

Interview with Mona Igutsaq

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Subsequent e-mails on July 29 and July 30 for clarifications.

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AB: Can you tell us about yourself: what is your position?

MI: I am General Manager of Taluq Designs.

AB: How long have you worked for Taluq Designs?

MI: I started in 1992. Taluq Designs was established in 1995.

AB: Did you start before the company was established?

MI: Yes.

AB: If Taluq Designs Ltd. was not established until 1995, what was your role between 1992 and 1995?

MI: Production Manager. When we started off in 1992 there was no Taluq Designs, we were just having workshops. We were just called Nesilik Argnakvik.

AB: Did you also work for Taloyoak Crafts in the 1970s?

MI: Yes.

AB: Did you work for Taloyoak Crafts Ltd. through the whole period (1974 to 1986)? Were you a seamstress and a manager too?

MI: I worked for them as admin, Sec, until '78 for them.

AB: If you have sewn dolls, how did you get started?

MI: I sew, do administrative work, and design. I started sewing when I was in school. I first went to school in Inuvik in 1959. I was in a residential school and learned to sew in my Home Economic class.

AB: What kind of things have you sewn in your life and what do you prefer making?

MI: The first thing that I learned to sew was in Inuvik, where they did mostly beading. The first thing I learned to do was bead and knit, after that, I started getting into clothing, cutting and sewing.

AB: Can you give us a brief history of how Taloyoak Crafts Ltd. started and who was involved?

MI: Taloyoak Crafts was started in 1974 and stopped in 1986. Taluq Designs started in 1992. Between in 1986 and 1992 the women had nothing to do. It had a negative impact on the women. We opened Taluq Designs and brought in people to start new stuff. We've moved from place to place, to different buildings, and sometimes things got moved around. In 1995, this place was built in December for Taluq Designs, and then we didn't have to pack our stuff and had a permanent location.

AB: What inspired the original designers to create packing dolls in the first place?

MI: I was there when the packing dolls were invented. I was there in 1974, when we started the packing dolls. I knew all the ladies.

AB: How many people were involved?

MI: There must have been about 10 to 15 ladies. At that time the Government had lots of money so we had lots of women. One day, we were having a coffee break and we were laughing: how would a packing animal look with a baby on its back in a parka? We finally got all the ladies to [agree to it] and Peeteekootee was there, and she came back the next day and that's where the packing doll started from.

AB: Did the ladies agree to it but only Peeteekootee made it?

MI: Yes.

AB: I read that her first doll was a raven: is that correct?

MI: Her first doll was a fish. It was our idea and we told her to try it and sew it and she designed it. We have these packing dolls, some of them are from way back in 1974. We didn't go with the fish, it couldn't stand up. She [Peeteekootee] did nine designs: packing Sedna, packing walrus, packing beluga whale, packing bear (in 1992), packing seal, packing owl, packing raven, packing rabbit and thunder woman. She did those and I did packing muskox, packing Inukshuk, packing loon, packing dog, packing fox, packing Ptarmigan.

AB: Are they all sewn at the Taluq Designs headquarter?

MI: We designed what to put on the trims, everything. We cut them up here in this place. We package them then give them [the home seamstresses] all the threads, embroidery yarn and show them what to use: what colors to use, what design, ... Then they take them home, sew them and bring them back.

AB: How long does it take to make a doll?

MI: It depends which lady does the doll. Each is different.

AB: Thunder woman and Sedna must take the longest time?

MI: With thunder woman and Sedna you have to do the face. I think those are the ones that take the longest.

AB: How did the company get organized?

MI: We partnered with North West Territory Development Corporation so that they would supply us with the material. North West Territory Development Corporation was 51% owners and cooperative ladies were 49% owners. In the later years we had Nunavut Development Corporation because we are in Nunavut. They are 51% owners. The cooperative ladies call themselves "Netsilik Argnakvik Society" and they are 49% owners. Taluq Designs is a combination of Netsilik Argnakvik Society (has 49%) and Nunavut Development Corporation (has 51%).

AB: Why was it started in Taloyoak?

MI: Because in 1974-86 we knew that those ladies were really skilled. They have first quality stitches and we know how well they could do their jobs: so that's how we really wanted to get this started. So that's how we got started in 1992. We knew we could make it work again, different name, different partner, not with those old Government [agencies]: new people. We knew we could make it work, because the ladies are first quality.

AB: What did the other women have a background in?

MI: The ladies didn't go to school because they did their clothing beautifully and we knew they could do well.

AB: What role did Peeteekootee Ugyuk play in Taloyoak Crafts' development?

MI: Because she designed these 9 packing animals, she worked until she passed away. Because she was with us in the 1970s too and even later, here was a lady we could count on. If we wanted something done, she would come up with a packing animal.

AB: When did she pass away?

MI: 1999 or 2000.

AB: How many styles of dolls are now in production

MI: We produce 15 now.

AB: The Arctic Nunavut Online Shop Web site (<http://www.arcticnunavut.ca/index.php>) only shows 12 dolls. Are you not producing the packing beluga whale, packing dog, or packing fox anymore?

MI: We still are when there are orders for them.

AB: Do you have any plans for new designs?

MI: Each time I think of something to design for a new packing animal, I have high hopes. I'm like Oh! ...When everyone was wanting Inukshuks for Vancouver, [like] carving Inukshuks [listing different Inukshuks for sale]... I had such high hopes for the [packing doll] Inukshuk. When it doesn't really work out the way you hoped it would, you ask yourself "Is it really worth it to try another one again?" So you come up with another [design]. Instead of a packing animal, you think of something else.

AB: There are stories associated with Nualiyuk/Sedna and Thunder Woman. Are there other dolls with stories associated with them?

MI: All of these animals have stories in the past. In the legends there are always the stories about one of these animals. There are stories behind every animal.

AB: Could you tell me what Thunderwoman is called in Netsilik Inuktitut?

MI: Kadluk.

AB: Is Nualiyuk/Sedna's tail a bird's or a fish's?

MI: It's a whale's tail. [It represents when] Sedna is turning into a whale. She was on the land, her son tied a rope around her waist and used her as a float and when he harpooned the whale passing by, he tied a rope around her waist because he wasn't treated well by her. So when he could see again, he first asked his sister "Do you mind if I use our mom as a float?" The sister didn't mind, then he asked his mother and he tied a rope around her waist and when he harpooned the whale. The whale was going in and out and Sedna was dragged by the whale and she was making the sound of a whale and she turned into a whale because she was in the water so long. So that is her tail.

AB: Is there a particular significance for some of the dolls wearing mother hubbard parkas compared to the more traditional *amauti*?

MI: We have parkas for all packing animals. We 'pack' our babies up here because it's so cold. To have a baby out in the cold here it would freeze. So that's where the packing parka came from. The mother hubbard can be used for packing too, but it must be much bigger. The packing parka has room for the mother and the baby and the hood is for both the mother and the baby. And it keeps you warm that way. The pouch is in the back, the hood is not where you put the baby. A lot of people down south think that you put your baby in the hood. You'd choke! The baby does not go in the hood! Not in the hood but in the back of the parka! Down south they are like little children when you are trying to explain this, they don't understand! The baby doesn't go in the hood! The hood is for both the mother and the baby.

AB: Both our mermaid and beige owl with Mother Hubbards have the original tag still attached certifying by the Canadian Government that 'this article was made by a Canadian Eskimo'. Would people making these dolls at home have that kind of tag?

MI: I think they were bought by Northern Images Yellowknife right from the people. I think they were using the patterns in the years between 1986 1992? Seems like some ladies copied the patterns [from Taloyaok Crafts Ltd.] at home and sold them to other people, and tried putting different parkas on them, because there are some in mother hubbards and we've never did them in mother hubbards before.

AB: How many people are making the packing dolls today?

MI: Right now we have about 10 women at home. We do the cutting and packaging in here [Taluq Designs]. We package yarns and thread and stuffing. Two people do the cutting. We have a cutter like a die that cuts them. That's pretty easy. Sewing them is a lot harder.

AB: Are any men making them?

MI: No..... The men mostly do their carvings.

AB: How does a person become involved with Taluq Designs? Are they interviewed?

MI: Everyone knows everybody in this community. So if someone says something, everybody knows about it! You don't even have to go out. We are a close family, sharing food...

You can walk in into Taluq Designs: we know everyone even the last little child that was born. If someone wants a job, we'll know it.

AB: Are there children interested in sewing?

MI: We had a workshop when Peeteekootee was alive. In the evenings so there are some young people that know how to do these.

AB: Do they have to produce a certain number of walking bears first?

MI: We know every skill and every lady in town. We've seen their sewing and we talk to them. We know everybody.

AB: How has Taluq Designs impacted the lives of its members and the economy of Taloyoak?

MI: There's a lack of jobs in this community and we really wanted something for the ladies. Men have carving. For unemployment it really helps the community. So we really need this place. There are summer jobs—seasonal jobs. But in the winter time they are completely gone. We need this business to keep going. Taluq Designs really helps people with jobs. We buy carvings from the men. It has been very positive for this community.

AB: Are there other similar cooperatives making other types of products in Taloyoak?

MI: Because we are partners with Nunavut Development Corporation, we have sister companies elsewhere. Other partners don't do packing dolls, their specialty is sealskin parkas and coats. Another sister companies do weaving and painting and printing. Another, fish meat and stuff like that. There are other companies that are working with Nunavut Development Corporation. Look on the Web page. There's not too many cooperatives with Nunavut Development Corporation, but it helps. I am so happy that there is Nunavut Development Corporation, because they help with people in these communities, for uneducated people [too]. Today they only want educated people. But for this place you only have to know how to sew, you don't need an education.

AB: Can we put a link up of your company to our website?

MI: It would really help us, because here there are lots of dropouts and elders and lack of jobs, there's nothing going on in the winter time and it would really help us!

AB: Thank you!

For information on Taluq Designs, visit their Web site at
http://www.ndcorp.nu.ca/ndc/subs_artsandcrafts/taluq/