

Paul L. Rivard

CM 15/12/76

Dr. Rivard, who now practices in Montreal, studied surgery in France and then worked in northern Quebec for 35 years as the medical officer of Canadian International Paper. He attended company employees, mostly lumberjacks, and the members of five scattered Indian tribes. Below, he remembers the way things were.

"The Indians were very good to me, they treated me like a god. I was a doctor and a justice of the peace, a dentist and a surgeon. Everyone lived in tents in the summer. I made all the confinements in tents. Sometimes I had to wait, and I would sleep and after a bit the patient would push me and say, 'Hey Doc, the baby is coming.'

"I raised my own family up north, and I was the doctor of all my own kids. I made all our confinements except once when my wife was alone.

"I learned quite a bit. I never found a case of cancer among the several tribes. I don't know if it was nutrition or the lack of industry. I favour nutrition. The Waswanipi tribe diet was fish only, and they all had very nice, good teeth. The Ojibwa tribe all had bad teeth. As a matter of fact that was where I got almost my diploma as a dentist, because I removed all their teeth. They were eating bear, partridge and other wild animals.

"It was a good life. Not lonely. Oh no. I had a lot of good times. Always something new. When I had a call, the plane came and got me and I never knew what was coming. I might get out 500, 600 or 700 miles and come back for supper. From where I was up to the North Pole there was no doctor. My neighbour — my confrere — south of me was 250 miles away; the one east was 40 miles, and the one west about 125 miles.

"I set up a radio network. You hear now about the James Bay electric project. Every year for 17 years I had communications with the surveyors sent out by the Quebec government to prepare for the work that is done today. Every night I had between 20 and 25 groups of surveyors working in the bush. I was getting in touch with them to give them medical advice if they needed it and to give them news from their families because they were without contact for five or six months.

"I was also medical officer of the Régiment de Châteauguay, and every year I went down to the camp. During the war they wouldn't let me go overseas because they had no other doctor up there, but they sent me 200 German prisoners to work in the bush. It was just after Dunkirk, and the prisoners were marines from the *Bismarck* and some aviators that were shot down over England. When it got cold, maybe 10°F below zero, they went on strike and wouldn't work. Our lumberjacks were going to work, but they would not. I put the prisoners on a special diet — clear soup and a little piece of meat — and they didn't like that. Finally the government decided to ship them out to western Canada.



"The Indians were quiet and gentle and healthy outside of tuberculosis. I had a few cases of gall stones, mostly among women. After I read some articles about hypnotherapy, I tried hypnosis for surgery. I found I could make a patient unconscious in 5 to 25 minutes, depending on the patient, and operate on him without pain. It was something marvelous."

Abe Okpik

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Abe Okpik, born in the Mackenzie Delta in 1929, was the first native person to serve on the Northwest Territories Council. He has been directly involved in just about everything that has happened to the Inuit in the last fifty years.

