

Struggling
With My Soul



George Rich

Struggling With My Soul

George Rich

Exploring Memory, Finding Meaning was a special project of the Adult Basic Education Writing Network. The Network gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the [National Literacy Secretariat](#), Human Resources Development Canada.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Rich, George, 1962- Struggling with my soul

(Exploring memory, finding meaning)
ISBN 0-9681338-7-8

I. Readers for new literates. 2. Naskapi Indians- Biography. I. Title. II. Series.

PEI126.N43R53 2000 428.6'2 COO-90 I 045-9

@ Copyright for the text is held by the author. Series copyright is held by Harrish Press.

Cover photograph: Hettasch Collection

Design: C. Anne MacLeod

Published by:

HARRISH PRESS
18 Leslie St.
St. John's, NF
A1E 2V6
Phone 709-753-8815 Fax 709-753-8856
edplan@firstcity.net

Contents

Foreword

The Promised Land

Coming of Age in Natuashish

A Boy Between Worlds

Elders, Leaders, Cowboys and Indians

Coming Apart

Healing

Waking the True Innu Spirit

Crossing the White Line

Where I Belong

Acknowledgements

Foreward

This is one of a series of four books. They all began in a workshop where writers shared ideas and life stories, as well as thoughts about the fears and joys of writing itself. During the workshop, writers used photographs of people and places as doorways to the past, as ways to get at their memories and the stories that are important to them. Writers wrote about whatever the photographs brought to mind, then read their drafts aloud. Other writers and workshop leaders gave comments and asked questions. Then the writers went home to face the winter and the work of rewriting alone. Like most writing, this book is a product of both community and solitary work.

George Rich's *Struggling With My Soul* is a story of growing up caught between two worlds. The author is a Labrador Innu whose family and people gave up their nomadic way of life to settle in Davis Inlet. But the promises of a better life in the new place quickly turned to alcoholism, despair and tragedy. Rich's story is one of a people coming apart, but it is also a story of healing- and of the hard work it takes to put one's life, one's soul and one's community back together. Readers who are not familiar with the Innu language will come across new words here. There is *Natuashish*-the wonderful winter encampment where the caribou come. There is *Kuekuatsheu*, who in Innu legend creates the earth with the help of animals. Readers should not worry about how to pronounce the words, but enjoy the stories behind them instead. The language of any culture is an entrance to a new world. Readers who speak one language may want to think about what it would be like to always live between two languages, two cultures.



Boyhood memories
Georg Henriksen

The Promised Land

The northerly wind calmed as we landed on the beaches of the new Davis Inlet. Waves splashed against our 15-foot punt, in which 10 people were crammed together.

We had often traveled to this place before. It was across from the old Davis Inlet. It had been chosen by the missionary and his newly appointed chief, a respected elder. Now this place had become the promised land. There was talk of a huge store, a church and a big school that would take all the children age five and up.

My parents were not church-going people. They were not easily tamed by the missionary. But they decided to set up their tent near the church and school that were being built. Almost all the men in the community were being trained and employed as carpenters to build the new community. People set up their camps near the stream that would be used for drinking and cooking. My parents immediately set their nets into the water to catch the Arctic char that swarmed the area.

“We’ve got to eat,” my father said. “I don’t think we will receive a pay cheque. We’ve got to work first.”

“Why do we have to camp here near everybody?” my mother asked him. “There is no privacy here. It seems that all the other tents are camped so near and there will be a lot of noise from the teenagers that always prowl in the nights.”

“Your brother John and my brother David will also camp near here,” my father told her. “Besides that, we can try to go to church more often and maybe the priest will start noticing us. We never did get much clothing that he gave away.” He went on. “And we will be able to get the house right away instead of waiting forever. They promised that they will build 10 houses this summer and we might get lucky.”

This kind of talk went on for days. As people arrived and set up their tents near the beaches, they talked about what kind of houses they wanted. They wanted running water and full basements. They thought that now all the things said at the priest’s house would finally come true. The talk of houses brought excitement and joy to the women in the tent city of the new Davis Inlet.

No one knew what would happen in the next decades on that tiny island off the mainland of Labrador.

Before we settled in Davis Inlet, my people, the Innu, had always led a nomadic life. We did not stay in one place. The Innu traveled to and from Quebec's northern shores, migrated with the caribou, and had regular contact with relatives in Schefferville and Fort Chimo.

Our land was known as Ntesinan. In its interior was a traditional gathering place where festivities and marriages took place. This place was known as Tshinuatipish. It was also known as "Indian House Lake." Innu had met in this place long before trading posts were established in the late 1800s. We continued to meet there until a lot of Innu people were forced to settle in one place.

In the new community of Davis Inlet, the houses were in a line from east to west. My family lived in the east end away from the school and the church and store. My parents were among the last people to get the houses that were built. They were away in the bay in the fall when the houses were given away by the new council.

I remember when we first moved to our new house. It wasn't equipped with water or sewer. We hauled water from a nearby stream that didn't freeze in the winter. We were at least one kilometre from the school and store. The store manager ran the post office too. There were many things to order from Eaton's catalogue—record players, clothes, radios. Walking from one end of the community to the other, from my house to the store, I would hear Hank Williams wailing from our neighbour's house. As I reached another dwelling, I would listen to Johnny Cash. At the far end, where the teenagers who had gone away to school had come back for the summer, the air rocked with Elvis Presley and CCR.

It was a beautiful setting. There were three hills to explore, a wooded area, and in the east end of the community, a stream where we children soaked and swam in the warm, muddy waters.

Davis Inlet lies under one of the hills, and as children we often went there to see if a coastal boat was on the horizon. The site was chosen for a coastal boat to get closer to the wharf and I suppose for the new airstrip that was built 15 years later but was already being planned. In the old Davis Inlet, coastal boats used to anchor far away from the shallow harbour, and huge hills and steep, rocky land made it hard to build an airstrip or houses.

A large rock in the centre of the new community was a great hangout in the evening. This is also where the nuns and teachers lived in the two-story dwelling with running water. We kept the nuns and teachers awake at night and played pranks on the poor nuns. We would knock at their door and they would sometimes chase us. This was our main entertainment. They never caught us because we hid under their doorsteps. Sometimes someone would run out of luck. Then they would tell on us. The nuns would give us an earful in the school lobby, and the pranks would stop for a little while.

There was an old bell that the nuns rang every morning to summon us to school. One time my friend tied a rope to its centre using black thread. He hid a few metres away and rang the bell by pulling the threads. A nun would come running to see who was abusing the bell but she couldn't see anybody. My friend would stop ringing the bell as she came closer. This went on until she saw the thread. The following morning there was another earful, with reminders that the bell could only be rung when school was in session or for emergencies.

We had our fun. Near the rock in the centre of the village, usually on Thursdays and Sundays, there would be soccer games and our own version of baseball. We only used two bases. The idea was that you had to hit the ball three times, and if you did, you had to run to the other base before somebody hit you with a ball. If the ball hit you, you were out. If a teammate got stuck at first base, it was your job to get them back to the home base without getting hit by the ball. If the other team managed to catch your ball while in the air, your team was out. There were usually two teams but no score was kept; it was just for fun.

As we grew up, we often got our water from the brook as the community pump was usually broke. The endless need to haul water was quite a workload for any teenager. Children hauled wood too. I remember at about age 12 going with my brother to haul wood on the komatik, sometimes using a dog team. With the two of us, getting wood was always an adventure. My brother was two years older than I was, and much stronger and wiser. After hours of cutting and loading wood, I would often make him angry for I was clumsy and slow, to his advantage. He played some memorable tricks on me.

One time we hauled wood my father had cut about a kilometre away. We used the dog team, and when we finished putting everything on the komatik, my brother said I was the faster runner and I should guide the dogs along the trail to Davis Inlet. After running for a few minutes, I stopped to catch my breath. He kept flattering me that I was faster and could run without rest. As I was

leading the dogs, I looked around to see if he was pushing the load from behind. I caught a glimpse of him lying down and enjoying the ride while I was suffering from exhaustion.

Once we cut wood in an uphill area. The trail was narrow and it would be tricky to get back down. I am sure he knew that as well. If we hit one of the trees when we went downhill, we might break the komatik bars and we would be stuck there for the rest of the day. And we would have to face our father with the news. My brother stayed ahead of me and out of trouble as I guided the komatik downhill. I managed to swing it the wrong way and it hit a tree. My brother cursed the daylights out of me and we had to rearrange the load just to get the komatik on good ground. My brother said he would tell on me and we started fighting and arguing. In the end I got thrown in a snow bank. Then I ran away. I told him I was not going to help him. He had to do all the work.

He cursed and shouted death threats. I got away and watched him from a distance. He changed his tone a little bit and promised he would lead the dogs from now on. I could sit on the komatik for a change—if I helped him put all the wood on the komatik. I did and then he told me that I had hurt his knee when I led the komatik into the tree. He blackmailed me with telling our father what I did. I thought it would be in my best interest to lead the dogs again. Of course, he sat on the komatik the rest of the way. Miraculously, his knee was healed before we reached home.



Caribou
Todd Keith

Coming of Age in Natuashish

My father managed to save enough money to purchase the snowmobile we needed, for he had worked in a fish camp most of his life. He was a fish guide for the outfitters for a number of years. He and a friend went out to work summers in a fish camp in a place known as Hunt River. We would not see him until the end of August when he came home for the season. He was usually gone for a couple of months. Then he would come back with enough money to purchase an outboard motor and canoe and snowmobile to use on the fall trip to Natuashish, where he would set up a winter camp. There, he would set a net for the Arctic char on their way to the lake. He would tell us that someday the caribou would go by the pond.

After we did our chores, we skated and fished. When the pond was frozen for a few days, we would ice-fish for trout along the shore. When the ice was safe, the skates we got from the priest came in handy. Once the Natuashish froze solid, we would skate around it, the strong wind pushing us a little faster to the other side of the pond.

But the most memorable experience I had growing up in Natuashish was when my father's prediction came true. I might have been 13 years or older back then. That was my first chance to shoot a caribou, after years of trying and not succeeding. The elders said it was the first time in 30 years the caribou herd had come across little Natuashish Pond. It was exciting for any hunter to see such a great herd. They came around the point in great numbers, and a week passed when we saw the magnificent herd pass by our camp.

The spirits of the hunters went up like rockets blasted into outer space. There were screams of joy and tears from our mothers. Hunters grabbed their rifles to hop on the skidoos to get their first kill. The longing for fresh meat was strong after a diet of fish and small game. The hunters quickly went to the wooded area on the other side of the lake, planning to meet the caribou when they came in close. The recently frozen Natuashish was quickly forgotten as men hurried across.

My mother told me to keep quiet and listen for gunshots. We could hear gunshots but we couldn't see the hunters. We could see the caribou going in the direction where the hunters were hiding and taking their shots. Only an hour had passed when we sighted the first skidoo returning with fresh kill.

The women of the camp searched for butcher knives to skin the caribou, shouting in frustrated tones about where they had left their knives and files. Of course, I had used the file earlier to sharpen my skates. I'd forgot where I'd put it last. One of my siblings told my mother that I was the last one who had used the file. Only after she turned everything upside down did the file and the knife turn up. The kill was skinned and the cooking pots and teapots were made ready.

It was in the late evening when my father and the others showed up. They slit the throats of the caribou they'd killed so the meat would not spoil overnight. They talked on into the night, and I listened to the conversations of my father and uncle about the kill and what they needed for the winter. The next morning the real work began. The hunters quickly built a rafter to store the frozen meat for the winter and hauled the carcasses in.

The news of the caribou spread quickly around Davis Inlet. The hunters of Davis Inlet arrived the following morning across the recently frozen water. The visitors would kill what they needed. My older brother and another man got their caribou. I had yet to get my own caribou. I helped my mother butcher the caribou and store it in the rafters, while my brother and father hauled the meat. I was left behind as usual to do the chores of getting the water and cutting the wood.

My uncle had left his rifle behind just in case the caribou came near our camp. My mother said to be careful if I had to use the gun because I had never fired a high-powered rifle before. It was late in the day when I saw my opportunity to shoot my first caribou. The others saw two caribou come directly towards our camp. My mother and aunt told me to wait until they were closer, and I had to walk a few hundred metres away from camp to get my shot. As the two wandering caribou came closer to where I hid, my hands were trembling and I started to sweat. I aimed to shoot and squeezed the trigger but nothing happened. Now they were only a few feet away. I squeezed again—nothing!

When the caribou saw me, they ran towards me. They were fairly close, and I couldn't even shoot. They ran toward the woods and I was left there, stunned. I didn't even know that there was a safety lock on the rifle. I didn't know how to use the gun. I felt ashamed and humiliated. I gave up, but I didn't go home to the camp, feeling that I would be mocked by my siblings, especially my older brother when he got home. Finally, tired and hungry, I went home and told my mother what had happened. I said the gun was jammed and I couldn't shoot it. My brother-in-law and my brother came back from the hunt then, and my younger sibling told them about the incident. They checked the gun and

saw that the safety lock was on. They took it off, aimed at a target and fired. My brother laughed his head off. My in-law told me jokingly that I shouldn't get married; if I did, I would probably starve my wife and children, because I couldn't even shoot a gun. The mocking at my expense carried on for days in our tent.

It was a few weeks later before I got another chance. My brother and I were hauling out the carcasses when he spotted caribou. They were still plentiful in our area. He had shown me how to use the gun before we set out. He told me not to be nervous and to be very careful where I pointed the gun. If I didn't do what he instructed me to do, he would punch the daylight out of me. I got ready and took a firing position. Still inexperienced in handling a gun, I missed many times. I think I closed my eyes during the first shots, as I was afraid of the gun, and it hurt my shoulder as I fired. I finally had a lucky shot and one of the bulls fell hard to the snow.

My first reaction was: if only my mother or father could see me now. Although my parents were impressed that I shot my first caribou and praised me, I must have felt at least 10 feet taller than my brother at the time. I had finally become a man, my father told me. And since we had enough meat to last the winter, I was told to clean and butcher the big bull with the help of my mother. My brother-in-law told me that I might have a chance yet not to starve my wife and children. And so I got my first caribou in November, 1976 when the herd passed our way for the first time in 30 years.



Hunters
Hettach Collection

A Boy Between Worlds

In places like Natuashish, the Innu world went on as before. But in the new settlement of Davis Inlet, the children would be educated in English, a language foreign to them. The Innu would struggle to keep their own values and beliefs and way of life. Already their spiritual beliefs had been mocked by the missionaries. Their fundamental rights as people had been violated—how and where they lived and how they governed themselves had been taken over by another culture. The promised land became a shambles of despair and poverty.

I sometimes wonder what would happen now if Innu people entered a foreign land and tried to make the rules and regulations, and tried to impose their cultural and spiritual beliefs on other people. What would happen if the Innu tried to force others to speak their language? People of European descent need to take the time to think of how hurtful and degrading that can be. Maybe then they will understand why there is so much anger and suicide among Labrador's aboriginal peoples.

As a young boy, I watched, fascinated, as the world of my people changed. Snowmobiles quickly replaced dog teams; outboard motors replaced canoes and paddles. All the new conveniences cost money. But work was scarce and there were few ways to get money. People also needed to learn how to manage the money they earned. All of a sudden, money was important in Innu culture in ways it never was before.

When food was scarce in Davis Inlet, my parents walked all the way to the hunting grounds. Even though they now lived in houses, families still prepared for their fall hunt when they would camp near the mainland and near the rivers. There, they caught the winter supply of Arctic char, small game like porcupine and small birds. They would leave the community that had been built for them behind.

In the late 1960s my parents and five other families traveled to hunting grounds where caribou usually were plentiful. This may be the last time I know of that people traveled quite a distance by dog team to hunt caribou. The area was known as "Border Beacon" because of the new weather station there. The caretakers of the weather station would always share when the Innu ran out of grub like tea or sugar. It was fiercely cold on those barrens. I remember

now how the five of us children were tucked in and bundled up in canvas. I am lucky to have this memory.

I also remember the day my younger brother was born in the country. I don't know how my mother survived the ordeal of harsh cold and all the pulling and shoving of the komatik. My father was pulling the sled with the help of three cranky dogs. There were blizzard conditions that day, and on the barrens wood was scarce. It must have been hard for my mother to keep warm through her labour.

We were sent to my uncle's tent to wait for the baby's arrival. We didn't know what was happening. All my father told us was that our mother was sick and we had to behave ourselves. This brought back fear and bad memories of the time she had to go away to hospital in North West River with TB. What was going on in our minds brought our usually energetic spirits to a halt for the day. My uncle told us not to worry because she was in good hands. Three midwives were taking care of her.

Late in the afternoon we had a little brother. As any child would do, we asked our father how the baby had arrived in our tent. He told us the baby was found crawling up to our tent that afternoon. Being curious, we set out to look for tracks and couldn't find any.

Because of the birth, my parents were forced to stay behind while other Innu families headed home. We had to wait until my mother started to gain her strength back. On the way home, I had to walk beside the komatik. I started to dislike my little brother. I told my mother quietly that she should have left him there where they had found him. He was taking my space where I would have enjoyed being bundled up against the cold.

As we settled into the new community, we had to get used to new neighbours. There were teachers, nurses, store managers, and other new people to work with the Innu. These people were all white. The only jobs available to Innu were as janitors in the school and as relief workers for the hydro generating plant. The lucky ones who had been obedient to the missionary got the first chance at these jobs.

Many other people suddenly became dependent on welfare and family allowance cheques. Parents were told that in order to receive family allowances, they would have to send their children to school. The Innu were not supposed to take their children out of school to go in the country, although this was an important part of our way of life. Few people struggled against the

new rule. One missionary tried to find a way around it. He encouraged the families to camp about a mile outside the community.

The missionary and the new leaders that had been parachuted in to look after us had begun to realize something. The restless Innu could not easily turn away from their way of life and move to a more permanent settlement. Almost immediately, they began to turn to alcohol.

The new school opened in the late fall. There were nuns and brothers to supposedly educate us children. From the beginning, the new language and the outside world sidetracked our way of thinking. We had to learn quickly about the Prime Ministers of Canada. We had to be patriotic like any Canadian child and learn to sing *O Canada*.

But we had our own culture. I remember hearing as a child the legends about the *Tshakapesh*. He is a folk hero who destroys *Atshen*, a mystical cannibal who hunted down the Innu. Eventually, *Tshakapesh* and his sister went to live on the moon. Now when we heard about men landing on the moon we were confused. When the teacher asked one of the Innu students who was the first man on the moon, the Innu child replied "*Tshakapesh*."

In religion class, our beliefs clashed again. I remember a priest asking a student who created the earth. The student answered without hesitation, "*Kuekuatsheu*." There are comical legends about *Kuekuatsheu*, a man who deceives everyone who comes across his path. He is also known as creator of the earth with the help of the animals. This was another of our beloved legends that soon went down the tubes.

Of all the things we were taught during our first year of school, religion was the greatest torment. The missionary had graphic pictures of the devil and demons that looked so horrible, they stayed in my mind late at night. His thundering voice preaching about hell and fire left us with the impression that he was the saviour of our people.

Despite the demons, I always enjoyed school, and I was eager to learn about other things and other places around the world. I stayed in that school until grade eight. We had to do grade nine outside of the community. It would be my first time ever on the island of Newfoundland. At first it was culture shock. I didn't understand what was going on in my new surroundings. The first day of class I was surprised to come face to face with Brothers again. I was frightened and concerned about what they would do to us. It took a while to

adjust. The new teachers weren't so bad, but I could not really trust them. I had been sexually assaulted by the Brothers in Davis Inlet in the late 1960s.

I never did finish the second semester. I had trouble keeping up with other students in the class. During one of our English classes, the teacher told us to write an essay on Pontiac, the car. I had no idea what a Pontiac was. If he had suggested writing about the snowmobile, I would probably have gotten a good mark on the essay. I didn't do a lot of the assignments because I didn't understand them.

At the age of fifteen, I'd had it with school. My friends and I went back to Davis Inlet. For a few years, I just hung out. There weren't many opportunities for work or training.

Our summer youth employment in Davis Inlet was make-work projects, hauling the store goods from the coastal boats to the warehouse. Almost every summer, I worked in community cleanup. The sale of a catch of Arctic char to the nuns brought enough money for a round trip to Nain on a coastal boat. Either of the two coastal boats was a chance to get out of the community for a night, a quick getaway. A lot of times we would go without paying the fare and we would share with others who paid for a room. We used their tickets that were already punched by the purser. Sometimes they didn't even bother to look for stowaways. No wonder Marine Atlantic is in trouble now.

Our one-night vacations in Nain, the most northerly community in Labrador, put some variety in my boring teenage life. We eagerly awaited the first boat of the year, which usually got in around mid-July.

A boat expected was always excitement. When we knew a boat was coming that day, we would climb the hill at the back of the community and use it as a crow's nest. If we saw the boat on the horizon, looking south heading towards Davis Inlet, we would yell down below that the boat was coming. Those who heard us sometimes climbed the steep hill just to see what all the fuss was about. Adults would climb up with their binoculars and stay for hours, looking for wildlife or just passing the time away. The hill was a good place to play cowboys and Indians or war games or to escape from the mosquitoes.

With the first boat of summer, new store goods would arrive, including cans of pop and chips that would be a treat for the next few months. When nobody was around, those of us who unloaded it would reward ourselves with a soft drink and bags of chips after a hard day's work. Sometimes the coastal boats anchored out in the harbor, and collector boats brought the goods to be

unloaded at a small wharf. The store manager and stock handlers of the government store marked down everybody who worked, and how many hours we worked. The next morning we had to wait in line to collect our wages. Sometimes our wages disappeared again before we left the store.

In the summer, the store had a new stock of fishing supplies—rods, reels and spinners. We fished daily, and it was the one thing I loved to do.

One time I tried to enlist in the army when a recruiter came by. I was told to travel to St. John's and meet certain people. I made my way up to Goose Bay and stayed in a hotel for the night. It was there I met with my stepbrother and his friend from Davis Inlet. They were working in Sheshatshiu at the lumberyard and were traveling back to Davis Inlet on a coastal boat the following morning.

After a few beers, they asked what I was doing in Goose Bay. At first I didn't want to say anything, but after a few beers, I told them about my plans. They laughed. They asked me how I could be in the army when I couldn't even shoot a caribou. How could I defend myself in a war when I didn't know how to use a gun? After a lot of beer, my wish to be in the army had flown away. After chatting with these supposedly wiser role models of mine, I decided to go back with them the next morning on the coastal boat. It was not long before I was caught up in my community's struggle to survive.



Young men at Davis Inlet
Heng Lin

Elders, Leaders, Cowboys and Indians

When the life you lead is not an easy or very pleasant road to travel, you need a lot of support along the way. If you do a lot of crazy stuff when you are drinking, this will be one of the hurdles you have to jump in order to succeed. My uncle John used to say this to me. He was my uncle on my mother's side and a respected elder in the community. I would visit him in the two-bedroom bungalow he shared with his daughter Katherine and her four children. John used to drink when he was young but had been a sober man for many years. He sobered up on his own without the help of outside treatment centres because he wanted to quit and alcohol was getting him nowhere. He felt that stopping drinking was the only way to survive.

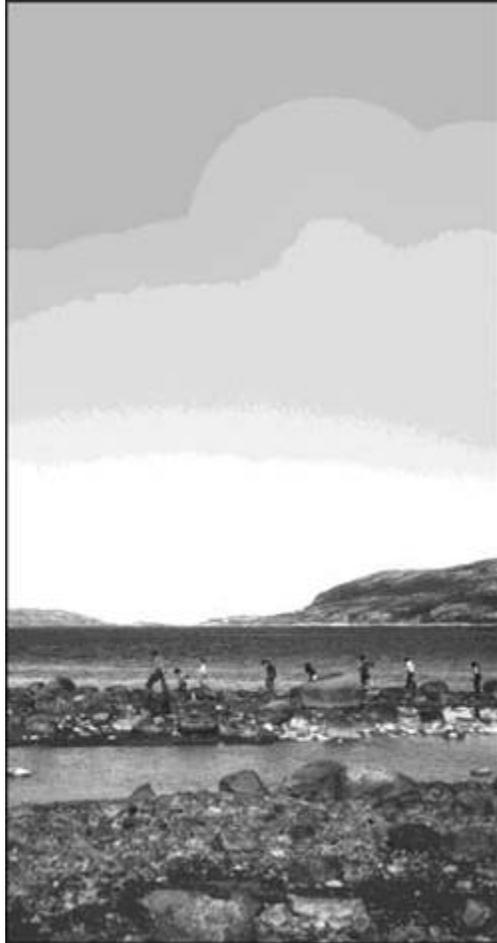
John and other elders often advised us young leaders. At times we thought we were problem solvers for the great social illness that existed in our community. We often bragged about our understanding of the English language and the rules of governments. We assumed that the elders were not worth listening to. When elders wanted to run for band council elections, we young leaders mocked their old ways of thinking. We said what they knew was not relevant to this new world. We said their world was dead, and we had to have people who understood European culture and who could read and write. Band council elections gradually turned into a race that divided the elders and young leaders. How wrong we were! If we had included our elders in all of our meetings, things would have been different. We would have stayed in touch with our own culture.

I remember the first community elections held in the late 1970s, the first time leaders were not chosen by Innu traditions. It was the missionary who got the elections going. He followed the Municipalities Act, a provincial Act followed by all town councils in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Act itself is a thick book with everything in it from how to run your own government to dog control policy. This policy might have had something to do with the disappearance of the dog team. The snowmobile had replaced that part of our culture borrowed from our neighbours, the Inuit.

The Municipalities Act brought another new thing—taxes. My parents had to pay \$10 a year. As such things came into the community, people tried to adapt. But there was no plan to provide jobs so that people could earn the money they now needed.

The people in power, outsiders who worked in the community, may have had good intentions. But there was little municipal funding. Most of the work was make-work projects like putting in a community pump where people could get their water, digging ditches, raking and hauling garbage to the dumps. Some funding was used to renovate the church, which was also used as a community hall.

We went there to see movies, such as westerns, everybody's favourite. The cowboys always won the war, so we couldn't help cheering for them instead of the Indians. Most people my age always wanted to be cowboys. I sometimes wonder if that was another part of the master plan to brainwash the Innu into thinking that white culture is superior to ours.



At Davis Inlet

Davis Inlet Roman Catholic Mission Collection

Coming Apart

The new way of choosing leaders went against the old traditional ways by which the Innu ran their affairs. The Innu had always relied on the elders in the camp, and they had their way of selecting camp leaders. There were many kinds of leaders. There was a camp leader and leaders for hunting. Almost everyone in the camp had a role to play.

The election system created division and took away the elders' traditional role. It also brought all the kinds of corruption elections can have. In our small community, people with large families can control band council elections and government. Also, anyone who has a lot of alcohol can win a seat on council. Now every year we have elections in Davis Inlet, mainly because people crave influence or business contracts or good employment from the council. People think of community government in terms of what power or favours they can get. Petty politics grew from a spark into a blazing fire that divides the community today. The only way to extinguish the flames is to create a new way of electing community representatives. We need a way for everyone to have their say.

I loved the elections for all the booze brought in by the people who wanted the chief's job or councilor's position. When it was my turn to run, I used every trick I'd learned to get elected as band councilor. I had a lot of tactics. Once I went out for the Liberal leadership convention when Len Sterling was elected leader. I quickly imitated the use of campaign buttons in the next band council election. I ordered the buttons and distributed them to my supporters. I once wore the campaign buttons as earrings when I was drunk and crazy at a party. I did it to get votes and laughs, but you can imagine how I felt the following morning.

The thrills and excitement lasted until I turned sober at the age of 29. After 17 years, I reached a point where I felt guilt and shame that I was serving only my own self-interest. I could see my own people struggling to survive on \$500 a month on welfare for a family of five. Yet some elected leaders wouldn't even attend meetings unless they received an honorarium of \$500 a day. It began to keep me awake at night. When we attended outside meetings, we received a per diem of \$60 a day for expenses. We would stay for a number of days to get the full amount. I once took my wife to Halifax for a quick holiday. We checked into a nice hotel. After a few days, she told me that no wonder we elected leaders loved to travel all the time. This was another stab to my inner soul. There we were, staying in five-star hotels, while our own

people didn't even have water and sewer in their homes. It hit my conscience hard. It was time to quit this imaginary life.

Perhaps I should have listened to my father. When I decided to run for election, I turned to him for support and advice. My father said I should go hunting caribou instead. I should have realized by now that my father never bought all the changes happening around us. His beliefs and principles as an Innu gatherer and hunter were all he knew.

When the thrill went out of politics for me, it seemed we weren't achieving much of value. We were not doing enough for people who needed new homes. Alcoholism had rapidly increased. The band councils couldn't do a thing with their budgets; the governments of the day turned deaf ears to us. They ignored our pleas for the funding and resources we needed. We tried so hard to answer the needs of the people, but what could we do if nobody was listening?

Over the years I would chat with the elder on the council about the way things were going. Once I asked if he was going to run in the next election. He just laughed lightly and told me that if I wanted to create any image for myself, I should know by now it was all an illusion. He said he ran in the elections for fun, something to do. He knew nothing was going to change. He told me that if things were going to change now, then it was in the works already; it would happen so fast that we young leaders wouldn't be able to handle it. Looking back at it now, I realize he was right. When the federal government announced the relocation of Davis Inlet, all the things he told me were right there in front of our noses. We could not handle it.

The public meeting was held in the basement of the community bathhouse. The big question was: in what direction are we heading? We had a public forum on where we could have water and sewer, the topic on everybody's mind. The engineer the band council had hired to do studies on where we could get water still had no answers. The drilling had lasted for three years and the engineers had drilled everywhere; the cost of the studies was sky-high. We were running out of ideas. The community joke was that we had so many drill holes in Davis Inlet, the whole island would sink soon. It was then that the elders spoke of the first resettlement from the mainland 25 years ago. Water and sewer had been promised then, but had never been delivered. The elders urged the young leaders to talk to the federal and provincial governments about the current conditions of the houses and the skin diseases of the Innu in Davis Inlet.

It was time to listen to the elders. We organized a meeting for federal and provincial representatives to come see first-hand how our people lived. We organized the public meeting in a tent setting, and we invited the media. The elders were very outspoken; they were not satisfied to get their water and dump their honey buckets outside in the freezing winter. We asked the bored bureaucrats: what other Canadians live in such conditions? Is it a Canadian standard to live like this? The questions from the elders were very powerful and touching. The federal and provincial officials told the Innu they would listen to their concerns and take them to their bosses in Ottawa. But the ongoing meetings were postponed and we never did receive the answer we wanted to hear.

With encouragement from the elders, the leaders didn't give up. Somehow in the next few years, things seemed to fall into place. But first there had to be tragedy. The accidental burning of six children and the suicide attempts of teens created an uproar throughout Canada. People wanted to know what was going on in Davis Inlet and who was responsible for this mess. It wasn't a difficult decision to make when our crisis worker called to say that our teenagers were shouting and damaging the crisis centre. Apparently our tribal police spotted them just in time before they hurt themselves. Then on the spot we made a decision to release the video to outside news agencies. We had to get the children out too. With the help of the Innu Nation president, we chartered an aircraft in the early morning after the RCMP turned us down when we requested more back-up. It was then that the images of Davis Inlet scattered around the country.

We got a few hours sleep before hearing that the children we escorted out in the early morning were in a safe place. Now the real work began. All the media attention turned toward the social illness that had existed in our community for so long. A few months later the announcement was made: the Innu would move to the mainland site of our choice.

Good things were happening but we were left with the fact that six children had died in a house fire. My sister's grandchildren were burned. I believe the federal government decided to do something about Davis Inlet then, after it felt the heat from the Canadian public. It was certainly a turning point and eye opener for us to start to think about our children.

We asked the federal government to do an inquiry into why this pain and suffering was happening to Innu people. In the end, the Innu Nation and band council had funds to do such a study. All the frustrations and grievances were told in *Gathering Voices*.

The reality of relocation should be credited to the children who lost their lives in the fire, and to those who lost their lives in suicides. Now some Innu leaders want very much to take the credit, but I believe it was a team effort and the elders with their wisdom should also take credit. As for me, I once heard a man say in the news: it doesn't matter who takes the credit, as long as the job is done. And I know it was those children who turned the world's eyes toward us.



In the country
Joel Rich

Healing

In the early 1990s, when the healing really begin, we had a sober and energetic leader. He wanted to do something for all the sickness we had in our communities; he wanted to promote sobriety within the leadership of the Innu. At first I considered him the enemy. I always said nobody should tell us what to do, especially people from Sheshatshiu who always walk all over us and think they are always right. The decisions were always made by the people in Sheshatshiu, without the people in Davis Inlet having our say. For me it was all internal politics at first. Then I came to my senses. I knew we had to fight alcoholism; it was killing our people.

At the beginning of 1990, I tried to quit drinking on my own. I fell off the wagon many times. My first attempt to stay sober lasted six months. I was traveling all the time and I couldn't stop myself. In the midst of all my troubles and public pressures, I fell off the wagon again and again.

The meetings with the federal and provincial governments went on and on, taking my time and energy. Dealing with my own alcoholism was not my first priority. I couldn't care less about my family and myself. During the community gathering in April 1991, I fell off the wagon. I didn't care much about what was happening. I believed it would be the same routine. People would complain about the lousy job we did on the council, although the purpose of the meeting was to choose a new site for the community. We had fought hard to have our say.

The Premier had suggested a site with some services in place so that the governments wouldn't have to spend so much. He recommended that we look at three or more choices. One of them was Goose Bay. I was sure people in Goose Bay would oppose this; I later learned they'd had a meeting to find out what was going on. When the referendum was held in Davis Inlet, a majority voted for Natuashish, while the other site got only one percent of the vote. Only three people wanted to move to Goose Bay.

Through it all, I kept drinking. One night, I started fighting again with my wife. At the time she was carrying our fourth child. I woke up beside her and saw that her nose was filled with dried blood, and I woke her up to see if she was okay. She told me that she was leaving me. After promising her many times before that I would never hurt her, I didn't know what to do.

The next morning my mother came back to the tent, which she had left the evening before because of our drinking. She came back and started yelling at me; she said she could hear my wife screaming and yelling all through the night. Then my uncle came inside our tent to see what was happening. He, too, raised his voice to me. He said what I did was inexcusable. I had nobody to blame but myself if I seriously hurt my wife and the baby. He reminded me of how my first common-law wife died, something I had tried not to think about. He said I still didn't care how many people I hurt and now I was doing the same thing to my second wife.

When I was a teenager, the only way to become a man was to drink and have a wife. So when I was 17 I was making my own home brew and living with a common-law wife even younger than me. We ignored the disapproval of both our parents. I couldn't care less about what I did; I was just following the pack. The first few months were okay. I was acting civilized and felt I had a new lease on life. But after a few months, we grew tired of each other. The hurting, lying and cheating grew worse every day. I was constantly going on trips to outside meetings, as I was working for the NMIA (Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association).

Other things changed as well. The slap I had given her on the wrist became a more aggressively clenched fist into her face. As my consumption of alcohol increased, my temper flared like a raging bull. I couldn't control the anger. I inflicted harm on her and I was in no position to seek help, even though I felt remorse and pain for what I did to her. I just couldn't control it. I must have apologized a million times and claimed that I would never do it again, but this only lasted a few days a month, when I was sober. I didn't do the things when I didn't drink. I wasn't in trouble with the law when I wasn't drinking.

Then something happened that will haunt me the rest of my life. I was in Goose Bay for meetings. My girlfriend and I had a good telephone conversation and she sounded happy. She said she was looking forward to me coming home. She asked me to bring her some clothes. After drinking the night before, I felt a bit hungover as we headed home on a charter plane on Good Friday. We landed on the harbour ice, and my drinking buddy picked me up. I hopped on his skidoo with a case of booze to keep my supporters happy.

As we arrived at my parents' house, I heard a commotion going on inside. As I went in, I saw my sister and brother holding my girlfriend in their arms. She had shot herself with a 22 rifle and was bleeding from her shoulder. I could see she was struggling to stand. I got her on my buddy's snowmobile and rushed her to the clinic. I screamed at the nurses to come and help me get her

inside. We carried her to the bed and the nurses did the best they could. As she lay on the bed, she whispered to me that she was scared and worried. I told her not to worry; everything would be all right. I had once seen someone who had shot himself in the same area, and he was all right. I was certain she would be okay. But I sensed something wasn't right when I saw the blank faces of the nurses as one of them approached me. I was leaning toward my girlfriend and trying to speak to her. One of the nurses started sobbing and then I realized that I had lost her.

I thought I was sleeping and having a nightmare and I couldn't wake up. I went back to my parents and the whole clans were there, and I just couldn't say anything when two of my children were immediately taken away from me. One of them was a few months old and the other was two years old. In the next few months, I couldn't handle my grief and sorrow. I felt I was being deserted by my own people and treated as an outcast. I felt my life was worthless. A lot of people believed that I killed her, that I was the one who pulled the trigger. Walking on the road, I could hear whispers and giggles. When I went to visit friends, some of their fathers warned their daughters to stay away from me because they would end up dead.

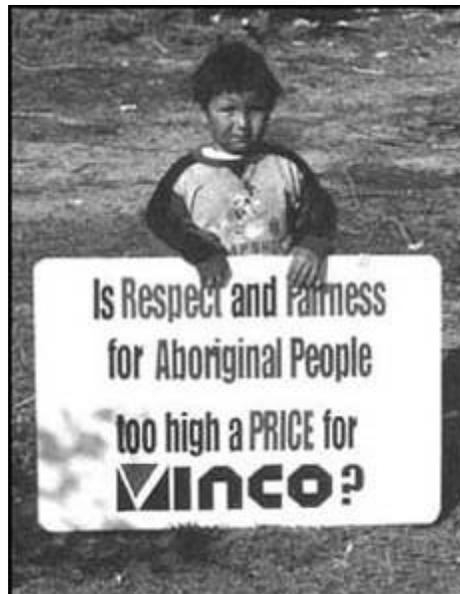
My parents also had to listen to the remarks of my girlfriend's parents. My father often told me to snap out of it, to face it and try to live a normal life. My mother told me to imagine what my girlfriend's parents must feel about losing a daughter. She told me that when she herself lost her first husband, she experienced the same situation. She said people were harsh and they only believed what they wanted to believe. Healing would take time and I could not ignore that. I had to face it and try to deal with it any way I could. I had frequent nightmares and I would wake in the middle of the night sweating and calling her name. This only led me to more drinking.

That spring I joined my parents as they traveled to Natuashish for the spring hunt. I stayed with them for a few months. During our stay, my father told me a story about a man who abused his wife. He said a man and wife stayed alone in the country with no children. The wife was a fine wife; she could sew moccasins perfectly and mend her husband's things. The man was a good hunter; he provided food for his wife. But the man would hit her with a stick and hurt her every chance he got. One night the man's wife died and from that moment on, the man felt pain and suffering. Every time he went out in his torn moccasins, he sang a song. "If only I hadn't abused my manhood. And now I feel the pain in every footstep as I go across the swamp and lakes." That day I swore that if I ever had another wife, I would not abuse her.

Years after my first wife died, I saw a mirror image of my young self in our first-born son. My son and his common-law wife stayed next door in an apartment for a few weeks when we were living in Goose Bay. I witnessed the anger and abuse he inflicted on his girlfriend. I immediately called the police to have him charged with assault. After he was taken away, I called Social Services to get help for his girlfriend. I offered her a one-way ticket out to stay with her relatives in Quebec. But she refused and she was angry with me for reporting my son to the police. He asked for my help when he was in court and his lawyer came to me a number of times. I refused to support him. I later learned that the healing agencies of the band council drafted a letter of support on his behalf. The hardest thing I had to do was to write the judge saying that I was more concerned for his girlfriend and he had to think about what he had done. Today he struggles very hard to follow the right path. The only way for him to stay out of trouble is to lay off the alcohol.

My uncle gave me an earful the day after I hurt my second wife. I will never forget the words and sometimes when I think of him, his thundering voice aches my eardrums. I feel I owe him something. I treated him badly when he was still around, and I never had a chance to say I am sorry and to tell him I respected him. I still have the snowshoes he made for me.

If I had listened to and respected elders like my uncle, I would have been a different man growing up in this sometimes hostile world of ours. I have heard many things about Davis Inlet in healing sessions—that evil spirits lie beneath the houses, that we built houses on ancient burial grounds and so brought misery and despair to the community. But I once heard somebody say in a healing session: “Hell is what we create ourselves. The misery, pain and suffering is what alcohol contributes.” If we see the problem this way, we can work on it.



Protest at Voisey's Bay
Joel Rich

Waking the True Innu Spirit

What we needed next was an awakening. We had to resurrect the true Innu spirit to struggle with governments, protest changes to our land and heal our sickening souls. For me, the awakening came when I saw Innu protest against the military activity in Ntesinan. I saw the people of Sheshatshiu protesting while the police carried them away to waiting buses. I knew then that it was time to take new kinds of action to fight the ignorance of governments.

When we defied government policies, we created among ourselves intense feelings of empowerment. The military and law enforcement agencies had us in their grip for many years. Now we were finally breaking free. We could speak out and show the outside world what the Canadian government was doing in their own backyard to aboriginal people. Since then, there has been a lot of support from other countries. Governments have changed their attitudes toward the Innu in Ntesinan. Once again, we can feel proud to be Innu. I can see it on the faces of the Innu in our communities.

We had to look at how we got where we were. The young leaders had parents who abused alcohol. We followed the footsteps of our parents and other supposed role models. We followed the lead of the ones we hung out with when we were young, those who went to St. John's to finish high school. When they came back to Davis Inlet, they dressed differently and wore their hair long. They seemed to understand a language we could not comprehend. They brought the rock and roll era home. Their rebellion against their elders and outside workers caught our attention, for we needed a new image to feed our bored adolescent minds. My peers and I grew out of our dreams of becoming great hunters and providers. Our new dreams were more European. We wanted to be teachers, store managers, hydro plant workers, the new positions created by the government.

When we saw our role models gain respect from the elders and the community, we wanted to be like them. We were very impressed with their English. They were always going out of Davis Inlet for meetings with the government. I wanted a job like that. Now, I think I was only looking at the alcohol they brought back and I wanted to do the same.



George Rich and his daughter Linda
Camille Fouillard

Crossing the White Line

In 1995 I moved with my family to Goose Bay. I had decided to enroll in ABE to try to finish my education. In Goose Bay, I could no longer do the things I loved—no more fishing and hunting and traveling on the land.

In the more urban setting of Goose Bay, there were cultural differences and lots of expenses.

With a family of seven (and maybe I can count myself as two persons because of my size), it was very hard to keep food on the table. There were car loans and insurance for the car. Everything the children did I had to pay for—minor hockey, soccer, games, swimming. They all required money that I didn't have because I was on a fixed income. Going back to school at the age of 33 brought a lot of gray hairs. It was hard to live up to family responsibilities with the sudden difference in income. For 17 years, I'd worked for the band council and Innu Nation. I was used to making a decent living.

The second hard part of the transition was crossing the line to living in a white society. Perceptions of the Innu were different here. My children faced racism in school; they brought home new, racist names they wondered about. It was something I was familiar with from my years of traveling back and forth to Goose Bay. Each time I encountered racism, it sent shock waves to my spine. Racism towards the Innu is as bad as anything you might hear in the media in the United States. If nothing is done to fight racism in Goose Bay, things will only get worse, and the situation will go from name-calling to more destructive acts.

The first year was the hardest for my family. We met up with the racist idea that anybody with black hair has lice and is a carrier of diseases. My two boys were playing soccer and at the end of the game the players were lined up to shake hands and at least five children wouldn't even touch them.

Sometimes, their report cards had comments from the teachers that they lacked oral and written English skills. Some of those teachers realized that our first language is Innu-aimun and we use it at home all the time.

I would often hear that aboriginal people had everything free—free education, free housing, no taxes. If the people who say this could see the houses we lived in, they would be ashamed. When CBC showed the deplorable housing conditions in northern Labrador in the late 1980s, the Canadian public was ashamed. Today the same conditions exist. Shortages mean that sometimes

10 to 15 people share a two or three-bedroom house. This is not acceptable by Canadian standards, but for the Innu it's always been the same. Every year, government officials question housing repairs: why do you have to repair houses every year? Why don't you learn to keep your homes from breaking apart?

White society often forgets that the Innu are different. We used to live in tents or teepees made of caribou hides; these are our homes and we know how to build and repair them expertly. Like whites, we know how to take care of the kind of dwellings we have traditionally lived in.

Free education is another scam. I have yet to see an educated Innu with a university degree working in Davis Inlet. Formal education was not a priority for the Innu, but that may be changing. When I went to do upgrading, a lot of people in the community followed my path. Then the band council set up a program for adult learners in partnership with the college in Goose Bay.

My experiences in Goose Bay changed my attitudes towards white people. I'd always thought people in Goose Bay were all racists, but I was wrong. There are a lot of good people who will remain my friends. I still see and talk to my classmates at the college and the others at the entrepreneurial courses I took. They had to get past racist attitudes toward the Innu, and they tried.

My own thinking changed in other ways too. I had believed that all Innu should live in country and live the traditional way of life. But now I had chosen to live in this white, urban culture. I wanted my children to be ready to face whatever challenges may come along. I wanted this to be one of the experiences that would prepare them to face the difficulties that I struggled with when I was growing up. I knew that, like me, they would be caught between worlds.

Now I was also caught between responsibilities. When I decided to enroll in ABE, I felt I was deserting my duties as a community leader, neglecting the needs of the people, leaving the files I had been working on unresolved. The decision I faced kept me awake at night; questions kept pounding me. What sort of person am I? Why am I doing this? What do I have to gain in doing this? The questions would not let me rest the first few months in Goose Bay. Am I running away from my friends? Do they feel deserted by me?

We, the young leaders, took on a lot because we had few resources from the outside. We had to do everything ourselves, and we were expected to do a lot. Nothing we did could be enough to solve Davis Inlet's problems. We were under a lot of pressure. Sometimes I blamed myself for contributing to the

social illness that haunts Davis Inlet. Sometimes I wondered whether we were making the right decisions for our own people.

I needed a change, a break from all the sudden changes we lived with in the community. I needed a new way of thinking. And I knew that the problems and the negotiations with governments—all that struggle—would still be there whenever I returned.

I am constantly in struggle with my inner soul to overcome the barriers that I am about to face. I know that education will be rewarding and will help me in my work. I want to write fluently. But I always question the path I am taking. I tell myself I can always go back. But will I?



Sam Rich, Raphael Rich
and other family members
Hettasch Collection

Where I Belong

My parents raised me to be free. I could stay with other family members like my sisters or brothers for a period of time. Every time my parents wanted me to stay in the country or stay in the bay for the fall, I hid and avoided them so I could stay in Davis Inlet with my sister or brother. I was used to the new community by now. I especially liked the movies the priest showed on Thursdays and Sundays. My parents always seemed to know where I was staying.

I have good and bad memories of growing up in Davis Inlet. I remember looking forward to Halloween and Christmas. Near Christmas, the Hercules military jets would fly around the community to parachute Christmas supplies for the missionary to hand out. It was fascinating to watch the supplies getting thrown out of those big planes and the parachutes coming down slowly from the sky. The only other time we saw parachutes coming down was in war movies. The crates would sometimes hit hard on recently frozen ice and all the goodies inside would be all over the place. As children we would run toward them, ignoring the priest yelling that we should be careful or we'd get hit by crates. The high winds sometimes carried the parachuted crates into a wooded area. It was an opportunity for young men to search and hide some of the stuff they claimed they found.

I also have fond memories of Natuashish where I partly grew up and where my parents camped in the spring and fall. As soon as there was open water in early spring, my father would set his net for Arctic char as they headed back to the salt water. The spring would bring warm weather and we would wake to the sounds of sparrows and the crackling of sparks in my mother's fire. She would be cooking the fresh Arctic char that my father caught. Natuashish, about seven kilometres north of Davis Inlet, is surrounded by rolling hills coloured with evergreens. I recall the quiet and beauty of the pond with the morning mist rising from the cold water, and the lonely cries of the great northern diver. I believe that people in Davis Inlet have made the right choice when they want to spend the rest of their lives in Natuashish.

My parents usually adopted a couple of teenage boys to tag along with us to Natuashish, and the parents of those young men didn't mind at all. Nowadays, if I wanted to take somebody with me, there would be the red tape of Social Services. My background would be checked; they would want to know whether I use alcohol or drugs. *We forget that it takes a whole community to*

raise a child. Long ago, the people of Davis Inlet lived with this “new” motto I often hear now at healing conferences.

My friends and I once went on a hike to the other side of our island. We climbed a hill and went down the other side, farther than we’d planned. We played hide and seek, running around in a wooded area. Eventually, we ended up on the other side of the island. We were sitting and lying down on the shore when we heard an outboard motor. We were about six miles away from Davis Inlet. The sun was slowly setting and it would have been dark before we made it home. After hiking through the swamps, tired and hungry, we lay on a flat rock and talked about what we wanted to do when we grew up. One of my friends said he would marry and make love to his wife all the time and have a lot of children. Others said they wanted to have a skidoo or a fast speedboat.

We lay listening to the outboard motor approaching. I suppose the people on the boat saw us with their binoculars. They headed in our direction and landed their punts on the sandy area of the beach. It was my uncle John after hauling his catch. He wasn’t surprised to see us. He called us crazy kids and asked if our mothers knew where we were. He told us to go home directly as he had little room in his boat, and there were at least five of us. As he was ready to start his outboard motor, he grunted to us to go with him. I felt relieved and was glad to be in the boat. I had dreaded going back to Davis Inlet overland in the dark of the night. It was slightly dark when we made it back.

I was sure that this would not be the last I’d hear from my uncle. The next morning he visited and told my mother where he’d found us. He said she should know better than to let her 12-year-old son wander miles away from home. My mother was a wise woman; she never said anything as she had always shown respect and admiration to her older brother. My mother was never the type of person who would yell at us.

Until I was 15, my parents protected me from harm and disciplined me away from any wrongdoing. Our parents told us all—five boys and one girl—that we should never make fun of our elders and try to help out where we can. My mother said that, because elders had certain gifts from our creators, if we supported them we would probably live just as long as they did. When I reached the age of 17, I soon forgot this. But I remember it now.

On any paths we follow in our lives there are always hurdles and curves before one can reach one’s destination. Sometimes the paths that we follow can lead to the destruction of a life; any wrong turn can lead this way.

Gradually we can reach the place we want to go, but the tricky part is we can only identify it when we get there.

I decided to follow the path of well-being and it has led me to sobriety for the past nine years. I remember what my late uncle John said to me. He said, "It's not going to be easy," and it's not easy. It's not easy to let out all my anger and what is eating me away inside, to reveal my inner soul and welcome the combined strength of family and friends. But I wouldn't be here today if I was still sucking on that bottle of destruction. I am much happier now than I ever was. I have a wonderful wife and five children. I have the rest of my life.

Acknowledgements

This book was developed for Exploring Memory, Finding Meaning, a special project of the Adult Basic Education Writing Network. We offer our thanks to the National Literacy Secretariat for their financial support of the book series.

We also thank those who shared their photographs with us: Ross and Joan King, Mt. Pearl; Heng Lin, Marystown; Leo Abbass, Goose Bay; Bob Bartel, Saskatchewan; Annette Luttermann and Todd Keith, Halifax; Joel Rich, Davis Inlet; Georg Henriksen, Norway; Nigel Markham, St. John's; and Ted Ostrowski, North West River. Father Jack Davis of Our Lady of Peace Parish in Goose Bay gave us permission to use images from the Davis Inlet Roman Catholic Mission Collection. From her home in Ottawa, Hannie Fitzgerald took time to search through many photographs taken by her father, Siegfried Hettasch, and her aunt, Kate Hettasch. We had called Hannie and asked for her help in locating an image we thought could have been taken by the Hettasch family. Hannie found that photograph and sent original copies of all the images in the collection that might be relevant for the book.

Every photograph has its own story and sometimes those stories were shared over late-night lunches. We thank everyone for trusting us with their slides, negatives and prints, and for the hot tea. Photograph searches also require some detective work. In our search, we depended on the extensive knowledge and assistance of Peter Armitage and Camille Fouillard. Camille also introduced us to George.

Participants and staff at the Rabbittown Learners Program in St. John's, the Learning Centre in Edmonton, and the Discovery Centre in Bay Roberts field tested earlier drafts of the books. Their comments and suggestions helped us improve the series.



In *Struggling With My Soul*, George Rich tells the story of growing up as a Labrador Innu caught between two worlds, the settlement of Davis Inlet and the nomadic world of his ancestors. In sometimes painful detail, Rich shows how people and communities can be torn apart--and, even more importantly, how they can become whole again.

Readers say...

"George Rich recalls good and bad memories. Through out the stories I could feel a lump in my throat."

"This story is about struggling in the world. The pictures and story make you think about your own story in the world."

George Rich works with the Innu Nation in Davis Inlet, Labrador. He always loved reading but the ABE program gave him the confidence to write about his world. This is his first publication.