

Simon Anaviapik (1913[1915?]-1992)

Simon Anaviapik lived in Pond Inlet on Baffin Island, Northwest Territories. A description of Anaviapik's personality does not fit into any of the accepted levels of recognition for an individual. There is no list of accomplishments and there are no citations of his works, his words or phrases. He wrote some stories from his life for those who did not know him, his people or his land. He was of very slight stature and had small, soft hands that firmly and warmly shook your hand. His beaming eyes were alert and penetrating, showing experience in probing the unknown and revealing his great understanding of people.

His speech was clear and well pronounced and he knew his native language, Inuktitut, second to none of his contemporaries. Most valuable of all was his ability to explain fully all of its nuances. He often sadly remarked on the gradual deterioration of Inuktitut. He spoke no English, but we observed that he understood the language quite well without any help or translators.

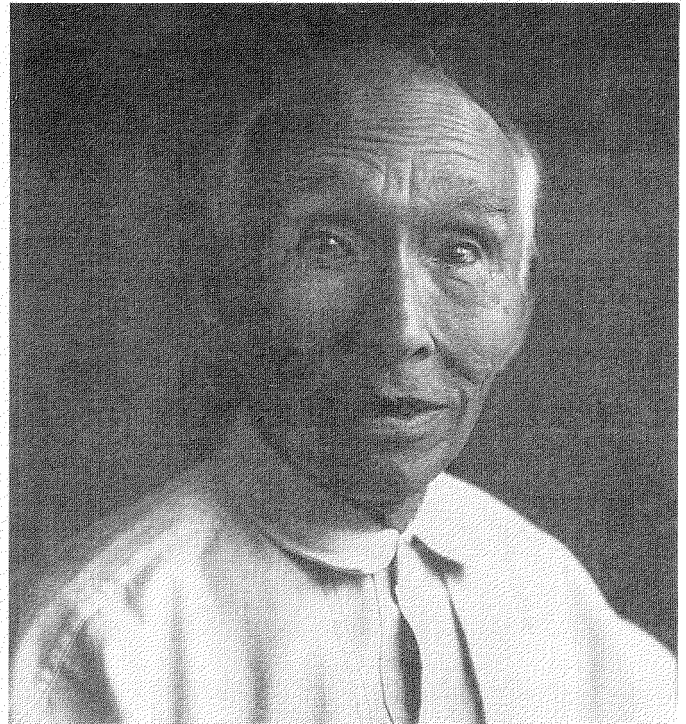
Anaviapik was to us living proof of the universality of intellect and related thought processes residing in healthy humans of all races, not only in an abstract sense, but also in an applied sense. He had never heard of or read the philosopher Kant, yet when expressing his thoughts in a discussion he invariably exercised, in his own way, this great philosopher's method of first categorizing in detail the subject to be discussed, followed by the steps of analysis, synthesis and composition and arriving at a conclusion with an uncanny precision of relevancy, applicability and timeliness.

Anaviapik's faith, as he explained, was based on looking out and around, like sitting deep in the center of the earth and looking into the universe, taking in the stars and comets and everything in between. He explained that his parents taught him to feel and think that way to enable him to understand, expect and accept the ever-changing impressions, perceptions, images and facts of life. Anaviapik explained that in his personal life he went through valleys of sadness and unhappiness in his quest for new experiences and each time succeeded in finding the balance with his own faith and concept of life.

Anaviapik showed no political or missionary zeal for convincing others in discussions that what he was saying or recommending was the right approach. He preferred to live his belief and his faith and never hesitated to talk about it for others to hear and see why he tried to be always content and most of the time happy. When there were circumstances causing sadness he was like a rock on which one could hang emotions and turmoil and end up feeling relieved and balanced. His explanations and expressions of his faith and belief we experienced as being those of a good neighbor in every sense and application.

From 1972 to 1986 we had at least five or more teaching and discussion sessions per week in our house in Pond Inlet, to which must be added the discussions Anaviapik had with the native technicians at the Arctic Research Establishment laboratory or in their residences, as well as the daily talks on the local radio. It is noteworthy that we found his ability to respond or to engage in any discussion fully developed when we first met in 1972.

He taught one of us, Sophie Steltner, how to write and read Syllabics and tried with great patience to improve the way Sophie was communicating in Inuktitut. When he visited he always brought with him pamphlets and other readings explaining Inuit culture and heritage and he spent a lot of time



Simon Anaviapik, summer 1990. Photo by Luigi D'Giorgi.

with us. He did not rest until he was satisfied that we really understood. Several times we showed him articles that had appeared in print where we thought that the authors could benefit from Anaviapik's personal knowledge. As a result, Anaviapik wrote several stories that were ultimately published.

Anaviapik was the key motivator for local Inuit to participate in a multidisciplinary, international scientific research project known as the EOS Routing Study, conceived and coordinated by Hermann Steltner in 1971. The participating senior European scientists mentioned Anaviapik in the text of subsequent journal publications, together with Anatiak and Kyak, also elders from Pond Inlet participating in this study.

Seventeen Inuit from Pond Inlet assisted with the Routing Study, together with researchers from Brock University, Canada, and several European institutions. At the end of that study Anaviapik succeeded in convincing us to continue with engaging Inuit in science-supporting data collection, measurements and observations. This led to our founding of the Arctic Research Establishment (ARE) in Pond Inlet in 1973.

Anaviapik continually voiced a desire to have more time to contemplate the world and was always sidetracked by recognizing the changes around him, in the family, with the neighbors and in the community. His concern was the continuous effort by the territorial government to fragment the social fabric to satisfy bureaucratic plans, which entailed an explosive increase in hiring non-native civil service personnel. His concern was the apparent helplessness and inability of "his" people to do anything about it and the resulting resignation of many of the people to a fate of utter dependency on bureaucrats and officials.

As a man deeply aware of and concerned with the continued mental welfare and independence of his people, Anaviapik realized that there must be a way of bridging the gap between the two cultures, which he felt were kept intentionally apart by the rules of the territorial civil servants and their politicians. Anaviapik provided continuous encouragement and help against many odds; he motivated active participation of younger Inuit when we had jointly convinced federal authorities in 1973 to set up a Surface Weather Station in Pond Inlet to be staffed by local Inuit trained in Pond Inlet. The station was realized in 1974 and today is still operating and carrying the code YIO. Anaviapik was active in the design and construction of the weather station and of the first section of the sea-ice and oceanographic laboratory of the ARE, as well as in the building of our house.

In 1973 Anaviapik had motivated Steven Koonark to feel responsible for the punctuality of the crew engaged, and thereafter Koonark became the mainstay of the Arctic Research Establishment and was, by example, a successful motivator for younger Inuit. (Steven Koonark died on 5 October 1992.) A big help was the fact that Anaviapik was great-grandfather, grandfather, father, uncle, cousin and otherwise related to many families with young sons and daughters. Anaviapik's experience and advice in observing natural phenomena peculiar to the High Arctic has led to valuable data contributions towards sea-ice research.

Anaviapik assisted and provided for the involvement of the Inuit in scientific efforts in Pond Inlet and elsewhere on Baffin Island. As a result of his concern for the culture of his people, he was still active after 1979 in teaching and lecturing in the Day School on the cultural heritage of his ancestors, as well as participating in numerous Inummariit programs.

All his adult life, Anaviapik helped and advised researchers, scientists and documentary film makers in correctly projecting indigenous life styles, as well as cultural and social aspects of the people. For being a leader of his people, Simon Anaviapik received, on 6 June 1980, the degree of LLD *honoris causa*



Simon Anaviapik (left) and Steven Koonark (right) with commissioner's awards presented in October 1986 by John Parker (center), commissioner of the N.W.T.

from Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. Anaviapik also received other recognitions. For instance, on 17 October 1986 he and Koonark received an award for public service from the commissioner of the Northwest Territories for their long years of work with the Arctic Research Establishment in Pond Inlet.

The ARE, a non-profit, charitable corporation, is now wholly owned and operated by Inuit of Pond Inlet. It is unique in the evolution and development concept for Canada's North and a realization of one of Anaviapik's favored dreams.

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