

Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters

a contribution from the Mi'kmaw Nation to the Aboriginal component within Canadian celebrations of International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009)

an overview of:

How the Elders and the Youth Recorded the Story and Passed on the Knowledge

by:

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In December 2007, as part of helping me to energize Cape Breton University's efforts to promote and develop a national Aboriginal component within Canadian IYA2009 celebrations, Dr. Jim Hesser (Canadian Chair, IYA2009, and Director, Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics, National Research Council of Canada, Victoria, BC) visited Cape Breton and met formally and informally with many key Elders from Mi'kmaw communities in Cape Breton (Unama'ki), NS. This included presenting before the Unama'ki Council of Elders in a formal meeting hosted by the Unama'ki Institute for Natural Resources (an umbrella group that works on behalf of all five Mi'kmaw communities in Cape Breton). And, it also involved a second presentation for a subset of Elders as part of a supper-time gathering in Membertou First Nation organized by me (as Canada Research Chair in Integrative Science at Cape Breton University) in conjunction with Mr. Lindsay Marshall of the Mi'kmaq College Institute of Cape Breton University. In the context of these two meetings, the Elders gave their approval and endorsement for the Integrative Science research team at Cape Breton University to proceed, i.e. to move forward with the idea to highlight a Mi'kmaw night sky story as a contribution to IYA2009 celebrations in Canada.

Further informal discussions were held among Integrative Science personnel (from Cape Breton University) and key Elders after Jim departed, and the outcome of such was the decision to focus on the story "Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters". This decision was based on at least two important factors:

1. Elder Lillian Marshall from the Mi'kmaw community of Potlotek (Chapel Island) in Cape Breton had been working for over 20 years to revitalize the story, and especially to come to understand its role in determining the timing of the Mi'kmaw Mid-Winter Feast. This Feast (which is celebrated shortly after the first new moon of Punamujuiku's (January)) is a thanksgiving to all spirits, especially to the Great Spirit, for the blessings of life, health, and sustenance and the privileges of community life. It is a traditional Mi'kmaw ceremony of deep significance as it marks the end of the old year and beginning of the new. Lillian's work was responsible for renewing and reviving this traditional ceremony in her home community ...

an achievement reached over 20 years ago. Celebrations today are not as elaborate as those of the ancestors but people in Potlotek are, to this day, the only Mi'kmaq that celebrate this most important traditional ceremony of the year. In the meantime (i.e. as the years moved on) Lillian was still working with great love and dedication to determine how the story of Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters was the oral calendar that determined the timing for the Feast and also which stars were which Birds, and which Birds by their Mi'kmaw names were which Birds by their English names, etc. After Jim's visit, Integrative Science personnel from Cape Breton University became more aware of Lillian's efforts and then also became intimately engaged in efforts to help her.

2. The Mi'kmaw night sky story of Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters was actually published in the American Journal of Folklore in 1900 by Stansbury Hagar (this is indicated in the video). Via this written source, Integrative Science personnel from Cape Breton University were able to help Lillian confirm which stars (by their Arabic names) were which Birds by their Mi'kmaw names, and which Birds by their Mi'kmaw names were which Birds by their English names, and where these stars were in the night sky, and at what time of night the story would have to have been told for it to be the oral calendar and why, etc. A lot of this cross-cultural science work was done by Sana Kavanagh who is a Research Associate within Integrative Science (and who is also pursuing a Master of Environmental Studies degree, but on another topic entirely, namely "eel knowledge and eel fishing in Mi'kmaw communities").

Sana is, moreover, an extremely talented artist and she therefore also worked with great love and dedication to create beautiful visuals to accompany the story of Muin and the Seven Birds. Sana was assisted in this regard by Kristy Read who is the Graphic Design artist for Integrative Science.

Throughout the time when Lillian and Integrative Science personnel were working together in this way, another Mi'kmaw Elder also became intimately involved, namely Elder Murdena Marshall from the Mi'kmaw community of Eskasoni (also in Cape Breton). Murdena is an expert in traditional Mi'kmaw culture including language, spirituality, education and science; in this regard, she has long had an interest in Mi'kmaw astronomical understandings. Her guidance and assistance were invaluable as the working group moved the written story of Muin into the illustrated, animated, audio video that it now is. Murdena's input also helped Lillian to validate and authenticate the Mi'kmaw understandings in the story.

Thus, the final product (Muin video in three languages) as we now have it is truly a collective effort on the part of Lillian, Murdena, and Sana ... plus Kristy ... PLUS other Integrative Science personnel (namely Cheryl Bartlett and especially Prune Harris), other Cape Breton University personnel (namely Chris Reid and

especially Lisa Patterson), and other key IYA people in Canada (especially astronomers Andy Woodsworth and Jim Hesser). Collectively we took the preliminary early idea to highlight a Mi'kmaw night sky story and we moved it into its final artistic, narrative, multi-lingual, scientific, and technical (audio, visual, video) state (see credits at the end of the video).

PLUS, the voices that provide the audio for the final product draw in additional people, as per the credits at the end of the video. In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention one person in particular, namely Annabelle Welsh, who did the French audio. Annabelle is a Grade 12 student at the French school (Étoile de l'Acadie) in Sydney. Prune Harris (an Integrative Science team member from Cape Breton University) asked the school's Principal if there might be an interest in the school working with the French audio taping of Muin. The Principal immediately suggested Annabelle as she is Mi'kmaq. Annabelle has grown up not speaking Mi'kmaq at home and she is the first student at Étoile de l'Acadie to be taking an online Mi'kmaw language course for credit towards her graduation. After it was all over, she indicated how excited she was to have been involved in the project and that she felt she had learned a great deal about her cultural heritage in working with Muin.

In this context of the Mi'kmaw language and cultural knowledge, it's wonderful to understand the input of Elders Lillian and Murdena and that of the young person, Annabelle. As a whole, it illustrates that without the knowledge and dedication of the Elders there are none to remember and tell the stories, and without the participation of the young there are none to hear the stories and their teachings. Together the Elders and the younger generation create the ability to continue the rich legacy of Indigenous knowledge.

Finally, I wish to add the words of Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall ... from Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki – Cape Breton, who is the husband of Murdena and who is also the voice of the Mi'kmaw Medicine Man in the Muin video, and with whom I have worked closely for 15+ years:

***Knowledge is Spirit.
It is a Gift passed on through many people.
We must pass it on.***

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(participants in development of presentation)

Overall Presentation Development

- Sana Kavanagh, Research Associate, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University

Mi'kmaw Knowledge

- Lillian Marshall, Elder, Potlotek (Chapel Island) First Nation, NS
- Murdena Marshall, Elder, Eskasoni First Nation, NS

Integrative Science

- Cheryl Bartlett, Canada Research Chair in Integrative Science, Cape Breton University
- Annamarie Hatcher, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University

Astronomy

- James Hesser, Director, Dominion Astrophysical Observatory and Canadian Chair, International Year of Astronomy 2009, NRC Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics, Victoria, National Research Council Canada
- Andrew Woodsworth, International Year of Astronomy 2009 - Canadian Steering Committee; Galaxy Consulting, Victoria; and Astronomer (retired), National Research Council of Canada
- Carina Software (SkyGazer 4); <http://www.carinasoft.com/>
- Gemini Observatory (circumpolar stars over Gemini North)

Ornithology

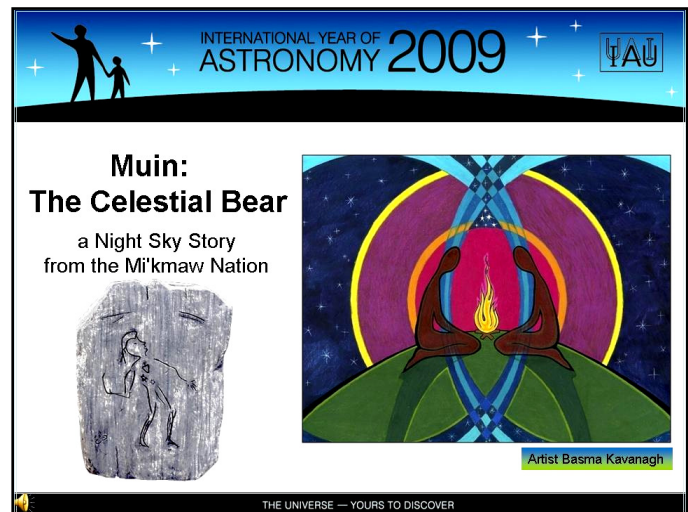
- David McCorquodale, Professor of Biology, Cape Breton University

Narrative Script

- Prune Harris, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University

Translations

- Lillian Marshall (Mi'kmaw), Elder, Potlotek (Chapel Island) First Nation, NS
- Kim Doney (French), France (visitor to Canada, Fall 2008)



Artwork

- Gerald Gloade, artist, Millbrook First Nation, NS
- Basma Kavanagh, artist, Westmount, NS
- Sana Kavanagh, artist and Research Associate, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University

Graphic Design

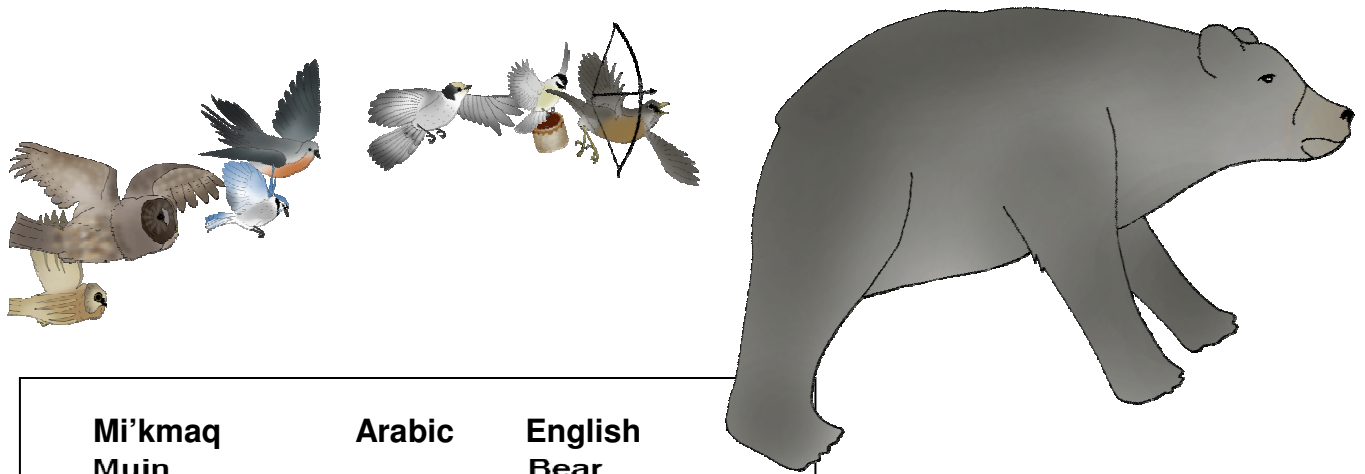
- Kristy Read, Institute for Integrative Science & Health, Cape Breton University

Audio

- Lillian Marshall (Mi'kmaw story), Elder, Potlotek (Chapel Island) First Nation, NS
- Albert Marshall (Mi'kmaw man), Elder, Eskasoni First Nation, NS
- Murdena Marshall (English story), Elder, Eskasoni First Nation, NS
- Rod Beresford (English man), Assistant Professor, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University
- Sana Kavanagh (English other), Research Associate, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University
- Annabelle Welsh (French), Grade 12 Student, Étoile de l'Acadie (French Immersion School, Sydney), Membertou First Nation, NS
- Collin Harker (French man), Sydney, NS

Audio Technical

- Lisa Patterson, Cape Breton University
- Chris Reid, Cape Breton University
- Prune Harris, Integrative Science, Cape Breton University



Mi'kmaq	Arabic	English
Muin		Bear
Ntuksuinu'k		The Hunters
Jipjawej	<i>Alioth</i>	Robin
Jiji'kes	<i>Mizar</i>	Chickadee
• Wow	• <i>Alcor</i>	• Pot
Mikjaqoqwej	<i>Alkaid</i>	Grey Jay
Ples	<i>Seginus</i>	Passenger Pigeon
Tities	<i>Izar</i>	Blue Jay
Ku ku kwes	<i>Arcturus</i>	Barred Owl
Kupkwe'j	<i>Mufrid</i>	Saw-whet Owl