

# INNU-NASKAPI

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Oh, when I was young! My childhood was full of beautiful memories. We played outside a lot, and we hunted and fished, of course.

I still remember, back in the 1970s, when we lived on the old Lac John reserve—the first village where people settled and stayed. The houses were little cabins. Lots of hunters came to live there, and two Nations lived as a community, the Naskapi and the people who were then called the Montagnais, the Innu. Later, the government built another village thirteen kilometres away, Matimekush. If memory serves, people started to move there in 1972. It was a new life: the first time people had seen toilets, sinks, taps, everything. In a way, that contributed to the loss of our culture. And people started working in the mines to be able to feed their children.

Today, there are two separate villages. Since 1982, the two Nations have lived separately, with about a thousand people on each side. I used to live in the Innu village, but I'm Innu-Naskapi. The two villages have always

helped each other. I always went to visit my Naskapi relatives. I loved going to my grandmother's house. She grilled meat on a wood fire and, best of all, she would make bannock. Since my father died, I often go goose hunting with my Naskapi uncles. I go every year. Many of us go out into the woods—unforgettable moments for my brothers and sisters. My Naskapi relatives are happy that we're there, and so are we. Naskapi life revolves around hunting and fishing. When I was little, I spoke Naskapi, but since the village was built, I decided to speak Innu. The words are the same, it's just the accent that's different. The Naskapi are proud of their history. They even have a day to celebrate it: Naskapi Day, on January 31.

I loved my childhood. I played outside all the time, I was out in the woods with my parents. My father was a great hunter, and a leader, and he showed me a lot of things. I learned how to set marten and hare traps. I even remember shooting partridges with a little gun, and eating them. During the winter we walked all the time; there were no snowmobiles. My father walked everywhere. Since he was a little boy, he would go hunting and walk for miles. I am proud of him to this day. He was my hero and I will never forget him.

At the time, Quebecers used to call us the Montagnais, though the term isn't used anymore. I'm proud of the word chosen by the community, by the people: the word "Innu" means "human being". Maybe a better way to explain it is to say an Innu is someone who doesn't like technology, or building dams, or cutting trees. An Innu respects nature and wildlife. It is my deepest pride to be

a part of the Innu Nation. I hope that one day the Innu will be listened to, that people will hear their words and their thoughts. I know that we're important: we want to protect the land for our children.

Our language survives today through music. Many of our young artists sing in Innu-aimun. There's a guitar in every house. Every village has a band, a music group. I know young people are practising more and more. My brother was a musician; he sang really well. I learned to play guitar too, so that I could sing in my language. It's so nice to hear songs in Innu-aimun in public. It's a dream for young people, I think. Each nation has to protect its language. We have to work together to become stronger and to protect the land.

My dream is to be a real Innu. I don't want to lose my identity, my culture, my language. We want peace on earth. Our ancestors were true hunters, true singers. They played the teueikan, the traditional drum, a sacred instrument. Did you know that you have to dream about it three times before you can play it? It reminds me, too, of the shaking tent, which was used to find game. Only Elders were allowed in...

I love our history. I'd like to become a public speaker, to explain my culture and tell young people about it in order to preserve it. I'm telling you now: be proud of your culture. Show the next generation how great our nation is.

Ekute!