

Interview with Mike Shouldice  
May 10, 2004, Rankin Inlet

*Interview took place in Mike's office in Rankin Inlet. I first asked his permission to record him. I showed him a copy of the charts I had been working on outlining the organizational history of Nunavut and the people involved.*

*My field is international relations and I have always wanted to bring Indigenous Peoples into that field, and there is no better story to tell than that of Nunavut for its international connections, and to learn from, to inform other Indigenous Peoples how they did it.*

That was a sad death, John Bailey?

*Yes, how did he die?*

It was a heart-attack. It was in February. He was 58 or 59 when he died. He was a real prince of a guy. And then Randy Ames, I was reading an alumni magazine when I saw his death. Ralph Rithcie died, and Armand Tagoona. What a really great group of people. One of my favorite stories is Tagak at the hotel in Edmonton where they decide to get together and become Inuit instead of Eskimo, and the next day it's in the national papers. I think that's just a wonderful story.

*Tell me about it.*

Oh you should ask Tagak. I think it was in the hotel room where they decided the whole formation of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) and the process that developed out of it. The next day they had a press conference saying they were Inuit and that's the first time you begin to really start to hear this role.

*The debate was even going on the Eskimo Association when it was formed, and then also in the Northwest Territories (NWT) Legislature, there were many debates.*

People in the west were more comfortable with the term, but now it's Inuvialuit, which is good.

*It will be a dissertation, and in it I will talk about leadership and social movement and what lessons can be learned from it. After the dissertation, I just need a year, someone who can pay my costs to live for a year, minimum cost of living, so that I can convert it into a book in common everyday language that will tell this story in their own words.*

I think that's interesting. I think that's a real interesting book. I really do. All the little writings that people have on the formation of Nunavut, this is really immense. I hope it comes together for you.

*I think it will, because the more people I talk to the more support I seem to get.*

There's enough Inuit who can tell you these stories as well. That's great!

*I am having to reconstruct the stories of those who are not here as well. Tell me your story because people have not been remiss in sharing your name, as someone who's been here and seen a lot, observed a lot and is well respected.*

That's flattering, really. I don't know what I can add, unless you have specific questions.

*When did you come North, or have you always been here?*

When Inuit Cultural Institute (ICI) was created in the mid 1970s, I worked in Arviat, which was Eskimo Point. I actually didn't move a lot, from there to here in the late 1980s with the college, and then three years in Yellowknife, and then back here and I've been with the college ever since.

*What did you do at ICI?*

I was a program coordinator.

*Did they move you up here for that?*

Yeah.

*Where had you been?*

I was in Ottawa at the National Museum. I had just finished my Master's in Anthropology. I was 23 or 24. It was a wonderful experience.

*Who recruited you?*

Tagak.

*Tagak himself?*

Yeah.

*Tell me that story. How did he know who you were?*

I was doing some work for a consulting company in Ontario and they had an office downtown. I think it was John Bradford, he was running the office at the time. He mentioned me to Tagak and we met. He hired me to come up for two weeks to do some program stuff with him, so we did. Then they offered me a two-year term.

*To come up to Arviat? What was ICI like in those days?*

It got lumped with all the Aboriginal federal programs and it really struggled. Inuit programs needed to be separated from Indian programs. That was one of the things that Tagak was really working on at the time so it went over to the Northern programs. There was one in Quebec, there was one in Labrador, and there was always some work being done in Igloolik. ICI had the mandate of those days of Inuit in the North, including Northern Quebec, but then each mandate got smaller until it was just the NWT. I remember when I was in Labrador at the time, and the Labrador Inuit wanted to develop their own. ICI's budget in the old days was about \$600,000 in the mid-1970s, which was a fair chunk of change. As time went by, budgets eroded and the program eroded. It had some great opportunities, but it had its ups and downs as an organization, that's for sure.

*What were those? When ICI was first created, the president was automatically on the board of ITC. That lasted for a couple of years, but then it ceased.*

That must have been before I came on Board because when I was there, Tagak was executive director and he had already made those changes. His dad was in Arviat. I don't know how much that influenced the location of the organizations. Arviat is a very traditional community so it almost makes sense to have it there, not that there aren't many traditional communities. Jose was the head of the language commission at the time.

*What was the mandate for that back then?*

I remember the goals were really broad: increase Inuit participation in Canadian society. One of the things they worked on regularly was with the Elders and collecting people's stories. There is just a host of material on tape, interviews that were done.

*That's another thing I am concerned about. I would like to create a definitive list of what materials are where. I have a list of all the things at the NWT Archives, and I know some other things, but I also know that some things have been thrown away.*

Was it you that put that list together? I once saw a list like that with all of the things and where they were, in national museums and all over the place. I have seen somebody put that together, but I don't know who it was.

*Jack Hicks has a bibliography that is on the web that you may have seen.*

That's Jack.

*Well, he's the one that got me into it.*

Is that right?

*Yeah, he sent me the first invitation up.*

He really has a talent for generating that kind of stuff. I don't know where ICI stuff is. It might be with the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth (CLEY), some of it is held at the Prince of Wales.

*ICI's goal at that time was trying to have a relationship with Elders and that kind of thing?*

And trying to have a relationship with the Department Education and preparing curriculum for schools. The struggle was always passing on traditional knowledge in terms of structure, it doesn't really work well in the school system. We know that the school system competes with some learning process in traditional knowledge. That was always an uncomfortable fit. There was always a lot of politics between the department and ICI, in terms of funding and getting it together and how to use it. I think the department had to have a learning curve. They wanted cultural curriculum and there's so much more depth to that than putting together some stuff for school. It's culturally inclusive. The other thing was the Elders. They used to have a series published and put together on the conferences with the Elders. That was always so informative, chatting with the people. It took a life of its own because they got to define what was important, what they wanted to publish and collect.

*Do you think younger people learned a lot from that process, or was ICI isolated from that, from the negotiators and all?*

I think it was separated from the politics. That was one of the purposeful things about locating it in Arviat. It wasn't in the political mainstream anymore. That decision had been made prior to me showing up that's for sure, but one thing I remember that was repeated constantly, we wanted to get culture out of politics. Luke Suluk was there too. He's now at Nunavut's Heritage Council. Somebody ought to give him an honorary doctorate in archeology because the work he has done is invaluable. Daniel Oeetoolook from Northern Quebec, you know he died in some kind of glider accident, now there is a guy who was into archeology. One of the distinctions that you look at in terms of the leadership is that the people who are the big cultural leaders, and the people who are the political leaders are not necessarily the same. You'll find that they have a whole different view of where they are at. Americans have a whole different history of treating Aboriginal people than we do in Canada. I mean not that we're excellent at it, but we're a lot better.

*A lot of Aboriginal people here are surprised because they think that things are somehow better in the US, and then I tell them, 'No – you guys have it a lot better here!'*

I don't quite think we have the same agenda, or the same history.

*No, and Canada wants to be seen a certain way in the international community that is almost diametrically opposed to the way that America wants to be seen. Without Canada wanting to have that profile, being a champion of human rights and with the creation of*

*the Inuit Circumpolar Conference at the same time, turning the spotlight on Canada's treatment of its Indigenous Peoples had an impact domestically..*

One of the kindest remarks I've heard is from Milton Freeman who was one of the authors of the land claim in 1973. He said that what we brought to the international arena was Canada's treatment of its Aboriginal people, when we were admonished in the United Nations for it. There was a turning point in the 1950s and 1960s.

*Tell me about him because I've not yet met him.*

He must be 70 now, because he was 50 in the 1970s.

*He was brought in to work on the first land survey in 1973, and his wife Minnie was involved in the organizations as well.*

She had a publication, *Survival Among the Kabloona*, which was one of the earliest books that was just translated into so many languages. I think everybody respects his work. He is a scholar and everything that he does, he does thoroughly. I don't think you'd see him make any point that he can't defend or support. When we were doing the Land Use and Occupancy Study, he was incorporated just so the process takes place, mapping use of the land, and peoples trap lines, that was a real significant point of documentation. He was at Memorial and then at McMaster after that and then he went to the feds.

*What did he do for the feds?*

Some kind of scientific work. My guess is that the politics of it did not interest him so much as the scholarly side of it, the data collection. His contribution was the Land Use and Occupancy Study. He has a real intimate knowledge of that stuff from that time, and his international stuff with whaling so he is on some pretty heavy committees. He's not retired. He's been at the University of Alberta for years.

*You were saying earlier that one of the people that you remember is Randy Ames. What was he like?*

I think he liked the work. Whenever you saw him on a project, you saw him enjoying it. He could have been many things and gone many places, but he seemed to stay. Money wasn't the motivator from my perception of it. He liked being a field rat, a social scientist in the field, and his data produced some of the most interesting studies. He did stuff for Labrador, he did stuff for ITC, and people would constantly go back to him and pay him a reasonable amount of money to do this, but he wasn't interested in having a house in Ottawa or teaching at some university. He had a Master's I think in Anthropology. He was obviously too young to die. He was killed in hang glider accident and I was surprised. The only connection he had with me is that we both went to the same university in different years. When you look back at who were the lawyers for all of these organizations, some of them got paid very well and got the start of a good career, but

those who have hung around for a long time, they aren't motivated by the short stop on a long career. They are more motivated by the cause or the justice of it, or whatever.

*It is amazing how well remembered some of these people are. Desmond Brice Bennett, for example.*

Absolutely, John Merritt would be another example.

*Where is Desmond now? Is he in South Africa?*

I don't know. It's been years since I have heard from any of these guys. But it's the same with people who are really dedicated to what they do. They were perceived as being part of the solution rather than part of the problem, and you just generally trusted them. You know you had to find someone who you could trust to negotiate the system for you. The rules of the system then were very, very different and if you wanted to negotiate it, you needed a broker. A lot of these guys were cultural brokers. There's a book by Robert Patayne, *Cultural Brokers of the Eastern Arctic*. It's ancient. I think it's from the 1970s. The point is that somebody might have been educated as a carpenter because that was their training, but their real role was the ability to broker two systems. And you see that. Peter Irniq is a guy who was a good example of a man who can broker and you see him to this day, writing about it and talking about the strength of one and the process of the other. You could keep a dozen names that have gone through and brokered the two. The other distinction over the years that I have thought about is from Freedman who took it from Netike Tokulu, who is an author in Japan from the 1900s. He makes the distinction in the history and development in Japan between Westernization and modernization. I think that is really a wonderful distinction in the North because Inuit have always been very happy to modernize, take something, make it their own and run with it. Hamlets are a good example. It is not a traditional structure, but a lot of people want to run for it and control the boundaries of your life with it. Something that is culturally formed is Westernizing it, it changes your values. If you own a store, and your father wants to buy an outboard motor from you, but he can't pay for it. If you give it to him and figure it out, then you know a lot about family, but if you charge him, then you know a lot about economy. That's where you see the difference between these two systems. Justice and health struggle the same way. I've never really been in the political stream. I've watched a lot of it and I've facilitated meetings and things like that, but I've worked mostly on the cultural end of it and the educational.

*Tell me about the times that you had.*

I think that some of the most interesting stories are when the first classes of Nunavut Sivuniksavut were coming to the North and they came to ICI and Jose Kusugak spoke to them. They looked at Jose and he was talking about so-and-so and so-and-so had died, or was older, and these younger people had never met them because they had died before their time. I think that was the first time Jose and I had the conversation where we kind of laughed at each other and said, 'Wow, we're becoming the old farts.' That was a long time ago, so now we must really old farts! But you realize that guys like Jose have been

around a really long time, and the implementation of the language commission for him is most likely the interesting story because something as serious as God's word changed the minute you changed the writing system. They owned that, and that is the whole notion of modernizing, as opposed to wanting something to change or Westernize. You struggle with those distinctions. All of the negotiations were held in the building, that's how I met most of these people.

*What do you remember from those days because there was that struggle when they put the first proposal?*

In 1976 with first proposal, that was a breathtaking moment. I don't know why they withdrew that proposal, but it really took the wind out of the sails for momentum until the 1980s, until Tungavik federation of Nunavut (TFN). Once TFN was in play, things were in earnest for a land claim again. I think withdrawing it was a rethinking, and no one was really in any hurry. My culture is strike while the iron is hot. Everybody else is strike when you're ready. Most likely a different philosophy. I personally don't perceive the land claims getting really going until TFN comes in. A lot of prep work comes out of ITC in the early days and some hard decisions in withdrawing the claim. It's really with TFN that you begin to see movement. And then, the feds were open to negotiating. too.

*Because?*

It's really dependent upon who was Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) minister. Warren Allmand was pretty good, he was seen as being on side, and then there's Chretien, he had his ups and downs, but he was very supportive. It just depended on who wanted to see movement and who wanted to negotiate.

*What about Inuit continuity? On the fed side, you've got governments coming and going, but on the Inuit side you would have leadership who would get into trouble. No matter what was going on, you always had someone who could step up and take over without taking a breath, without pause, and go from that moment. What are your thoughts on that?*

One side sees it as a job, as a career. It's one stop on a long career. You're going through the bureaucracy in negotiating a land claim. Maybe guys like Keith Crowe wanted to be around for a long time and have integrity. A side story about Keith –during the starvation periods in this region, he was involved with a photographer that took some very stunning pictures, Harrington, of people at their worst. Keith says he remembers asking people if he could take their pictures at their camps and they were very uncomfortable because they weren't at their best, and their clothing was poor and they were really struggling. When he came home and he looked at the pictures, he said that was the last time that he would take a camera with him in the Arctic. You get people like that with a really deep sense of integrity, and you get some people who see it as a job. On the Inuit side, I don't think people ever really saw it as a job. I mean it's a calling. My perception is that the men who were in leadership positions gave up time with their families, they were always on planes. They were leading a lifestyle that's out of a suitcase living in some hotel.

They had whole different priorities than some of the people around them and people respected and encouraged them. And whether they got into trouble or not, or came and go, I mean that's part of the process of living that lifestyle. I don't think anyone saw it as anything other than trying to struggle in a world that is rapidly changing around you and you are trying to redefine who you are in a modern setting at once. The perception between the two groups is totally different. The people who have hung in for many years have done it because they believe in it. The other side of the fence is elected or promoted or whatever. It's just like when academics in the land use and occupancy study and people got together, and the academics were on one side of the table and the federal government was on the other. The federal government was asking about who we report to, we'll talk to the department head. But in academia, the poor guy that got stuck with the job is the department head because nobody else wanted it. The language between the two parts of the table is foreign. Titles are recognition on one side of the table and scholarship is recognition on the other, the number of publications and reputation. Magnify that by bringing Inuit to the table for whom titles have no meaning, you have to be a reasonable human being and a decent person first.

*You were in the communities most of the time. You saw what other people didn't see, the impact of these guys being away, the negotiators being years and years away leaving their families to struggle. Did it have a visible impact or was that a quiet thing that nobody noticed or said much about?*

I never felt that their families struggled, to be honest. They gave up a lot. Like David Alagalak said one time, because we were getting into it, there's a lot of people working a lot of weekends and after hours now, and although it's spring and people would like to be out fishing and things like that. I think the statement is that people have a lot of other needs, wants and priorities in life and they were willing to give those up. I am sure it is hard on families. I remember seeing Ray Ningeocheak and Louis Pilakapsi getting on a plane one time, and it seemed to me that every time I traveled they would be on the plane coming back from some meeting. People appreciate the fact that they have given up their time. I am sure their families miss them when they are always gone and there were all those meetings to go to. To be away from your family is not a priority in an Inuit world view. Jose has always had a leadership role. He provides leadership. When people provide leadership, it's really important, and as the years go by, you get to understand what a sense of leadership really is, someone who can actually be in charge and be responsible, someone who can actually provide vision and comfort and growth for others and leads something in that way. There are lots of people on your list that are doing that.

*Isumataq.*

I read this dissertation once by this guy from Alberta who argued the difference between the Angakak and the Isumataq. I think it's an academic construction. I think that's the kind of stuff you mumble your gums about, you know you stay two weeks in the North and you go back. Isumataq is someone who is thinking and worldly. Senatuq is the other, the only reason is that it's like senator, someone who is worldly and has vision. They use the term now, ukaa, like an older brother. Someone who runs an organization as

opposed to somebody who is the boss, Isumataq. That's what this dissertation was about. I just wasn't interested.

*What do you think about this? When I was talking to James Wah-Shee and Tagak, the similarities of how they approached things. Tagak gets it started, has the vision, and once he gets that underway, he's not interested, he's onto the next project. James is the same way. When you look at their families, there is that tradition there. You were saying earlier that it takes one kind of leader to do one thing and another kind of leader to do another?*

I don't really know the family histories that you're talking about. I think you know more about that.

*I am trying to trace how leaders are related to each other and the people/leaders from who they are descended.*

I think people hire people they are related to, and why not because you get support out of that. The relationships are well defined. Inuktitut has a lot of formalization of relationships and specific expectations of those relationships. Men working together who are related to each other is a real strength. There's no doubt about that. You can really find a lot of relationships between people like that. They are really healthy in the long term.

*That factor might be missing from other Indigenous Peoples trying to do this because so many of the negotiators came from leadership families.*

Yep.

*They could see their parents doing it, and the more I learn about traditional leadership I start to see what kinds of methods and strategies traditional leaders used in the negotiations, sometimes unknowingly.*

What do you think those are?

*Delegation, really good community leader would know the strengths and weaknesses of the community and delegate accordingly. If someone was particularly good at making a persuasive argument, that is the person to whom they might go to build consensus. That is what the presidents of ITC consistently did.*

Sure.

*Even presidents of the regional organizations, I asked them how did you overcome adversity, how did you get through the difficult times and they would say, 'I delegated it. And I knew it would be resolved.' And the women did it, too. When you get a group of people together who can't agree and work together, then you dissolve the group and reconstitute it later with people who can.*

Sure. Team playing is another one.

*You are going to be in that position as long as you're respected, but if you become egomaniacal, then you're out, and that happened. I always wanted to find out why all these negotiators always told me that they felt they were respected, if we hadn't been then we wouldn't have been able to do what we did. We made decisions for people and the communication, we were telling the people what we were doing.*

The town meetings and lots of travel, conferencing was really leveling the information playing field, and making consensus style decisions.

*That's the thing that later came to impress me. Communication is mostly one directional, and the only time that you get feedback from the people is the land selection and the ratification tour. How do you know that you have the authority to make these decisions? They said because we trust the traditional way of respecting leadership, even though we are young guys. That's kind of what you were saying about cultural brokering.*

These young guys would have listened to Elders, too. Tagak must have been in his 30s when he was doing this stuff, and a respected guy then. Have you talked to Aupilardjuk yet? He taught one of the Sikvulinikjuk programs on traditional leadership. One of the interesting things about that was the guy who came up from Harvard to teach the model listened to Aupilardjuk and then left. He's smoking on the steps realizing that he had a lot to learn from Inuit about personal leadership.