

Catherine Mitchell

Inuvik, NT

Born: May 31, 1918

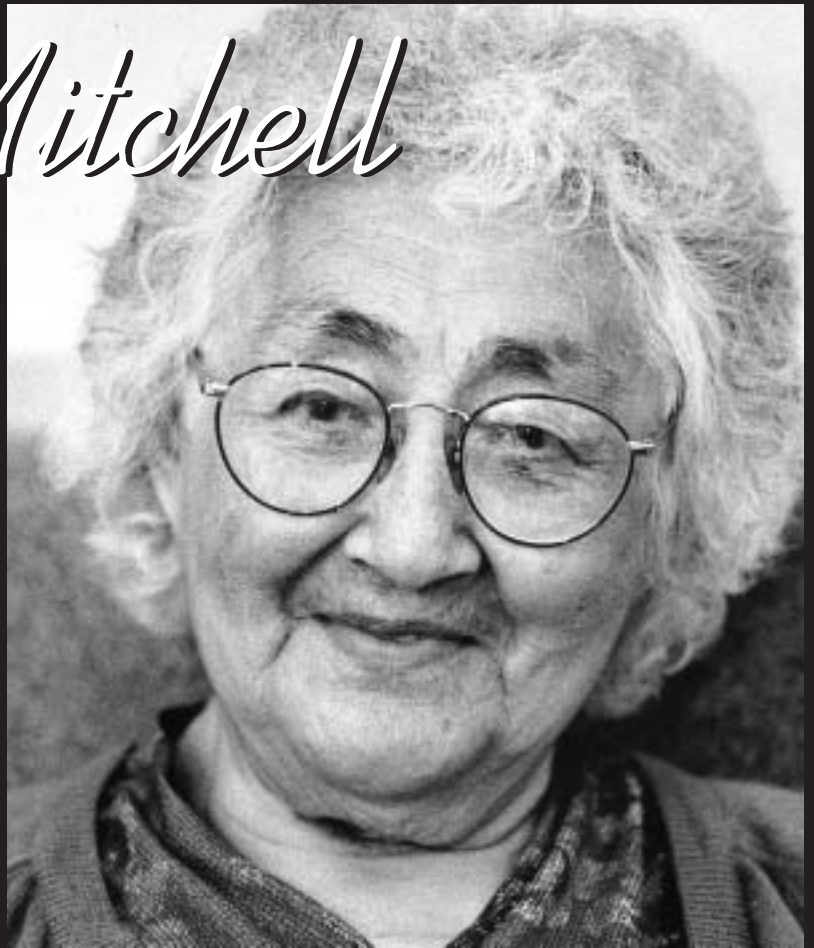
Birthplace: Pokiak Channel

Parents: Margaret Bonnetplume &
Charlie Stewart

Gwich'in: Teet'it Gwich'in

Married: Moise Mitchell on June 22, 1940
(d. April 27, 1947)

Children: Harold (d), Beverly, Kenneth (d),
Lawrence (adopted out), Rita



Catherine is the younger half-sister of Sarah Simon. She spent most of her childhood in the Aklavik area where her father, Charlie Stewart, worked for the RCMP as a translator and guide. She remembers her father travelled extensively and used to tell her many stories about the Lost Patrol and stories from long ago. Catherine also remembers as a child visiting Fort McPherson occasionally to visit relatives and once travelled with her Auntie Sarah and Lennie to Herschel Island and Shingle Point to hunt caribou.

In September of 1926, when Catherine was 8 years old, she was sent to the Anglican school in Hay River. However, she only stayed for nine months because her father missed her and sent for her the following June with the first boat of the season. When Catherine returned home, her mother taught her how to sew and look after the house. From that time, she sewed clothing for her mother, father and younger brother. Although Catherine was brought up speaking English, she also learned to speak Gwich'in from listening to her mother talking to visitors. She taught herself to

read and write in English by reading the Bible.

In October of 1939, Catherine's mother arranged her marriage to Moise Mitchell, a Dogrib man who lived in Fort Simpson. Moise had come down the Mackenzie River to Aklavik with Cliff Moore that year and had become friends with Catherine's brother Victor, and this is how they met. Catherine and Moise were married in 1940, when she was 22 years old, after the ratting season closed that spring. They continued to live around Aklavik and the Neyook River where Moise built a cabin close to Knut Lang's Place. After her husband died in 1947, she stayed out in the bush trapping for one year with her brother Victor and her father. She and Victor remained close throughout their life, always helping each other out when needed. After spending a year in the bush, Catherine moved back to Aklavik in 1948 and worked at the Anglican residential school and then in Norman Wells as a cook. She worked hard at a variety of jobs to raise her family. In the 1950s, she moved to Inuvik and has lived there ever since. In 1960, she worked at Stringer Hall

looking after the junior boys and girls for one year, then worked in the kitchen at the Inuvik General Hospital for approximately 16 years. Catherine started work in the hospital as a dishwasher, and worked her way up to a cook's helper and finally a cook. Catherine also worked for CBC Radio spending five years on the Gwich'in program which started in the 1970s. For a short time, she was also a matron for the RCMP.

Catherine is one of the founding board members of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. Her strong desire to keep the Gwich'in language and culture alive has helped to guide the program and projects that the Institute carries out. Catherine says "it is good to speak your own language, and it's a shame that our children are not able to speak our language." Catherine likes to tell stories and is often asked to speak to school children and the public about Gwich'in culture. She believes strongly in her family, and is always helping her children and grand-children. As her children say, "she's always there for us."