

THE BLUE CARIBOU

Summer 2008

Newsletter of the International Campaign For The Innu And The Earth (ICIE)

LWR – 238 Queen Street West, Toronto, ON M5V 1Z7, (647) 436-6398

E-mail: icie@actfortheearth.org * Website: www.actfortheearth.org

CBC Radio Interviews

Elizabeth Penashue and son Peter

Shelagh Rogers of CBC Radio's "Sounds like Canada" interviewed Elizabeth Penashue and her oldest son, Peter Penashue on May 14, 2008.

Her introduction to their conversation began with the following narrative:

"There are many conflicts across the country between Natives and non Natives over resource development. Six Anishnawbe leaders from northern Ontario are in jail at the moment, because they tried to stop a uranium mine on their traditional territory. Tensions remain high on the boundary between the Six Nations reserve and Caledonia, Ontario. The Six Nations people oppose a housing project on land they claim is their's.

Disagreements about industrial development occur within Aboriginal families as well. Today's generation of Aboriginal leaders often make decisions their elders oppose. These disagreements can create a lot of

pain. Peter Penashue is Vice-President of the Innu Nation in Labrador and he supports the provincial government's plan to develop more hydro electric power on the Churchill river. His mother, Tshaukuesh, strongly disagrees. They're in Goose Bay this morning. Hello."

CHURCHILL FALLS HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT

In response to Shelagh Roger's opening question about how Innu were affected by the Churchill Falls hydroelectric project, Peter Penashue responded that 6,700 square

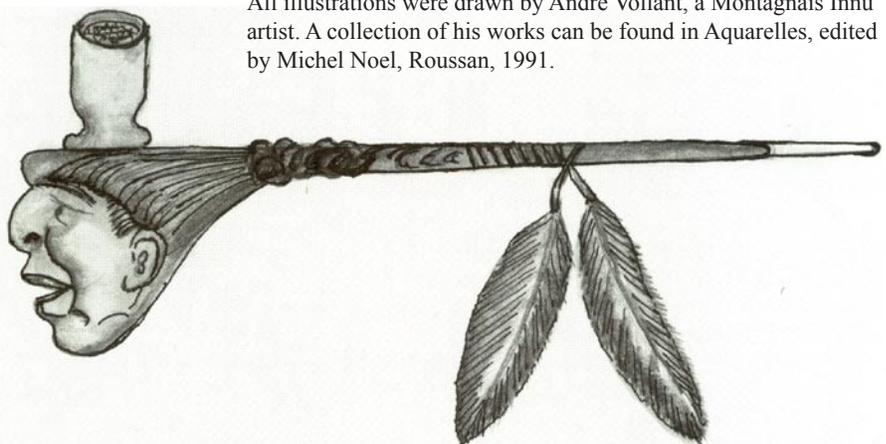
kilometres were flooded in 1974 which included Innu burial grounds and other historical lands.

Elizabeth Penashue recalled her father telling her that "this is a good place because there are a lot of animals here; we will come again next year"; he left all of their hunting things there like tent, stove and traps; when they returned, it was all lost under the water, flooded.

In a follow-up question regarding mist from the falls once seen from a long distance away, Eliza-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

All illustrations were drawn by Andre Vollant, a Montagnais Innu artist. A collection of his works can be found in *Aquarelles*, edited by Michel Noel, Roussan, 1991.



CBC Radio Interview (continued from page 1)

beth remarked that “every time I go now, there is nothing, there is no mist anymore; I always stop on the bridge and tell my grandchildren about what it was like before and I am very sad in my heart because there is little water now and it makes me cry.”

LAND CLAIMS

A very interesting exchange occurred when the interviewer said to Peter that *“I understand you’ve told the Danny Williams government you’ll help make the Lower Churchill Falls project a reality, if the Innu people are properly compensated. What are you expecting in return?”*

Peter replied that for any development project to proceed, it must have the consent of the Innu people and that the days are long-gone when there was no consent, consultation or compensation for Innu. He added that it’s different times now, that investors must be satisfied to know that they will not be alienating local aboriginal people, and that the

condition Innu put on the project is the “settlement of our land claims” because one thousand people will come to build the dam and they will change the political landscape of Labrador.

Peter also stated that past grievances must be worked out like compensation for the dam on the Upper Churchill and that he is saying he will help Danny Williams build the Lower Churchill dam but only if Innu land claims are met.

Peter noted that he was very nationalistic when he started getting politically involved at the age of sixteen and that he then wanted all non-Innu people off of Innu land; now, at the age of forty-three, he says he has grown out of that and now believes that Innu and others have to accommodate each other; still, he feels that Innu have to have their own place.

ELIZABETH’S COMMUNITY PROJECTS

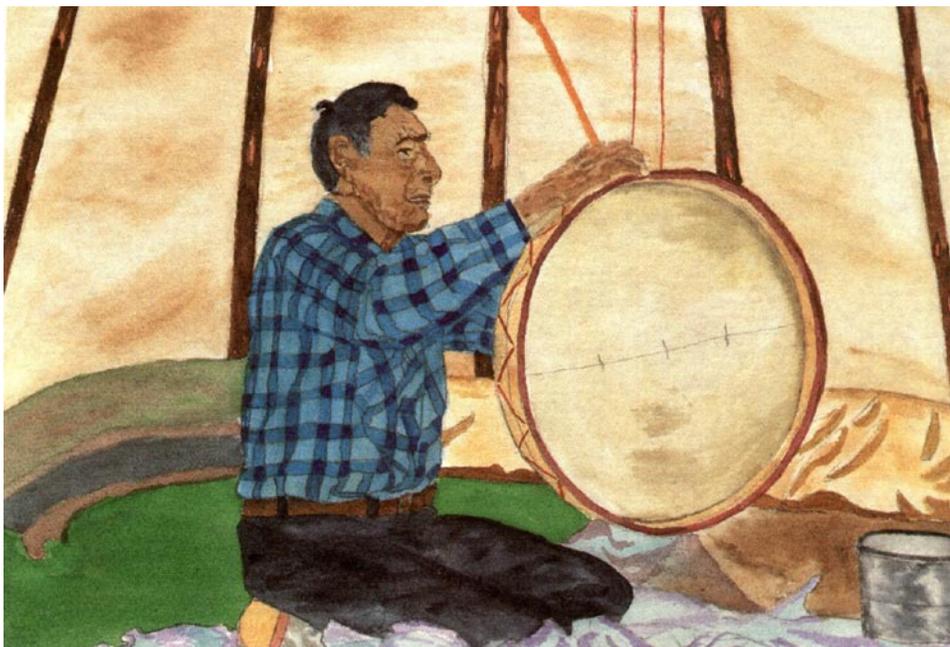
Elizabeth interjected to say that she would be very concerned if the

government started building the proposed Lower Churchill dam: “I will not be happy; for thousands of years, Innu hunted on the Churchill River; it is so beautiful; where will I go on my canoe trip every August 26 with Innu and others; I think about the trees, mountains and long beach; I am thinking about animals not just fish; I don’t want to drink dirty water and the same for animals – they want to drink clean water,” she said, adding that “the first time I went on my canoe trip, I was very surprised when I saw this big sign which said ‘don’t eat the fish’; that’s why I don’t want to stop the canoe trips and why I don’t want to see another dam”.

CONFIRMING THE IMPORTANCE OF ELIZABETH’S WORK

CBC Radio also pre-interviewed two women who have been on the canoe trip. Karlie King related that Elizabeth shared stories of her life, associated certain rocks with her grandchildren, and talked about people coming into Labrador and leaving an environmental mess; Karlie said she can feel the pain and the resistance of this Innu elder. The second woman, Elizabeth Yeoman, spoke of Elizabeth’s strong sense of attachment to the land and appreciated her intimate knowledge of it.

Elizabeth added that “when I walk every spring, Innu people support me... I want to keep Innu culture and environment. When we sit in the tent, I say to my grandchildren that school and Innu culture is very, very important and that I do not want Innu culture to get lost. I am not just walking for fun; it is really hard work to go eight, nine or even eleven kilometres a day.



“It’s like a circle and everything is important. When I’m gone, someone must carry on what I am doing. I am like a teacher in the schools,” said Elizabeth.

POPULATION GROWTH IS ALTERING LABRADOR

“Peter, given your mother’s strong environmental stand, how do you think she’ll react if the river is changed again and more land is flooded?” inquired Shelagh Rogers.

Peter stated that he understands his mother’s positions and emotions and explained that the difference between them was that today there are more and more people coming into Labrador than when his mother was younger.

He noted that the Canadian Forces Base at Goose Bay was not built until the 1940’s and that the population has grown to number 8,000 people there today; with 18,000 people in Labrador City and other developments being proposed, population growth definitely is taking place in Labrador.

Peter stated that 2,200 Innu are now competing with 25,000 to 30,000 non-Innu people living in Labrador who all have their own interests, are staking their grounds and are referring to Labrador as their own. He believes that Innu need to have their own place in Labrador and their own land that they themselves can develop over the next couple of hundred years.

He feels that if Innu insist that the environment be kept as pristine as possible then only those involved in development will benefit.

Peter believes that Innu need to generate revenues from their own lands: “the country is becoming more and more right-wing than ever and there is less and less money for aboriginal people; where will we be if government becomes more right-wing? Innu will just be relegated to being poor and having no future. We do not have influence so we cannot sit back and try to put the brakes on development. We need to leverage Churchill Falls or be left in poverty”.

DIFFERING LIVED EXPERIENCES

Peter remarked that his relationship with his mother remains very good despite their political differences and that he thinks she is a very nice woman with a very big heart.

He stated that “I have children and grandchildren too and how do I assure the future for them? I don’t see people going onto the land for 365

days a year and there are less and less Innu people going into the bush. As a leader, I must be practical in my approach and in what I wish for and do. I cannot be held hostage by my own fear. I’m terrified of failure. We are not as isolated as we once were”.

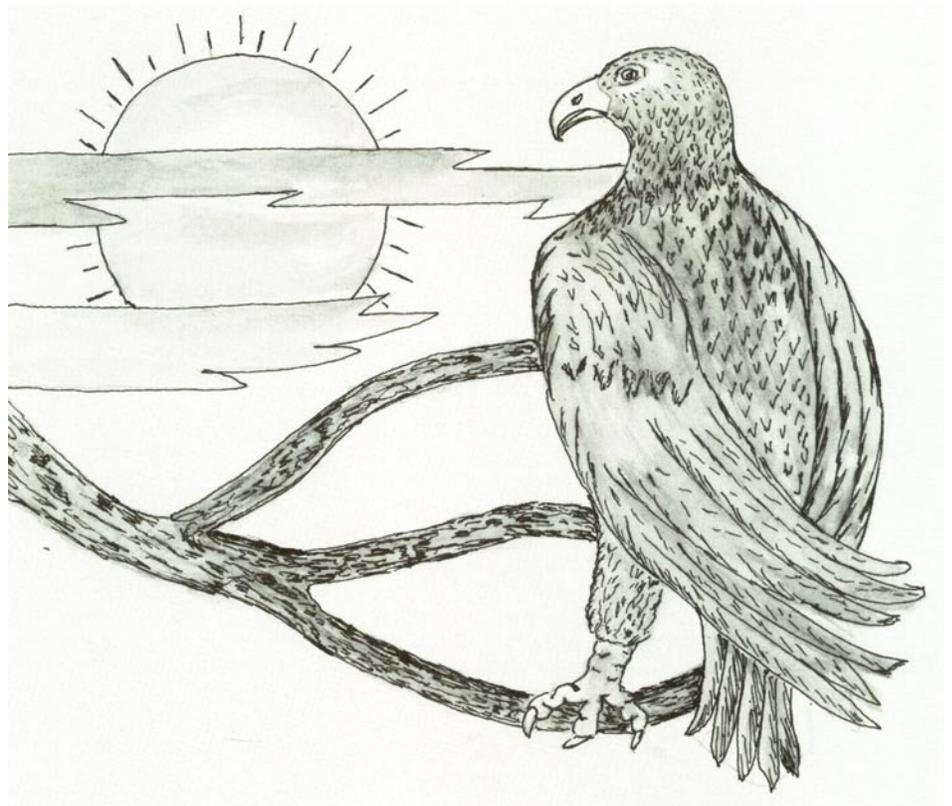
Elizabeth replied that “Peter is very, very strong and I am strong, too; someone is going to win and someone will lose – maybe I will win or maybe I will lose”.

Shelagh Rogers concluded the radio interview by saying that “I’m not trying to drive a wedge between you two; you obviously love each other and respect each other”.

ICIE NOTE:

Please note that the above article is not a transcript of the interview that was broadcast live on May 14, 2008 on the CBC Radio program “Sounds like Canada”.

To buy a copy of this interview for \$40, please contact Sission at 1-877-269-3367.



The International Campaign
for the Innu and the Earth (ICIE)

ICIE has been working in solidarity with Innu since 1992. We are volunteers who believe that, together with the Innu, we are making a positive difference for the Earth.

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