

## PRESENTATION TO THE EARP PANEL for the LOWER CHURCHILL HYDRO PROJECT

Good morning. My name is Susan Felsberg, and I am a first generation Labradorian. I arrived here from Overseas over 50 years ago, to serve the immediate health needs of this pioneer community as a nurse and midwife. I remained here to contribute in elected leadership, and social development, expanding my parameters eventually to include the whole Labrador region. I have lived for 40 years of that time in Mud Lake, and am very familiar with the lower stretches of the Grand-Hamilton-Churchill River. My husband was a skilled artisan, a College instructor, and established a unique enterprise as a metalsmith, while I became a hospital board trustee, an archives volunteer, and an amateur historian and geographer of Labrador. Today I still retain a homestead and an acreage in Mud Lake.

The Panel has heard of the memories and passions of the oldtimers on the river; and now I am a voice from the comparative newcomers, who love this land, call it home, and have paid our dues to do so. You, the Panel, will be well aware that to express one's opinion over a major controversial project in the adjacent polarised population requires courage and conviction on either side of the fence. We have done this time and time and time again, with the military Low-level Flying Environmental Assessment, with uranium mining potential, with health administration, with Parks Canada's arrogance and much else. By and large, Project supporters and critics alike in this town remain good neighbours, but the positions are clearly identified among us, and one lives with the aftermath. I choose to speak with equal courage from yet another position: one of equivocation about this Project, as follows:

Firstly, I have lived and survived on this river daily and weekly, thanks to the river knowledge, good equipment, boat and snowmobile skills usually belonging - though not entirely - to people other than myself. When one lives in sheltered Mud Lake, needing a commute across the river for reasons of employment, grocery supplies, health services or politico-cultural commitments, and the wind is blowing hard, one knows by its direction (especially from the East), plus the sway of the trees, and the distant noise, how the river is behaving, and whether it is navigable. There are people, believe it or not, particularly in the upper reaches of this town, who are quite unaware of the river, and hardly know that it exists, even for their own pollution purposes. Not so, if one lives in Mud Lake. One lives with, and on, and around, the river.

Many years ago, I wrote *"...the river is magnificent, gains one's abiding respect, is ever changeable, and has to be seen and experienced in an autumn gale of ocean proportions, in a solid white mass of swirling snow when visibility is reduced to six inches, in the icy stillness of midwinter, and in the glassy calm of a moonlit summer night. It is under such circumstances that one earns one's place in a country, and in return one feels that a very small piece belongs in one's heart."*

But through the years we Mud Lakers have all watched and struggled with the changes manifest in the lower river that developed after the adulteration from the Upper Churchill: the bank erosions, the shifting sands, the seasonally controlled, reduced water levels, and the solid expanding sandbars spread far and wide - all obstacles for the regular commuter. We have

experienced excess water poured on top of the spring ice during controlled releases upstream, which endangered life and limb. The downstream impacts were not considered in the 1980 EIS. I respectfully suggest that mitigation is a futile exercise after major damage has been done. It was significant on the third day of these Hearings, to hear Transport Canada declare its mandate towards navigability in recognized bodies of water, and then admit that they have not, and do not, patrol or monitor this stretch of water on a regular basis. Their concerns apparently are exercised for a 30day period related only to a Project launch, and to educated sophisticated public intervention, and thereafter to be shelved.

Along with the beauty and perfection of untouched Muskrat Falls and Gull Island, all of the above explains the practical and aesthetic reasons why I am deeply concerned about this Project. As an aside, if it appears to be hypocritical for anyone receiving Hydro services in a tiny community to be critical of such beneficence, let me explain that when the Upper Churchill was developed, firstly all the power was exported westwards, and then a few years later a fraction was brought eastwards to serve the Upper Lake Melville district. But Mud Lake remained on diesel generation, as the river crossing was deemed too expensive and technically challenging for the hydro alternative. Although the village lobbied vigorously for over ten years, including a cost-benefit analysis for the most labour-intensive diesel plant in the province (the oil supply being hand-pumped into lifeboat drums and towed by speed boat, with no oil tanker being feasible as for coastal plants elsewhere), we were dismissed as unreasonable for a mere population of sixty. Until a new Hydro Chairman arrived on the scene, took a look at the diesel servicing costs across the whole province, realised that Mud Lake was by far the most expensive of all, ordered an experimental submarine cable across the river over the winter months which proved stable and successful, and so the diesel was magically replaced by Hydro. While Mud Lakers appreciate the reduced costs and the convenience and reliability of Hydro services, we would contend that we have paid our price, with the changes made to the river that continue to constantly challenge us.

However, the other side of this equivocation coin for me is the economic future of this region. This Upper Lake Melville society is presently stabilized, after years of fluctuation, by a few factors: its considerable development now as a regional Government and commercial service centre, bolstered by an extraordinarily neglected but superb airport, and also by increasing aboriginal investments and partnerships. We have watched various industrial endeavours wax and wane: military activities of mixed origins, logging, the early tourism efforts, fly-in fish camps, even a new National Park nearby. But I have three grandsons growing up here, and there are hundreds of children in the local schools. This is their home, and their futures must be addressed. At the same time, I am also clearly aware of pro-development voices in this town - of which the Panel should be cognisant - who do not support this Project unconditionally, but who qualify their endorsement with the caveat that this cannot be yet one more colonial, resource extraction exercise. Labrador must gain substantially from this so-called 'development': not with short-term jobs, not with extra training which ultimately takes people to success elsewhere, not with perpetually restrictive remote diesel plants, but with all-inclusive opportunities for our part of the Province. In this day and age to perform otherwise is virtually

immoral: a strong word, but one that I use advisedly. It is immoral, in 2011, to be taking, taking, taking, largely for southern benefit, and without local return. And finally, I express this concern for balanced treatment as Progress moves onwards, because I sense a certain political inevitability around the Lower Churchill Project.

Hence I express my equivocation for the Project, which I suspect also represents the voices of many others in this population. Years ago I confronted a vigorous critic of our lively military industry, who was visiting this community. He wondered rhetorically, after a frustrating discussion, who would win, and who would lose, ten years hence, if that industry went ahead? My prompt answer to him was: Everyone. We would all win in economic success, employment, expansion and Allied rapport, and we would all lose in the disappearance of our rural innocence and untouched territory, and with added noise, stress, social turmoil, and other side-effects. The Panel can only listen, study and recommend to both Governments, but we look to you for a quality of input that brings careful judgment and rationality to the advice for the final decisions around this Project.

I would like to thank you and your Secretariat for this opportunity to speak in generalities in your closing days of the Labrador Hearings, and for the efficiency and reliability with which this Assessment is being performed.

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Thank you for listening.

Susan Felsberg, April 2 2011