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Tuinnaq Kanayuk Bruce, 1925-2012

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Her gift from the past is her grandmother's stories. I have had the privilege of recording oral-history from dozens of elders across every community of the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot, but none were more enthusiastic participants than Mrs. Bruce — she is also the only elder I know who is so often referred to as, "Mrs. so-and-so." I can't explain it, except to say it must surely be a sign of widespread respect, and to suggest that it is a measure of the extent to which she and Mikitok Bruce were such an indivisible force throughout more than 60 years of marriage.

From that marriage came a gift to the future, evident in the important ways in which their children have contributed to Nunavut.

They all, no doubt, owe their diverse success to the strength of their roots in Coral Harbour, and the values passed on to them by Tuinnaq and Mikitok Bruce. These two understood the importance of Inuit traditional knowledge, not only in the Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit sense as a way of seeing the world, but equally in the value of the old stories as a reflection of where they had come from, in effect the documentation of Inuit history.

Tuinnaq leaves a remarkable collection of documented stories, like a folk musician who leaves a repertoire of ballads. She loved to tell stories; some we heard many times. She took great pleasure in knowing they have all been recorded for posterity. One time, as she finished up a long oral account of events near Ukkusiksalik (Wager Bay), the telling of which

took several hours, she leaned over the recorder, looked me straight in the eyes, and said softly but emphatically: "This is true. I have told you in the same words that my grandmother used." I believe her, for that is how stories from the land have been transmitted through the generations for centuries.

As we celebrate Tuinnaq Kanayuk Bruce's repertoire of stories, like songs from the past, a poem from William Wordsworth says it best:

*Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending; ...
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.* 

David F. Pelly