

DAVIS INLET: MOVING FROM MISERY

Introduction

Recently, the aboriginal Innu community of Davis Inlet on the coast of Labrador was thrust into the international spotlight. On January 26, 1993, six children attempted multiple suicide by inhaling gasoline fumes. All fortunately were rescued and those who were most at risk were removed from Davis Inlet to Poundmaker's Lodge, a native treatment centre near Edmonton, Alberta. The videotape of these children was broadcast nationally and became the catalyst for Canadians' awareness of the tragedy of Davis Inlet. Although this tiny settlement had previously experienced symptoms of social disintegration, such as alcoholism, physical abuse, and suicide, this tragic event seemed to sum up the vulnerability, alienation, and isolation of the group, especially of the children.

Some trace the causes of the social disintegration of this particular Innu settlement to federal and provincial government decisions, decisions that critics call political. The relocation of aboriginal people to Canada's Far North has been characterized as a political move in that settlements in the Far North legitimize Canada's ownership of the land. Historically, the Innu were nomadic hunters, living on large tracts of land in what is now Labrador for about six thousand years. In the last century, as the influence of the European civilization spread, the Innu's dependency on trade and government assistance increased and their traditional livelihood of hunting and fur trading declined. Their living standards were gradually eroded. By the mid-1940s, living conditions of the Innu of Old Davis Inlet on the mainland had seriously deteriorated. The Innu were almost totally dependent on the government, the caribou were greatly in decline, and many of the people were starving. In 1948 the Newfoundland provincial government "relocated" the Innu to Nutak, a community four hundred kilometres north of Old Davis Inlet. The following year, most of the seventy-four people who were moved made their way back. In 1967, during Canada's Centennial year, a time of celebration for most other Canadians, the Davis Inlet Innu were moved once again, this time to an island in Davis Inlet. Simple houses were built of plywood but without adequate insulation. Running water, proper sewage, and adequate heating were all promised by both provincial and federal governments but never came. To add insult to injury, by the 1980s, NATO forces were using traditional Innu territory for aerial manoeuvres, making more than six thousand low-level flights a year at speeds of eight hundred kilometres per hour over the land.

Twenty-six years later, in 1993, the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, the federal government has announced that, in conjunction with the Province of Newfoundland, it will move the Innu back to the mainland to a site at Sango on the river of the same name. The current social conditions of the Innu of Davis Inlet reveal psychological scars that have resulted from a people being uprooted and moved to locations selected by a government bureaucracy. As government officials, social workers, native leaders, and the world's media focused on this isolated community, many questions began to be asked. Why were the Innu moved in the first place? Why have both levels of government, federal and provincial, failed to deliver on promises after so many years? Have missionaries, social workers, English-speaking school teachers, and modern communications technology unwittingly exacerbated the cultural decline of the Innu by importing southern white values and lifestyles? What can

be done to help the Innu in the short term? Is the planned move to nearby Sango the best course of action? How will the Innu themselves deal with their social problems as they try to establish a new collective sense of themselves as an independent people? How can a people with a long tradition of a nomadic lifestyle adapt to the realities of the twentieth century? How can the physical environment of northern Labrador sustain them?

Questions have been asked before regarding Canada's treatment of its aboriginal peoples. Sadly, throughout the world, dominant civilizations, intentionally or not, have ignored, uprooted, and exposed indigenous peoples to the threat of cultural genocide. International agencies who fight for human rights argue that these people continue to be victimized. As the world's population continues to explode and encroach on previously isolated territory, many traditional indigenous cultures suffer. After visiting Davis Inlet, Ovide Mercredi, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said, "There is a lack of hope in this community. It's all related to the loss of culture, the loss of life and the loss of their identity. They are a dispossessed people." Hopeful signs, however, exist. The Innu of Davis Inlet raised \$25 000 through donations from native support groups to conduct their own inquiry, establishing a committee to draft terms of reference and hire three community residents as commissioners. As for the children of Davis Inlet, programs with native abuse counsellors are being set up. Although some parents resisted sending their children for outside treatment, Chief Katie Rich has said, "This is just the start. What is important is that when the families come back, there is a program in place here to make sure they don't fall back into [addictive behaviour]."

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An Overview of a Complex Situation

Using a multimedia approach — the video, this resource guide, an atlas, and other print material you may have in your library — gather information that will help you begin to understand the plight of the Innu of Davis Inlet. Proceed as follows:

1. Working with a partner, watch and listen carefully to the video and record relevant information that describes the history and current situation of the Innu of Davis Inlet. Integrate the following information also into your notes.
 - The Innu are Montagnais-Naskapi aboriginal people of Labrador, Newfoundland.
 - There are approximately 500 Naskapi Innu living at Davis Inlet and 950 Montagnais Innu living in Sheshatshui.
 - The Innu are a distinct and separate people from the Inuit, with their own language, customs, and history.
 - The words "Innu" and "Inuit" both mean "people" in their respective languages.
 - The Innu of Davis Inlet are the Mushuau Band. They elect their own Band Council and their Chief is Katie Rich.
 - One generally refers to the Innu as the Innu Nation. Most indigenous peoples today prefer the term "nation."
 - The Innu are not registered Indians under Canada's Indian Act. They have indicated that they wish to deal directly with the federal government as an aboriginal people. Canada has advised the Innu that it is prepared to address their request for self-government negotiations, which Canada is prepared to undertake parallel to an Innu land claim. Such negotiations would have to include the government of Newfoundland. Canada believes that the outcome of such negotiations would result in a land base for the Innu over which they would have clearly defined self-government powers.

2. Consult an atlas and complete the following activities.
 - (a) Draw a simple map of Labrador, Newfoundland, and northern Quebec. Indicate the provincial borders and the names of the surrounding waters and territories.
 - (b) Locate in an atlas each of the places listed below and measure their distance in kilometres from Davis Inlet. Be sure to mark the

communities on your map of Labrador if they fall within its borders.

- Goose Bay
- Churchill Falls
- Hopedale
- Sheshatshui
- St. John's
- Where you live

(c) Consulting a topographical map, which illustrates the surface features of a region, describe the landscape in which the Innu live.

3. Briefly describe in one or two sentences the role each of the following organizations has played in the Davis Inlet story.

- the Newfoundland government
- the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
- the Addiction Research Foundation
- Poundmakers Lodge
- the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

4. Formulate a definition of each of the following words, using a dictionary or other resources. In order to show you understand the meaning of the words, write a two- paragraph statement that summarizes the main issues discussed in the video. Incorporate in your statement as many as of the words as possible from the list.

- aboriginal
- assimilate
- band
- genocide
- indigenous
- minority
- sovereignty
- traditional
- tribe
- nation

5. Identify each of the following people and the connection they have with the recent events in Davis Inlet.

- Simeon Jacobish
- Tom Siddon
- Katie Rich
- Clyde Wells
- Peter Penashue

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Chronology of a Threatened People

- Until the start of this century the Innu were nomadic hunters who had lived on the land for about six thousand years.
- About 1003, Viking explorers from what are today Scandinavian countries reach Labrador. They encounter the Innu and kill a number of them, before eventually returning to Greenland.
- In the 1500s, French fishing boats encounter Innu in the Strait of Belle Isle and begin to trade with them for their catch.
- In the early 1700s the Innu begin to congregate near trading posts in a number of locations in Labrador. These posts are established by a variety of European settlers with whom the Innu develop a fur trading relationship and an economic dependency.
- By the early 1900s, as the income from fur sales decreases, the Innu become more and more dependent on government rations.
- In the 1940s the Canadian military begin to build air bases in Labrador near traditional Innu land.
- In 1948 the Newfoundland Commission moves seventy-four Innu to Nutak, four hundred kilometres north of Old Davis Inlet, in hopes of finding new and better hunting grounds for them.
- In 1949 these Innu, despite being supplied with tents, new clothes, and food supplies, make their way back to Old Davis Inlet, mainly on foot.
- In the 1949 referendum in Newfoundland, the Innu of Labrador also become citizens of Canada.
- In the 1950s, iron ore mines are opened in a number of locations in Labrador.
- In the early 1960s the Churchill Falls hydroelectric project floods much of the traditional Innu hunting and burial grounds.
- In 1967 the entire band of Naskapi Innu are relocated by the federal government to an island in Davis Inlet just off the coast of Labrador.
- In the mid-1980s, supersonic military jets of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) begin to use established Innu hunting grounds for low-level aerial manoeuvres at speeds of up to eight hundred kilometres per hour and at an altitude of thirty-five metres.
- In 1988, twenty-one young people attempt suicide in the Innu community of

Sheshatshui.

- In February 1992, six children, left alone by their parents, who are out drinking, die in a house fire. There is no running water to fight the fire.
- In January 1993, six Innu children, high on gasoline fumes, attempt suicide together.
- In early February 1993, Innu elders and other native leaders call for government action to assist with the immediate move of the Innu community.
- In mid-February 1993, Tom Siddon, federal Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development announces that the Innu community at Davis Inlet will be moved to a site at Sango, approximately twenty kilometres away, on the mainland.

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Profile of a Troubled Community

- Approximately five hundred Naskapi Innu live at Davis Inlet.
- Of the adults, 75% are identified as chronic alcohol abusers.
- An additional 20% are identified as recovering adults.
- Adult unemployment is 80%. However, such a measurement may not be appropriate in an Innu community.
- Among the 340 youths there are 42 solvent abusers.
- Since 1973, 50 lives in the community have been lost to alcohol-related deaths.
- In the fiscal year 1991-92 the federal and provincial governments spent a combined \$2.8 million on the Davis Inlet Innu.
- There is one water pump for five hundred Innu people in Davis Inlet.
- Davis Inlet has thirteen school teachers, two permanent nurses, one social worker, two Native Administration staff, one doctor who visits on a biweekly or emergency response basis, three Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program counsellors, one solvent abuse counsellor from the Mennonite Church, one Alcoholics Anonymous branch run by the Roman Catholic Church, two tribal police officers, five RCMP officers located in Hopedale, Newfoundland, who fly in on regular patrols (they police four communities), one community health representative, and one itinerant priest.

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An International Focus on Indigenous People

The year 1993 has been declared International Year for the World's Indigenous People by the United Nations. Currently, the member nations of the United Nations are working on a document that will state the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. At the time of this writing the document is in the working stages.

Canada is not alone in witnessing significant difficulties among some of its indigenous peoples. The widespread substance abuse found in Davis Inlet can be found in hundreds of other similar communities in Canada and around the world. The abuse, although a tragic and complex problem in itself, is symptomatic of a greater problem. — the dislocation of people from their traditional homes and their traditional way of life. Throughout the world, indigenous peoples have been isolated and alienated within societies that have evolved through immigration. Frequently these indigenous peoples find themselves living in environments very foreign to their traditional ones and have been forced to adopt the values and lifestyles of the dominant cultural groups. The psychological damage runs deep. The severing of a physical and emotional connections with their past leads to a loss of identity, of self-sufficiency, and consequently of self-worth.

Choose one of the indigenous groups listed below and research the people's history and current status.

1. The Indians of Guatemala
2. The Gam Indians of Panama
3. The Pygmies of Central Africa
4. The Bushmen of the Kalahari
5. The Tibetans of China
6. The Papuans of Irian Jaya
7. The Highland Indians of Chile
8. The Aché of Eastern Paraguay
9. The Yanomami peoples of Brazil and Venezuela

As you conduct your research, consider the following:

1. How has the changing of international boundaries affected this group's well-being? What political events have contributed the group's difficulties?

2. In addition to forms of addiction such as alcohol and gasoline sniffing, what other behaviour within the society suggests a threatened people?
3. Is the destruction of this group's culture at an advanced stage?
4. Is it possible for this people to preserve its traditional ways of living?
5. How has language become an issue in the struggles of this group?
6. What aspects of modern civilized society have had the most destructive effect on the group's culture?
7. How has the group attempted to adapt as a means of survival?
8. What actions, if any, has the existing government taken to assist the people? How successful has this assistance been?

For more information on aboriginal peoples, you may write to:

World Council of Indigenous Peoples
100 Argyle Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K2P 1B6
Tel: (613) 230-9030
Fax: (613) 230-9340

Two useful books for student research on these issues are the following:

The Innu (The Montagnais-Naskapi) by Peter Armitage, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers 1991)

Threatened Cultures by Virginia Luling, (Vero Beach: Rourke Enterprises Inc., 1990)

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Images and Imagery

Storytelling

Like many indigenous people, the Innu have a splendid oral tradition. Their stories are generally divided into two types. The first, *tipatshamuna*, are historical accounts of the real-life events of Innu people. The second, *atanukana*, recount myths about the creation of the world and legends from ancient times when beings underwent transformations between animal and human states. One example of *atanukana* tells how the world was created.

Long ago, Kuetuatsheu, the wolverine, built a big boat and put animals from all species inside it. It then began to rain heavily, and the land became flooded. Kuetuatsheu told the mink to dive into the water to retrieve some mud and rocks, which the wolverine mixed together to make an island.

Discussion

1. Does this myth sound familiar?
2. Myths contain certain universal truths and reflect realities that human beings experience. What do you think this short myth expresses about the Innu people?

Media Reporting

In a recent article in the Toronto Star, Miles Morriseau, editor of *Nativebeat*, a journal dealing with native issues, discussed his reactions to the media coverage of the events in Davis Inlet:

"It occurred to me that one of the reasons the Davis Inlet tragedy has become such a big deal is because of the tape [news footage]. It is the equivalent of the Rodney King beating, as it becomes indisputable proof to those who haven't witnessed the reality first-hand. It is the videotape that makes the connection and not the experience. I don't need to see the video tape and I don't know if I ever want to. I don't need the pain of the people of Davis Inlet spread out before me like some B movie. And it scares me to think that some people need that. It scares me to think some people are so insulated that they need to see it on television first before a crack is made in their protective cocoon."

Globe and Mail columnist Michael Valpy commented on what he saw when he visited the Davis Inlet community:

"Television crews with children trailing after them wander the village speaking the languages of Europe. An RCMP assistant commissioner visited for half an hour. Executive directors of aid organizations fly in with aboriginal healing counsellors from Nebraska, Alberta, British Columbia. Some private citizen from Quebec has turned up promising 8000 kilograms of food and clothing and distributing handbills announcing his pledge."

Discussion

1. What do you think each of the above writers is saying about the outside world's presence in Davis Inlet?
2. If you were an Innu from Davis Inlet, how would you respond to these two writers? How would you respond to the media in Davis Inlet?
3. To what extent do you feel television coverage of the events in Davis Inlet has helped or harmed the Innu?

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Exodus

The Innu's move from their island in Davis Inlet to a location sixteen kilometres away on the coast of mainland Labrador may take two to three years to complete. The new site would be accessible year-round to traditional hunting grounds and provide room for growth and adequate soil conditions for running water and sewage services. The entire community's departure from Davis Inlet to a new location will require a commitment of extensive financial resources and personnel from the provincial government.

The Innu's move is more than a practical consideration, however. It is a departure from misery in search of a better life. This kind of voyage has been recorded throughout human history and has become a metaphor for a nation's search for a homeland and freedom from suffering. Exodus, the second book of the Bible contains an account of the Israelites being lead out of Egypt by Moses.

Discussion

1. What groups throughout human history have been required to undertake an exodus?
2. What difficulties might a people have to endure during an exodus?
3. What is the poetic significance of an exodus? Compose a brief poem titled "Exodus of the Innu."

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Planning a Future

In a recent report for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Atlantic Region, the engineering consulting firm of Terpistra and Associates of Goose Bay, Labrador, recommended the following:

1. that the community of Davis Inlet be relocated to Sango.
2. that a new municipal plan be developed by the Band Council for Sango, with a clearly defined central core, houses in clusters, radial roads, and ring roads.
3. that an implementation strategy be developed for the relocation of the community.
4. that the new community be serviced by a conventional, deep-buried, piped water system from the Sango River, with sewage disposal through septic tanks and disposal fields.
5. that appropriate housing of R-2000 standard be designed to suit the special requirements of the families of the Mushuau Innu Band (Davis Inlet)
6. that, in order to reduce social problems and rebuild self-esteem of the Innu, the relocation to Sango is coupled with a transfer of control to the Innu through self-government.
7. that the hydro-electric potential of the Kakesekauts River be fully developed, building a dam and creating a reservoir, thus providing an economic power source for the new community and eliminating the need for costly diesel power generation.
8. that to ensure maximum benefit to the community, capital works be done through a combination of project management and public tender process.
9. that governments act expeditiously to implement the recommendations of this study.

Follow-up Discussion

1. As a class, discuss the implications of each of the above recommendations. Why was it made? What is involved in implementing it?
2. On February 26, 1993, MP Tom Reid announced the following short term aid package to the Innu of Davis Inlet.

- \$140 000 for basic community services
- \$50 000 to help the Innu prepare for discussions with the government on relocation
- \$100 000 to develop a plan this spring for a new village
- \$30 000 for an addictions consultant
- \$25 000 for emergency repairs and assessment of water and sewer problems
- \$10 000 for administrative and financial consultants to help the village solve its deficit problem

Band Chief Katie Rich's response to the government assistance was "It's not what we asked for. They still want to treat us like little children."

Assess both the federal government's financial proposal and Chief Katie Rich's response.

Additional resources on this issue or other issues relating to native peoples are available from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Information is also available from Indian and Inuit Affairs, Atlantic Region.

The Enquiries Kiosk
 Communications Branch
 Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
 Ottawa, Ontario
 K1A 0H4
 Tel: (819) 997-0380

Indian and Inuit Affairs
 Atlantic Region
 P.O. Box 160
 Amherst, Nova Scotia
 B4H 3Z3
 Tel: (902) 661-6233

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Deprivation

Antonia Benuen is fifteen years old and lives in Davis Inlet. In 1992 she stopped sniffing gas fumes about the same time her parents quit drinking. She considers herself one of the lucky ones. Now she counsels her friends to end the deadly gasoline habit. Ms. Benuen speaks of the constant bitter cold in her family's wooden house, heated only by a wood stove. Innu leaders have suggested that the effect of these physical and social conditions is such that the Innu are "living on a time bomb" and "It's going to go off any minute." Much has been promised over the years by many officials at both levels of government. However, they have had to live without many things which most of us take for granted, comforts which they too had hoped for. Depriving people of the basic necessities of life — proper food, clothing, and shelter — can be a significant factor in the breakdown of a community.

Activity

The class will be divided into small groups. Each group should draw four columns on a large piece of chart paper with the following headings: Item, Consequence, Personal Response, and Alternative Strategy. Begin by having a class discussion about the effect of the first condition of deprivation from the list below.

Within their small groups, students should then move on to stage two of deprivation and discuss the consequence of the particular deprivation and their response to it.

At appropriate times, the teacher will announce that the groups are to move to the next item of deprivation. This should continue until all the items have been discussed.

Additional "deprivations" may be suggested from time to time by individual groups, at which point all groups must respond to the suggested condition.

Conditions of Deprivation

You wake up in the morning and

1. the tooth paste tube is empty.
2. the radio does not work.
3. the television does not work.
4. the toilet does not work.
5. the refrigerator has ceased functioning overnight.
6. electrical power has been cut off.
7. the phone has gone dead.

8. buses, your car or any other form of transportation which you might normally use is no longer operating.
9. the temperature has dropped below zero Celsius.
10. someone in your group is feeling ill.
11. someone in your group announces that he or she is feeling rather hopeless about the situation.
12. someone in your group begins to assume a leadership role.

Debriefing

Using the charts on which you have recorded your reactions to the above conditions of deprivation, discuss with another group how each of you responded to the situation. Try to trace how your group coped or did not cope.

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Staying in Touch

Most experts would agree that the Innu of Labrador, in particular the Innu of Davis Inlet, have suffered as a result of being deprived of a traditional way of life and being cut off from their natural environment.

To what extent are you aware of your immediate personal environment and the way in which it supports, facilitates, and embellishes your lifestyle?

1. As a class, brainstorm elements that make up your environment. You might begin by discussing what practical or material goods, services, products, laws, systems, or structures allow you to live as you do. You might then move on to personal and family relationships that sustain you. Intellectual and spiritual elements, such as cultural resources, belief systems, traditions, and family histories might also be considered. Try to construct your "environmental support structure" with words.
2. To what extent do you interact with your environment through your senses? We all see, hear, smell, touch, and even taste our environment. We also feel and react to our environment.

Everyone understands what the sense of touch means but have you ever thought of the sense of touch as a diverse sense? Consider touch in the following ways:

- (a) *Contact*: When you put your finger on the table top you make physical contact.
- (b) *Texture*: When you run your hand across a piece of soft cloth, you are experiencing texture.
- (c) *Biofeedback*: When you touch a block of ice you get a sensation of cold.
- (d) *Pressure*: When you press down on a suitcase to close it you are exerting pressure.
- (e) *Sensing physical distance*: This concept of touching may be new to you, but in some cultures it plays an important role in determining how people behave. We all position our bodies in relation to physical objects or other people. Whether we approach or draw back, we are responding to an imagined touch.

Activity One

1. Using the "touch" model above, give your favourite or least favourite examples of each type of touching. Suggest how each is a function of your environment. Can you think of any cultural or behavioural implications for each of these senses of touch?

2. Again using the above model, try to define each of the items below in the same way. Students might work in small groups and be assigned one item per group.

- seeing
- hearing
- speaking
- smelling
- tasting
- learning
- fun
- understanding
- music
- art
- other

Activity Two

Not only do our environments provide us with important support mechanisms but they can also challenge us to change and adapt as the environments change. The educational system, in the broadest sense of the word, is an environment which has changed enormously over the years. You might ask your teacher to comment on how he or she has seen the educational environment change over the years.

One way in which the educational environment has changed is in the type of learning materials we use. Increasingly the learning environment is a multimedia one, emphasizing "electronic highways," distance and computer-assisted learning, and lifelong learning. A convergence of industries has occurred that has an impact on how you learn. Education, business, communication technology, computers, publishing, and entertainment have all contributed to and must adapt to a media revolution.

How well can you adapt to a high-tech media environment? Can you identify or explain each of the following? Are any of these words, concepts or inventions part of your daily environment?

- an analogue signal
- an authoring program
- biofeedforward devices

- CD-ROM
- CDI
- computer-assisted design and editing system
- compression
- a cursor
- cyberactivity
- DVI
- a dataglove
- a datasuit
- a digital signal
- a digitizing board
- electricity as the new universal medium
- fibre optics
- force-feedback systems
- high-tech
- hot text
- hypertext-based integrated media technology
- icon
- keyboards and mice
- metadesign
- multimedia databases
- neural networking
- organo-technical interfaces
- the organic and the electric eye
- output device
- portable databases
- pop-up fields
- principal input
- the "prosumer" (a term invented by Alvin Toffler)
- real-timeliness
- remote message-collecting
- restructure and reconfigure
- solitaire mode
- synthesizer
- tactile and remote sensors
- touch screen
- track ball
- a total-surround perceptual system
- user control
- user-defined parameters and integrated parameters
- word processor

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Bygone life; a look back at Davis Inlet

by Peter Steele

Whitehorse, Yukon

Davis Inlet was a stop on my clinic run between Nain and Hopedale. It was 1965, and I was temporarily in charge of the Grenfell Association's beat that covered northern Labrador. Our base was North West River at the head of Hamilton Inlet, which looks on a map like the mouth of the dog that is Labrador. Once a month I did clinics at each of the coastal communities, flying with Hector Baikie, pilot of the hospital's Beaver, on floats or skis.

Davis Inlet was one of the prettiest settlements on the coast and my favorite place to stay over, partly because of the gentle Innu people who lived there, partly because of the prospect of stimulating discussions with Father Frank Pieters, the Oblate priest who ran the Catholic mission.

When the plane touched down in front of the community, most of the village people would rush down the hill and through the foreshore ice to garner news from up and down the coast.

Those were the days before the community was moved to an island sixteen kilometres down the bay, which was said to provide better moorage for the supply boats. There were few permanent buildings in Davis Inlet, just the mission that acted as church, meeting hall, clinic and rectory, Chief Joe Rich's house, a small Hudson's Bay store, and a few family cabins.

Most of the Innu, Indians of the Nashkaupi tribe, lived in tents scattered among the trees that led away into the inhospitable interior of Labrador.

Their wall tents were hung from spruce frames. Inside, a woodstove kept a constant temperature in the small space for an entire family. Every few days the women would lay a new spruce-bough carpet and then the whole tent smelled squeaky clean.

We had to choose our dates carefully for the Davis Inlet clinic because soon after freeze-up most of the Innu families disappeared into the bush until Christmas, when they returned to stay for a couple of weeks before moving off again. They lived nomadically, travelling between trapping and hunting grounds according to the abundance of game.

Just after New Year I arrived there by dog team from the North on my run down the coast. Following the tradition of Grenfell doctors, I was trying to visit all the people who were habitually shut in for the duration of the winter.

We had set off from Nain with Bob Voisey driving a team of 17 dogs. At Shango, we were stormbound for a day, but when it cleared, Ben Parly drove a dozen dogs on to Davis Inlet.

I visited every tent in the village, accompanied by Father Pieters, who carried my doctor's black bag. From reading the Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy, he had gleaned a working knowledge of medicine, and did all the clinic work in between visits from nurses and doctors.

We watched the Innu families getting ready to go back into the bush. They wrapped all their gear in a light canvas travelling tent laid out on the sledge and then parcelled and lashed it with rope. Alongside the rifle, babies were put on top of the load, in spaces made by drawing apart the canvas. Mothers expressed breast milk into small deerskin bags on which the baby sucked, drawing milk through the

pores in the skin. This way they did not need to stop for feeding when on the move.

They would travel all day without taking a break, trotting beside the sledge that was pulled by only one or two dogs to make travel in the woods easier. If caught out in severe weather, they would camp out, wrapped in a single blanket lying on a thin layer of spruce boughs.

Doing my clinic rounds with Father Pieters, I observed that the families who had spent the previous months in the bush were significantly healthier than families who, for whatever reason, had remained in Davis Inlet. In the woods they survived well on what they caught with gun, fishing line, snare wire and traps, together with some flour and a few extra staples.

I spent an afternoon with Chief Joe Rich on his trapline. He was too old to go on long trips but he kept active close to home. He was still a master in the bush, where we walked on round, bear-paw snowshoes, tending and setting his traps.

In the evenings, Father Pieters and I sat at his dinner table and put the world to rights late into the night. He would thump the table to drive home his argument or punctuate excited outbursts with loud guffaws. We did another clinic in the morning and then I left to continue my journey south to Hopedale with an Innu dog driver, Chenis, and John Edmunds.

I am reluctant to paint an idyllic picture of Davis Inlet as some Labradorian Utopia. But it was evident to me then, nearly thirty years ago, that the Innu thrived in their desolate mountains and forests, where they were masters of survival.

When I was with them in their environment — and I rather fancied myself as a mountaineer and outdoorsman — I was helpless as a babe in arms, and humbled by it. I just did not have the skills to let me travel through that inclement land alone, and my Innu companions commanded my most profound respect.

I believe this vignette of a bygone life is significant today because our national failure to respect the Innu, and other legions of other native groups, is at the root of their present sadness. We all have fragile egos, and when they are ruthlessly crushed by lack of opportunity, poverty and their successors, alcohol and drugs, a culture is destroyed.

Back in those days, a pulp mill was proposed. But it never materialized, because of lack of cash, as with other schemes designed to enable the Innu to remain on the land and follow a way of life in which they thrived.

The Innu cannot return to an earlier era. But anything must be better than the way successive governments have hived off the problems of dealing with native groups that do not fit neatly into the moulds created for them.

With imagination, it must be possible to divert part of the vast sums of money set aside for relocating these people into helping them establish programs that would allow them to pursue the lives in which they excel.

They should not need to compete with our foreign ways, which have brought them, over the generations, nothing but heartache and misery.

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DAVIS INLET: MOVING FROM MISERY

Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions

1. When questioned by a Canadian journalist about some aspect of apartheid, Pik Botha, then President of South Africa, suggested that the reporter should examine how Canadians have treated their native peoples. In your opinion, is it valid to compare situations such as the relocation of the Innu in 1967 to the policies of apartheid of South Africa?
2. What possible reasons might there have been for moving the Innu in the first place? After reviewing the video, suggest several possible motives or strategies the government might have had for initiating the move.
3. In what ways have the permafrost, the pack ice, and the long, cold, dark days determined how life is organized in the Far North?
4. The Innu have asked retiring cabinet minister Joe Clark to represent the federal government in talks designed to revitalize and relocate their devastated community. Why do you think the Innu leaders have requested the former Prime Minister's help? Even though he has announced his plans to leave politics, why might Joe Clark take on this challenge at this stage in his career?
5. Despite not having running water and adequate sewage disposal, the Davis Inlet community has television, video recorders, and a satellite dish. Consequently, they are very aware of the enormous cultural, social, and economic advantages enjoyed by the majority of North Americans. Young Innu may well know more about modern cultural institutions than their own traditional ones. If you were an educational consultant to the Newfoundland government, what recommendations would you make to help Innu children regain a sense of cultural identity?
6. The situation in Davis Inlet has been called "a national disgrace." Do you agree with this assessment? Justify your answer.