

Inuvialuit News + Culture

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REMEMBERING BILLY DAY

NEW DIRECTION FOR ICS

**NORTHERN
HOCKEY
GETS
COMPETITIVE**



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ICS: SAME GOALS,
New Direction

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{is Inuvialuktun for
"something new to hear about"}

Publisher
Topsy Cockney
Inuvialuit Communications
Society, Executive Director
Editor/Writer/
Creative Dir.
Zoe Ho

Asst. Editor/Writer
Maia Lepage
Photography
Maia Lepage
David Stewart
Design,
Illustration,
Layout & Typography
Zoe Ho
Translation
Leonard Harry

Contributors
Brodie Thomas
Jenn Robins
Justin & Stephanie
Kinney
Pat Dunn
Sub-editing
Seraphina Tan

Printing
Quality Color

ICS Board of Directors
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Foster Arey, Aklavik
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Directors
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A Schooner of memories

Written by Zoe Ho with files from Jenn Robins, Charles Gruben and Elizabeth Pertschy
Photos by Jenn Robins

Angun Charles Gruben remembers a time when “medivacc” was in the form of a schooner. “I got injured as a child of seven in the spring of April 1952. They waited until summer of 1952 when the schooner could take me by river to Aklavik,” he said. “The captain, an Inuvialuk named Captain Bill Thrasher was such a kind man. After about fifteen hours, the schooner arrived in Aklavik with a load of school children from all along the Arctic coast and with me, bound for the hospital.”

Many in Tuktoyaktuk are familiar with this schooner, “Our Lady of Lourdes”, brought up to the Arctic community all the way from California in the late 19th century. She used to be a crucial mode of mass transport for people living in the delta and Tuktoyaktuk, bringing supplies to the communities and families to their destinations. For the past twenty years, the sixty-foot vessel made mostly from thirty-five tons of teak iron bark has been perched on land, acting as a landmark in the hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk.

Older residents fondly remember the schooner’s history. Elizabeth Pertschy, who has since moved to Edmonton, feels the schooner is tied to memories of her father.

“My Dad, Bertram Pokiak, was the person looking after the engine of the schooner, ‘Our Lady of Lourdes’. This was just as important as the pilot of the schooner,” she said.

“The schooner took a lot of children, like myself for school in the early forties.” It also brought the children back home. “Summers were short, but for two months we always enjoyed being at home with our parents,” said Elizabeth.

The now weathered and worn schooner became one of the targets of vandalism in the community. Sister Fay Trombley, a retired nun who has told children in Tuktoyaktuk that she would stay in the north “until all her teeth fall out” started a refurbishing project to give Our Lady of Lourdes some of her dignity back. Elizabeth, Charles and many others in the community rose to the Sister’s call.





"In late August, I was visiting from Edmonton. For a while I was one of the volunteers to paint the schooner, with a lot of children from Tuktoyaktuk and others who wanted to fix the boat," said Elizabeth.

In the three weeks that the project was underway, summer storms rolled in, but the volunteers stuck to their commitment of scraping and painting the Lady of Lourdes. One of the young people who helped said, "I think they felt happy to be making it look brand new. And when it was done they felt joyful."

It also made young people dream about journeys the Lady of Lourdes had been on. A teacher from Mangilaluk school recorded what her students thought about the renewal project.

One said, "It would have been cool if I was a captain on that boat. I could have been a good captain."

Another said, "If I was on that boat I would be a passenger, so I could look around while we are sailing along the arctic. I would be so happy."

Jenn Robins, an artist originally from England was visiting Tuktoyaktuk at the same time. She taught the children how to make prints of the Lady of the Lourdes. "We scraped and painted and made prints, ate bannock and drank hot tea, all at Sister Fay's," said Jenn. "Hopefully, the kids getting involved in getting the boat back in shape will look on the boat as their own as they worked so hard and will take care of her." The community is looking forward to continuing with the schooner's restoration next summer. ✨

