

OUR WHOLE GWICH'IN WAY OF LIFE HAS CHANGED: STORIES FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND. GWICH'IN K'YUU GWIIDANDÀI TTHAK EJUK GÒONLIH. By LESLIE MCCARTNEY and GWICH'IN TRIBAL COUNCIL. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2020. ISBN 978-1-77212-482-8. 776 p., maps, b&w illus., appendix, endnotes, index. Hardbound. Cnd\$99.99. Also available in PDF.

Our Whole Gwich'in Way Of Life Has Changed: Stories From The People Of The Land. Gwich'in K'yuu Gwiidandài Tthak Ejuk Gòonlih is "...a gift from the Gwich'in Elders to Future Generations so that they can learn about their heritage and culture through our stories" (dedication). The title, attributed to Elder Therese Remy-Sawyer, speaks to the intention for future generations to find guidance in their Elders' life experiences as they navigate the changing world. The cover photo of a family fish camp, taken by photographer James Jerome, reflects this motivation to pass on Gwich'in culture. Since its publication, *Gwich'in K'yuu Gwiidandài Tthak Ejuk Gòonlih* has received numerous awards and distinctions in recognition of the historical and ethnographic significance of this work.

Gwich'in K'yuu Gwiidandài Tthak Ejuk Gòonlih is an extensive (over 800 pages) compilation of 23 Elders' memories of daily life throughout periods of great change in Gwich'in history. This compendium builds on the catalogue of works by the Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC) and the Gwich'in Department of Cultural Heritage (formerly the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute), inspired by their earlier publication *Jijuu: Who Are My Grandparents? Where Are They From?: Our People, Our Names: A Genealogy/History of Teetl'it Gwich'in in Fort McPherson*. The GTC has always self-published, and the decision to work with the University of Alberta Press for this project was done in the hopes of achieving a wider readership (GwichinNWT, 2021:48:17). Initially conceived as a series of booklets for distribution in Gwich'in schools, the richness and interconnectedness of the Elders' stories led to their publication as a narrative collection.

The book is structured around chapters dedicated to each of the Elders interviewed for the project. The chapters are ordered according to the Elders' birth years and include a photo and quote from the Elder at the beginning of every chapter. The project was guided by questions that the Elders felt were important for the information that could be passed on to the community. Interviews mostly took place in the Elders' homes or fish camps and flowed according to the stories the Elder wished to share during that visit. Each chapter ends with a postscript that briefly describes the Elder's life following their interview. There are generous footnotes throughout, which take care to elaborate on the stories in ways that introduce the reader to the network of relations and places known to these Elders, including short biographies and descriptions of mentioned locations (some with entries in the *Gwich'in Place Names Atlas* (2015), another longstanding project of the Gwich'in Social and

Cultural Institute). The final chapter revisits the Elders' words and reflects on the Gwich'in values demonstrated in each of their stories.

The remaining sections offer background information on the project and supplementary resources for interested readers. In the interest of providing context for readers who are not familiar with the Gwich'in and Gwich'in homelands, there is an introductory chapter that provides a brief overview of Gwich'in communities and correlates specific historical events to the stories that will be shared later. The authors also describe the goals they had for the recording process. A table of information that situates both the lives of the Elders and the context of their interviews is also included, and I often found myself returning to it after having read their stories. For example, the authors note that the Elders often preferred to speak in Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik when talking about the land and in English when describing life in town. Many of the Elders passed away only a year or two after their interviews had taken place. A curated reading list provides further publications on the history of the Gwich'in and resources on recording oral histories. While several of these readings are specific to the Gwich'in, many are generalized to the Dene and Indigenous northerners broadly. However, the authors do acknowledge that this list is not exhaustive. The endnotes and index are both well documented.

The authors have also included a dedicated appendix to describe the transcription and reconstruction processes of recording the Elders' stories. As mentioned in the introduction, the decision was made for McCartney to use an impressionistic style of writing to create a unique narrative 'voice' for each of the Elders. McCartney worked back and forth with the GTC between the original recordings, translations, and transcriptions to ensure that the Elders' words were represented as they'd wanted them. This included considerations of repetitions in stories, chronological versus thematic ordering of events, and pronoun usage. The choice to publish the Elders' stories entirely in English was likely made so that the book would be more accessible to a broader audience, and the authors note that some details of the stories may be misinterpretations in the translation. It would be welcome to see more Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik in a future printing, especially given that many of the Elders are among the last generation to speak their language fluently. The original audio recordings, which McCartney notes capture both the language and rhythms of daily community life (GwichinNWT, 2021:58:24), will be invaluable for future generations of Gwich'in.

As stated in the dedication, *Gwich'in K'yuu Gwiidandài Tthak Ejuk Gòonlih* is first and foremost for Gwich'in and for the families and communities connected to the Elders in this work. I recommend this book for anyone interested in Gwich'in histories, oral history, or the histories of northern and Indigenous peoples. I believe that the book succeeds in achieving the broad appeal that was intended, as it is accessible and compelling for both those familiar with or

learning about the history of the Gwich'in. Students and experienced researchers alike can gain insights into the commitments of long-term relationships with community supported projects. \$99.00 is a modest price for a publication of this magnitude, for the depth of interviews, and years of editing that went into it. The hardcover copy is now out of print, however, the second edition was recently released in softcover for \$88.99. Nevertheless, this is not an affordable cost for some, which is why it would be an excellent publication for libraries and other book lending institutions to have, and I encourage interested readers to make requests for borrowable copies (and for libraries to pre-emptively meet the demand).

The 20+ years it took to publish *Our Whole Gwich'in Way Of Life Has Changed: Stories From The People Of The Land. Gwich'in K'yuu Gwiidandài Tthak Ejuk Gòonlih* demonstrates the importance of community relationships and support. This book is the result of the Elders, their family members, and extended communities involved in the processes of editing, finding photos, helping with translations, and adding information after Elders had passed away. Care for the Elders' stories is present throughout the text, and it is evident that the Elders trusted the intentions

of this work in sharing their life's experiences. Values of love, respect, and hard work are throughout all the stories, and they are a gift that the Gwich'in Elders have shared with the world.

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