

Remarks for Van Tat Oral History Book Launch

We, the Vuntut Gwitchin Heritage Committee of Jane Montgomery, Marion Schafer, Robert Bruce and myself, Mary Jane welcome you all here today, to gather and celebrate an important event in the lives of Vuntut Gwitchin. Today we celebrate all the hard work and long hours that has gone into the research and publication of a Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History book called People of the Lakes, Stories of Our Van Tat Elders – Googwandak Nakhwach'ànjòo and Van Tat Gwich'in. The information in this book was gathered up by VGG Heritage department since 1999, and by researchers since the 1970's. We are grateful to all who have assisted and participated in bringing this book to completion.

We are also here today to honor our ancestors and those of our family and friends who have passed on. We honor them and are constantly reminded of them as they have left us with many teachings. Those who have passed on have left us with a huge legacy – a legacy that **will** be passed to future generations. This legacy is one of survival. We are here today because of the resilience, the strength and determination of our ancestors to never let go of their will to live in a harsh land and climate. They adapted themselves well and used the resources of the land and animals to see them through the hard times of long ago. Today, we as their generations are still here, proud and strong, in a time of climate changes.

It is through storytelling that we can see how our ancestors subsisted off of this great land by their own will and determination. They have traveled far and wide across Van Tat Gwitchin Territory. In our own travels on the land with the Heritage Department research projects, we saw the vastness of our country and the great distances that were traveled long ago by dogteam to where there was food availability and good trapping and hunting areas.

We saw the evidence of where our ancestors lived on this land, we saw some of the survival structures that had been made long time ago, like a tsiik'it [rock meat cache dug into a hill side] at Potato Hill [Dinizhoo] old stump cuts and fence poles laying on the ground, partially visible at the Thomas Creek caribou fence. These were made thousands of years ago, made by hand and carried by their own strength, made in the time of our legendary ancestors, one of which was Ch'eeghwalti', who today still has living relatives in this community.

The imprints of our ancestors on this land are still clearly visible today, they are a reminder to us of how strong our people were, how determined they were to make a good basic living for their families on this great untouched land. We each need to respect that and make more visits to the land where our ancestors once walked and once prayed. We need to take our young ones back to the land of our ancestors and teach them the necessary skills of the land so they in turn will be strong role models for the future, so they can take their place in society with great pride as Gwich'in and to continue to share the stories of our people,

to educate the outside world of our uniqueness and our will to survive.

I hope you all will treasure this important book about the history of Van Tat Gwitchin made especially for you all, read the stories to your children, look on the map, find out where some of the place names are located like Diniizhoo, [Potato Hill Zhoh Drin Choo, [White Snow Mtn] Kaachik, [Johnson Creek] and many other places, most importantly – stay connected to the land, for it is your teacher, it is your provider. This book here is an important resource for the future of Vuntut Gwitchin.

A big Mahsi' goes out to two people who we have worked with from the beginning, who have helped us come to this special day in our live's, the launching of a historical book here in Old Crow - Heritage Manager, Megan Williams, our guiding light and mentor and also to a hard working lady, known as "Chopper Lady" especially by our late respected elder Charlie Thomas, Shirleen Smith – we couldn't have done it without your professionalism, your dedication and motivation, we thank you both for your good works. Hai'

Mahsi' Choo Shaagwich'in Kat

Mary Jane Moses
Jan, 2010