

Dr. Jean Briggs

The *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2006) in its entry on Jean L. Briggs, describes her as “an eminent anthropologist of Inuit society [who] has been at the forefront of change and innovation in her discipline... At a time when it was uncommon for women to conduct prolonged and intensive fieldwork in isolated and extreme environments, she conducted fieldwork in Alaska, the eastern and central Canadian Arctic, and briefly, in Siberia.” How fortunate it was for Memorial University that this indomitable researcher came to the Department of Anthropology in 1967 and remained as a livyer for 47 years. Her 17 years of post-retirement contributions to the university, to academia, to the Inuit communities she has served, and to Canadian understanding of Inuit culture are not only important but remarkable. Her book *Never in Anger* (1970) continues to be a classic in its field.

In retirement, Jean has been awarded four SSHRC-funded team research grants, supplemented by a grant from the Government of the Northwest Territories for her work on the Utku dialect of Inuktitut. She has collected a second set of recordings in which she interviewed Utku elders in their own language, a feat virtually unprecedented for dictionary work on any First Nations language. Her current and ongoing work includes the challenging multi-disciplinary task of creating a dictionary for the dialect, now only spoken by elders, and for which European dictionary-making techniques cannot be used. Her post-base dictionary of the Utku is online and a paper edition is to be published by Nunavut Arctic College and placed in every school in Nunavut. Her work has contributed to the development of the Inuit community of Gjoa Haven by helping to standardize the Utku writing system, protect the language, put the youth in touch with their heritage and help preserve the local history and culture.

Jean’s work continues to attract attention on multiple levels; she has attended selected international academic conferences and workshops, offered invited presentations, and published scholarly articles and book chapters in the fields of psychological anthropology, Arctic anthropology and Inuit Studies. Popular national media sources have been interested in her groundbreaking experience as a single woman living in isolated hunting camps and her articulate accounts of her experiences have contributed to the public understanding of anthropology. A compelling example was broadcast in 2011 on the CBC *Ideas* program. She remains connected to the faculty and students of the Department of Anthropology and until health issues intervened, regularly attended and contributed to departmental seminars and offered guest lectures. She has offered PhD supervision, advised students, and consulted with colleagues.

An ardent environmentalist, Jean lives the principles of conservation of nature; until recently she made her home in the woods without road access. She has devoted a great deal of time and private resources to establishing conservation projects both in Newfoundland and the United States. The head of the East Coast Trail in Maddox Cove is a conservation area protected under the Nature Conservancy of Canada because of her efforts. .

Since retirement, Jean has been deservedly well recognized by her academic community: she was made a Professor Emerita by Memorial University (1997); her second book, *Inuit Morality Play*, published in 1999, was awarded the Boyer Prize in Psychoanalytic Anthropology as well as the Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing. She was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (2001); served as Visiting Scholar at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks (2003); awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Society for Psychological Anthropology (2005); listed in *Who’s Who in Canada*; and as earlier noted, an entry devoted to her work was published in the *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Select adjectives from that descriptor capture vividly the essence of both Jean Briggs’ work and her uniqueness of character: *eminent, innovative, intensive*, and unquestionably, *uncommon*.