

*In Memoriam*

## BQCMB founder a true visionary

The BQCMB lost a true friend and mentor on April 8, 2016 when Gunther Abrahamson passed away in his home in Ottawa. Abrahamson played a leading role in the establishment of the BQCMB in 1982 and was the co-management board's secretary-treasurer for over 20 years. During that time, he worked diligently to make the board a meaningful forum and force for caribou conservation.

Abrahamson played varied roles in Canada's north since the 1950s. In an article written by long-time friend Jim Bell for the Nunatsiq News, Bell describes him as "a quiet, dignified introvert who sought no praise or recognition and it was in that spirit that he influenced the cultural and economic development of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut from the early 1950s until his death."

Born in Berlin in 1926, at the age of 12 Abrahamson escaped the Holocaust when his mother sent him to England. He was later sent to a children's home in Scotland and, after the war, attended Edinburgh University. Following graduation he left for Canada and landed in Yellowknife, where his love affair with the north began. He worked for a mining company before taking a job with the Canadian government

managing a herd of 10,000 reindeer at the now abandoned community of Reindeer Station (just north of what is now Inuvik). He spent the next 50 years working for the federal government in various capacities.

Former BQCMB writer and editor Marion Soublière was a long-time friend and colleague of Abrahamson. Of all the projects that Abrahamson worked on, it was the BQCMB that he was most proud of, she said. "He often said that the BQCMB's biggest accomplishment was establishing communication across various groups. At the end of the day, he would say of board members, we are all friends."

The BQCMB was the first wildlife co-management board to bring Indigenous people together with scientists and officials from two provinces and the territories. It was Abrahamson who pioneered the concept, says another close friend, environmental consultant and professor Peter Usher, who knew Abrahamson since 1961. "I think Gunther was really instrumental in getting that board established," Usher said.

"He was one of my key mentors. I loved the man dearly, actually. It's a big loss," said Usher.

Abrahamson's successor on the BQCMB, Executive Director Ross Thompson, also considered Abrahamson a mentor, and called him a true visionary for the BQCMB since it was established. "He was a shining example for us to follow," said Thompson.

BQCMB member Tim Trottier was one of the original BQCMB members who worked with Abrahamson from the Board's inception. "Gunther was very dedicated to the BQCMB and he projected an attitude of confidence that he could help the board to function well," says Trottier. "He was obviously highly regarded by senior government officials as there were a number of occasions when he was able to use his influence to save the board. He was direct in his comments and responses to people, was an excellent writer and had the ability to summarize long discussions into the most salient points. But I will never forget a brief Christmas message to me after a long-standing disagreement between us in which he acknowledged some good in me. That reminded me of my first impression of Gunther – one of the founding members of the BQCMB – as an elder, a man of great stature."

In that spirit, the Board voted unanimously, at its spring 2016 meeting, to change its award to the Gunther Abrahamson Caribou Research and Management Award (see sidebar).

It's a fitting tribute to a man who meant so much to so many, like Soublière. "To revel in his companionship was to be transported into little-known times and developments in Canada's North," she said. "But more than anything, Gunther was a kind man who thought of others first and was modest to a fault."

"I will miss Gunther and his friendship enormously. I'll carry his voice with me always." •



Photo by Marion Soublière