In the Words of Our Ancestors:

Métis Health and Healing

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
ᑲᓇᑕᒥ ᓄᓇᕗᑦᑎᓯᒪᔨᓄᑦ ᐊᐢᓂᐦᓇᕐᐳᓂᓕᓂᒧᑦ ᑲᑎᒪᔨᖅᑎᑦᓴᑦ

OAAPH [known as the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)] receives funding from Health Canada to assist it to undertake knowledge-based activities, including education, research and dissemination of information to promote health issues affecting Aboriginal Peoples. However, the contents and conclusions of this report are solely that of the authors and are not attributable, in whole or in part, to Health Canada.

Copies of this publication may be obtained by contacting:

Métis Centre
National Aboriginal Health Organization
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1200
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9

Phone: (613) 237-9462
Toll-free: 1-877-602-4445
Fax: (613) 237-8707
Email: metiscentre@naho.ca
Website: www.naho.ca/metiscentre

ISBN 978-0-9809579-1-4

Please cite using the following format:
Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008).
In The Words of Our Ancestors: Métis Health and Healing.
Ottawa: National Aboriginal Health Organization.

Design & Layout
Beat Studios
www.beatstudios.ca

In the Words of Our Ancestors:

Métis Health and Healing

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
ᑲᓇᑕᒥ ᓄᓇᖃᖅᑳᓕᕆᓂᖅ ᐊᐢᓂᐊᓇᐢᓯᓂᓕᓂᒃ ᑲᑎᒪᔨᖃᑎᒌᒃ

TABLE OF CONTENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"I would like to thank you right from my heart, for what you have done for us, to bring us in a circle like this, to talk about life, to discuss everything."

— Francis Dumais

The Métis Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization supported a series of Métis Elders' gatherings held between 2003 and 2006. An outcome of these gatherings is this very book, *In the Words of Our Ancestors: Métis Health and Healing*.

The Métis Centre would like to thank all the Elders who attended and shared their wisdom with us at the Métis Elders' gatherings: Angus Beaulieu, Rose Boyer, Angie Crerar, Albert Desjarlais, Alma Desjarlais, Francis Dumais, Francis Fisher, Marion Larkman, Michel Maurice, Tom McCallum, Jack McIvor, Marilee Nault, Earl Scofield and Lorraine Tordiff.

Many thanks are due to a number of expert guests who participated in the Métis Elders' gatherings: Rita Flamand, Sonny Flett, George Fleury, Norman Fleury, George McDermott, Rose Richardson, Elmer Ross, Grace Zoldy, Laura Burnouf and Karon Shmon.

The project facilitators were Lois Edge and Tricia Logan. Sara Fryer and Tricia Logan were the editors of this book. The Métis Centre is deeply grateful for their hard work and dedication to this important project.

PREFACE

This book contains the words of Métis ancestors and Elders from the past and present. The narrative form is used to share conversations the Elders had with each other and the rest of us about traditional knowledge. This was their wish.

A series of Métis Elders' gatherings were held between 2003 and 2006 to recognize, share, protect, affirm, use and *revitalize* Métis traditional health and healing knowledge and practices. The wisdom that was graciously shared at these historic meetings is the basis for this book, *In the Words of Our Ancestors: Métis Health and Healing*. Métis Elders asked the Métis Centre "to sift through" the knowledge and "present it in a way that is respectful of everybody who has contributed." It is hoped that *In the Words of Our Ancestors* manages this feat.

The teachings that emerged from the conversations the Elders had and their purpose in sharing knowledge varies depending on whom you speak to. For example, Francis Dumais tells us his purpose for sharing knowledge:

> *This book that we are putting together, it is not just going to be for a little while. It is going to be for a long time, for years to come into the future. It can be used especially by young people.*
>
> **— Francis Dumais, November 2006**

"We can say we are sharing 'the words of our ancestors.' These are the teachings of our ancestors. Our ancestors taught us to do it this way."

— Tom McCallum

The Métis Elders stressed that awareness of historical, cultural and Aboriginal language perspectives must be attained to better understand traditional cultural protocols. Métis Elders tell us that Métis health and well-being is dependent on the land and water as well as a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic influences; all of which inform Métis traditional health knowledge. The following themes emerged from Elders' discussions about traditional knowledge and are explored in *In the Words of Our Ancestors:*

1. revisiting Métis health and healing;
2. living Michif;
3. the importance of Métis women and families to community health; and
4. land and water as central to Métis health and wellness.

By discussing Métis traditional health knowledge with each other, the Elders agreed that this collaboration enhanced their health and allowed them to contribute to health and healing in their communities. It is hoped that this sharing of Métis traditional health knowledge may, in turn, contribute to the health of future generations.

MÉTIS THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

"Knowledge is no good if it's not shared."

— George Fleury

The Métis Elders gatherings were originally designed to share traditional knowledge and inform the Métis Centre on guiding principles for a Métis health framework. These gatherings provided the Centre with content and guidance for their health research and also helped to build a dialogue on conducting Métis-specific research. The Elders represented every Métis region in Canada and each helped to inform the Métis Centre on the needs of their own Métis communities.

While there were several regional variations in traditions, language, customs and ways of sharing knowledge, there were also several shared beliefs that helped to create a theoretical framework. The following understandings about Métis research involving Elders and traditional knowledge arose from the gatherings:

Old people know Métis history and the Michif languages.

Elders are strong advocates of a language and culture perspective. Elders and seniors are in some cases the only speakers of Michif and Métis languages. Since they are among the only speakers, they are also often the only people who hold the stories and histories transmitted through those languages. An aging population in Métis communities holds much of Métis history and language. Métis Elders and teachers are aware

of the endangerment of the Michif language and they work to encourage Métis to learn from oral histories, traditional knowledge and Elders in their community.

Elders have a critical role to play in passing on traditional knowledge.

Knowledge shared by Elders in Métis communities is held in the highest regard. The Elders/old people's role in Métis communities is, in part, to keep and to share oral histories and traditional knowledge.

We must pass Métis traditional knowledge on because some of it is becoming scarce.

Elders, especially those involved in this research, are well aware of how essential it is to acknowledge the scarcity of Métis traditional knowledge and the state of endangered languages, like Michif. Elders that attended the gatherings informed the Métis Centre's health content but they always reinforced the critical importance of passing on the content to others.

Honour the knowledge and the memories of relatives who gave us this wisdom.

Elders reinforced that a great deal of the stories, oral histories and traditional knowledge passed on is an accumulation of knowledge from their ancestors. The Elders often specifically referenced their own parents and grandparents in stories. By attributing the accumulation of knowledge to specific family members, they wished to honour the memory of their parents, grandparents and families, as well as the knowledge itself.

Métis cultural practices are diverse.

Protocols for approaching and inviting Elders were accepted and/or adapted to suit the individuals at each of the four gatherings due to the diversity of Métis traditional knowledge practices. Staff members and meeting attendees shared expectations and teachings with one another and protocols that were observed at these traditional knowledge meetings were adapted to meet the expectations of each group. Protocols changed from meeting to meeting but in all cases, gifts were presented and appreciation for the knowledge to be shared was acknowledged.

Elders provided the framework for every gathering.

Elders adapted the format and content of the meetings. Essentially, staff re-designed each meeting format for each group based on their requests. Use of the most logical and acceptable

methods and integration of several styles allowed for an original Métis style of conducting traditional knowledge research. This often occurred spontaneously but it can be considered to be a truly 'Métis' method; re-creating, adapting and reformulating a style that best suited Métis interests. Métis are known for working with what they are given and maintaining their distinctive style.

METHODOLOGY

"This book we are putting together, it is not just going to be for a little while. It is going to be for a long time, for years to come, into the future. It can be used especially for young people."

— Francis Dumais

Métis Elders gatherings

The 2002 Métis Health Policy Forum identified a real need to bring Métis Elders together from throughout Canada to discuss Métis-specific traditional health knowledge. By 2003, the Métis Centre started to plan a series of Elders' gatherings. With guidance from members of the Métis Centre's member organizations, a number of Elders were identified to participate in a series of Métis Elders' gatherings held between 2003 and 2006.

Planning meetings were initially held with Elders from across Canada to develop a method and framework to conduct this research on traditional health and healing knowledge. These meetings were instrumental in identifying specific themes that the Elders wanted to explore. Afterwards, Elders' gatherings related to health and healing, Michif language, women and family and land and water were planned. Those Elders that had expertise or interest in a particular topic area were asked to attend.

These four Métis Elders' gatherings brought together Métis from rural and urban areas across the country including: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, the Northwest

Territories and Métis Settlements of Alberta. A total of 21 participants who self-identified as Elders, seniors and/or healers attended these gatherings between 2003 and 2006. Fifteen participants were identified by their respective provincial Métis organizations and six others attended based upon their extensive knowledge of a particular topic.

Métis cultural protocols

The Métis Centre asked if cultural protocols as practiced by some of the Métis Elders during the initial planning meetings could be used throughout the four Métis Elders' gatherings. After a thorough discussion, as well as sharing experiences and understandings of traditional practices, the group came to agreement. Certain cultural protocols were observed when and where they were deemed to be most appropriate.

During the initial meetings a talking circle approach was adopted to encourage discussion and ensure equal opportunities for participation. Everyone was invited to participate in opening and closing prayers, purification or smudging ceremonies, talking or sharing circles, pipe ceremonies, the offering of tobacco and cloth, and at one meeting, a sweat lodge ceremony. Initially, some of the practices and protocols

were new or slightly unfamiliar to some Elders. At each meeting, the group worked to find the best for that setting and group.

Based on decisions made at the initial Elders gatherings, protocols at the smaller working groups were created based on the needs and requests of each group. Appropriate procedures for inviting Elders, obtaining consent, making offerings for shared knowledge, prayers and sharing circles were followed differently at each of the four meetings. Staff members made decisions on what procedures would be followed and based their decisions on who was involved and the knowledge they were going to be sharing.

In some cases, the Elders gave direct guidance on the protocols that should be followed during the proceedings, while in other meetings the staff decided ahead of time what would be deemed appropriate and the Elders agreed to the format before the beginning. Elders at each of the four gatherings were presented with a written agenda and format for the meeting and at that time they either rejected or accepted the format for the gathering. For example, during the 'health and healing' gathering, the Elders requested that staff change the format and content of the meeting in order to more appropriately conduct their teachings on the subject.

Reasons for changing the format included: the use of Michif and Cree languages, use of accumulated wisdom and ancestral knowledge, use of herbs and medicines, use of tobacco and/or gifts, and their general eagerness to best represent what was going to be shared.

Western and Métis methodologies were integrated during the Métis Elders' gatherings. At each gathering, Elders discussed how they felt that knowledge should be shared and recorded. Métis Centre staff made an effort to obtain the mainstream-required written consent and document the meeting proceedings while also trying to respect the Elders' orally-transmitted traditions. It was understood that some teachings and stories were transmitted orally and via an Aboriginal language for a reason. Several concepts and beliefs cannot be readily translated into an English-written format. Where necessary, staff members obtained oral consent, stopped audio taping or used language translators in order to respectfully represent oral agreements made with the Elders.

Participants agreed that some of the information about traditional medicines and healing should not be documented or shared as it is not within the group's, or a specific individual's, authority to share some types of traditional knowledge. It was agreed and clearly understood that the teachings in this book, as shared by these Elders, are those of individuals and not representative of any community, region, organization or nation.

Each time the group came together, initial discussion focused on the challenges faced by them, their families and communities, both historically and contemporarily. Over time, opportunities were provided to share grief and emotions for individual healing. Knowing one's family history and having pride in one's Métis heritage were the most important factors for individuals to attain and maintain good health and well-being. The group felt strongly that it was important for youth to learn about their family and community histories.

At the final Métis Elders' gathering in July 2006, the group reached an understanding that each of the participants are, in their own way, both leaders and healers. Elders commented that the gatherings provided an opportunity to focus on their own health and healing and served as a place where they could re-energize and gain momentum to continue their work as Elders in their families and communities.

CHAPTER 1 — SHARING OUR GIFTS: MÉTIS ELDERS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The narrators of *Sharing our Gifts: Métis Elders and Traditional Knowledge* are Albert Desjarlais, Francis Dumais, Tom McCallum and Michel Maurice, with guest George 'Lonewalker' McDermott. The content of this chapter is based on their discussions about revisiting Métis health and healing during a meeting held in Edmonton, Alberta, November 16 to 18, 2005. Some of the discussion occurred in Cree and where possible Tom McCallum helped translate from Cree to English for the benefit of the facilitators.

"It is so strong, these Native ways, this culture. That's why it is important to have this said, so more young people can maybe gather something, whatever they think is good, a few words they can use as they go along. Because it's the young we are doing this for, it is not for ourselves. So they can maybe get something out of what we are doing here today. So these things will guide them as they go through life. It is very important to prepare for these things, to make the right preparations so everything will go well."

— Albert Desjarlais

Métis Health and Healing Elders' Gathering

Following an opening prayer and introductions, participants were asked by the Métis Centre to think about some questions intended to guide the discussion on health and healing. The Elders were asked how they learned about Métis health and healing; about the importance of respecting protocols on sharing traditional knowledge; to share a story or a teaching; their thoughts about living a healthy life; and any advice they had to help protect and promote the use of traditional knowledge and health and healing practices.

Rather than answer the guiding questions proposed by the Métis Centre, the group chose to structure their discussions around their own interests and priorities. Some of the topics the Métis Centre suggested were rejected while others were retained and discussed at length. In this sense, Western and Indigenous methods were intertwined during these gatherings. The themes that came out of the discussions form the basis of this chapter and include: Historical Factors Impacting Métis Identity Today; Emergence as Métis; To Have a Clear Mind; Understanding World Views; Who is an Elder?; and, Approaching an Elder.

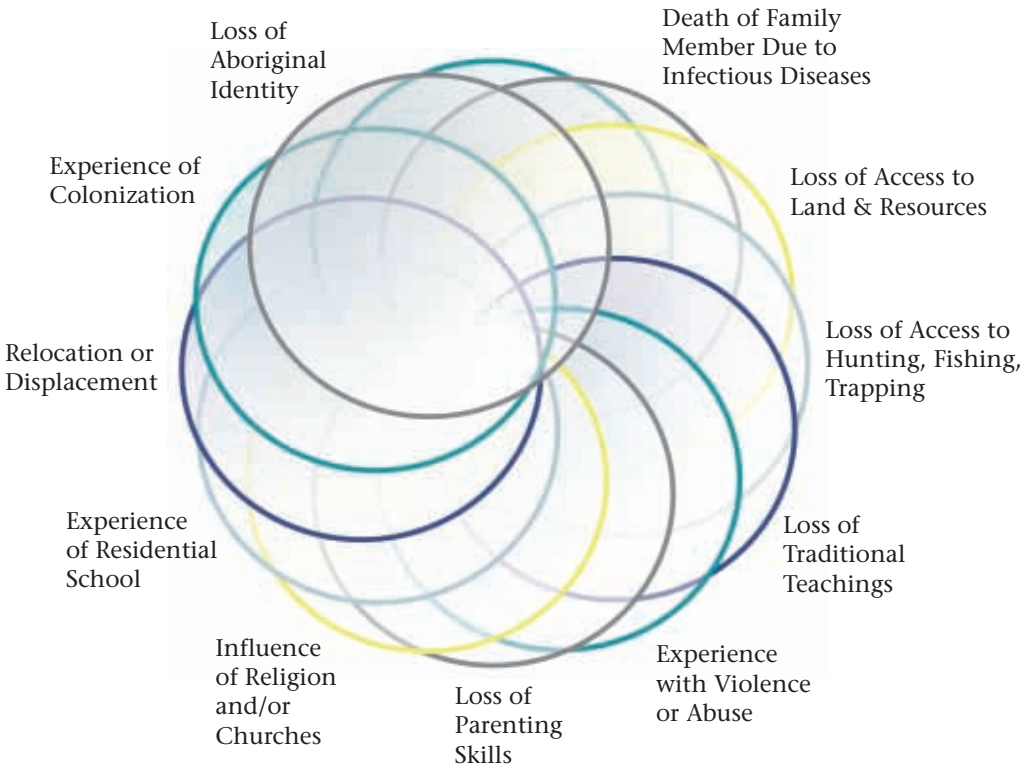
Tom discusses his vision for this book:

> *What we are doing is making medicine for the mind. It is the mind, the mental part of us that can heal all the other aspects of our well-being. This book is not designed for only one sector of society. It is for everybody who wants to pick it up. It is the same as when these gentlemen go and pick medicines. When you write this book, it will be for everyone.*
>
> **— Tom McCallum**

Historical Factors Impacting Métis Health and Identity

The Elders spoke of the many losses experienced by Métis people over the past few hundred years. Common experiences included: colonization; loss of Aboriginal identity; loss of Aboriginal languages; death of family members from infectious diseases; loss of access to land and resources; loss of access to hunting, fishing and trapping; loss of traditional teachings; experiences with violence and abuse; loss of parenting skills; influences of religion and/or

Figure 1 — Historical Factors Impacting Métis Health and Identity



churches; experiences of attending Residential School; or of relocation or displacement from ancestral lands. These historical factors mediate through each other and are believed to have an impact on Métis identity and health today.

Emergence as Métis

Elders shared perspectives on the emergence and resurgence of Métis identity. It was agreed that in order to understand Métis health, one has to explore the historical origins of Métis people. Struggles and resiliency are critical aspects of Métis health and well-being.

The emergence of Métis as a Nation of people is similar to the meaning of the Ojibway word, *Wisahkotewinowak*. It is the emergence of new shoots from Mother Earth after a fire has gone through and it requires an understanding of Métis history and the oppression of Métis as a people.

Tom acted as a translator during this session since much of the discussion occurred in Cree. He says:

> *It is important to understand our history, to acknowledge the oppression we have suffered, and recognize the significance of our emergence as a people known as Métis. To talk about traditional health knowledge and healing practices, to discuss spirituality, healing and medicines, we need to acknowledge the foundation we are working from as being from a Cree perspective for this group of Elders and healers.*
>
> *To the Cree, we are* nehiyowak. Ekwa kohtak anma apihtaw'kosisan isihkatew. Apihtaw'kosisan *means a sort of half-son. This was translated into English as Halfbreed. To the Ojibway, we are mixed-blood. They say* wisahkotewinowak *which translates to mean where the fire has gone through and burnt everything, and new shoots come up from the ground. That's where the Métis come from; they were the new Nation, the new shoots that come up from the ground from Mother Earth.*
>
> **— Tom McCallum**

A Clear Mind

A clear mind helps us to better understand one another, and to give thanks for each day and to learn about ourselves. The Elders thoughtfully reflected not only on what was being said but how it should be presented. Introspection, prayer and ceremonies were some of the ways some of the Elders prepared for their day of sharing stories and knowledge. Their preparations reinforce that honour and respect must accompany the transfer of knowledge in this format.

Francis conveys the importance of clearing his mind through prayer:

> *To begin a meeting or gathering, it is important to start with an opening prayer. The intent of an opening prayer is to clear our minds,*

"That's where the Métis come from; they were the new Nation, the new shoots that come up from the ground from Mother Earth."

— Tom McCallum

to make our minds clear, to pray to better understand each other and to have a good day. **— Francis Dumais**

Why we give thanks:

To give thanks to the Creator, to have the ability first thing in the day when you open your eyes, to give thanks for that day because you have one more day to walk upon sacred Mother Earth, and in this way, to learn more about yourself and to have a better understanding of other people around. **— Tom McCallum**

Understanding World Views

An understanding of different world views requires an awareness of other people's experiences, understanding, and knowledge. Elders remind us there are different points of view and that it is up to each of us to respect the perspective of others. We create balance and harmony by treating one another with kindness and respect. Thinking from either an Aboriginal or English language perspective shapes the lens through which we view the world in ways we may not be aware of. For example, in some Aboriginal language perspectives, kinship words emphasize strong relationships within families. Some describe our lives as gifts from the Creator and our journey in life is to learn and move towards wholeness.

Tom discusses the preparation and awareness needed to respect other's world views. He says:

It is important for us to prepare ourselves to be aware that when people get together to talk with one another, that each person shares their views about how they see things. It is up to each of us to respect other people's views. Each of us interprets and understands what we hear or are taught based upon our life experiences, understanding and knowledge we each have. If we sit in a circle and listen to a story, each of us will interpret and understand the story in a way that is both the same and different as the person sitting next to us. We can talk to everyone in the circle and each person will have a different point of view. It is up to the listener to make sense of what is being said, to be guided and assisted in their development toward wholeness. If we look straight ahead, we can develop tunnel vision and see things only one way. The more we listen to other people's views, the more our vision will open up and we will start to have peripheral vision, to be able to see from all perspectives and respect those perspectives. That is what creates our wholeness, to walk in balance and harmony, to respect other people's way, their journey of life, their way of interpreting, to treat each other with much more than kindness and respect. **— Tom McCallum**

He explains how our experiences and language shape our world view:

> *How we each see the world is based upon our experience. We have been given a world view from the* nehiyaw *or Cree world view. Métis people have been given that world view from the* nehiyaw*, the Cree. It depends upon how people were raised. Some were raised in the* nehiyaw *way and have a* nehiyaw *world view. Some people that are Métis were raised the white way and that is their world view. Sometimes the teachings of the Catholic Church may be prominent in people's lives and that is their world view. Métis are not all the same because we have all been brought up in different ways. This is how it is with the Michif language. There are different dialects and different world views. Their world view depends upon how they were raised. For us, the* nehiyaw *world, we see each other as being related to everything. Those who were raised as Catholic have a different world view. It is a holistic world view that we have. Once we learn and understand that, then we know where we come from and we know who we are.*
>
> **— Tom McCallum**

Tom emphasizes that it is important to respect people. We can show them by respectfully speaking to each other:

> *There were terms that we used growing up, my older brother, my younger sister, my older sister, my younger sister. You never called them by their names. That was the respect that was accorded to people. Within families and with anybody that was older than you. You never, never called them*

> *by their names, or looked them in the eyes. It is not just the language of the spoken word itself; it is the feeling that is being expressed. In the Cree language, it is spoken very gently, it is really, really gentle. Even when you are teasing, it is gentle. English is totally different. It is a harsh language. That is why jokes that sound funny in Cree, do not sound funny in English. It is a total way of being, so it is hard to articulate. The way of being defines how you speak and the way of being is your relationship to all of Creation. In English it isn't this way. Your relationship is who you marry, your nuclear family, and where individuality is emphasized. For us, it is not about individuality, these are some of the differences. There is a start and a finish in English. You are going to start and finish this book. In the Native world, there is no start and there is no finish.*
>
> **— Tom McCallum**

"Each of us has a gift. All people have gifts. These are gifts from the Creator."

— Tom McCallum

We all have gifts, according to Tom:

> *Each of us has a gift. All people have gifts. These are gifts from the Creator.* Emikosiyin iysawimikawiyin *is to be blessed by the Creator, to be born with a certain gift given to you by the Creator, a gift that you have to realize during your lifetime. Our life's journey is about coming to realize that gift. Each of us are learning and [moving] toward that wholeness, which we find is in ourselves. We don't have to go anywhere. We have connections on this earth because we live with other people. It is these interactions that trigger those things that are inside of us so we can bring this out and learn. This is the peripheral vision I am talking about.*

Experiences like schooling has meant changes:

> *The loss of respect, the loss of love for one another, the loss of reverence for all that exists, changed. It was not too long ago that it changed. It changed with the younger generation because of historical events such as schooling. People from the other culture wanted to teach the children how to do paperwork. And they did. They taught them very, very well how to do paperwork. They taught them how to work, how to have a good work ethic. They taught them all of that.*
>
> **— Tom McCallum**

The loss of respect occurred within a generation, according to Francis:

> *What about respect? I think it is very important now. We are losing all the respect, especially the young people. We are losing it completely. When I was a child, everyone had so much respect. It is going to take a lot of work to bring it back. I noticed that a few years ago, it started going away. It went so fast, it's wasn't even funny. It's gone now, respect. People just don't think anymore. It is like what was said today, it is English that turned everything right around.*
>
> **— Francis Dumais**

Who is an Elder?

Identifying Elders

An important part of learning about traditional knowledge is being able to identify Elders in your community. Indigenous and Western methods of research are rapidly emerging and becoming intertwined. With an increased demand for Indigenous-driven research, there has been an increased demand for community Elders to participate in both Western and Indigenous gatherings. In this meeting, participants were prompted to discuss the most effective and respectful ways to identify an Elder.

George reminds us that Elders open our minds to another world:

> *When you look for an Elder, you look to see what he has done. An Elder will be known for their honest and good work with the Creator. There will be a record of an Elder's good work. There are different kinds of Elders, teachers and gifted*

peoples, and each may share different kinds of teachings or stories. Some people brought news. Old ladies usually told stories. Some teachings were about relationships, about life and the world. My grandmother told us exciting stories. We would sit and listen to her stories. We would cut wood and get water for her. We were always cutting wood because we liked to listen to her stories because it opened our minds to another world.

— George McDermott

Albert and Tom spoke about their views on who is an Elder in Cree. Tom translated their discussion into English:

In the English language, the word Elder implies that we are putting somebody up on a pedestal. There is a suggestion that a person should behave in that way. You can be elevated to a position where you cannot be human anymore.

— Albert Desjarlais

When Elders go into a ceremony, they say they are nothing and express themselves in a way that shows humility. They believe this in their heart, because they have the knowledge that they don't know anything. But the people who know less elevate them because we are taught to do that in our society. The issue here is that you are trying to describe something from another language and world view. What we need to do is study what the term "Elder" means.

— Tom McCallum

To Albert, an Elder is not necessarily old:

You don't have to be very old before you can be called an Elder. Maybe there are ways you can earn the right to be called an Elder.

— Albert Desjarlais

Long life is seen as a blessing from the Creator to Francis:

When someone has done good work all of their lives, and helped many people, the Creator

"There are different kinds of Elders, teachers and gifted peoples, and each may share different kinds of teachings or stories. Some people brought news. Old ladies usually told stories. Some teachings were about relationships, about life and the world."

— George McDermott

"Sometimes when you go and see someone, and you don't know who they are, you have to be careful because you don't know if they are working in a good way or not."

— Tom McCallum

blesses you with a longer life and sacred gifts that you may use to help people.
— Francis Dumais

Michel explains that Elders have different areas of expertise:

Sometimes organizations may take advantage by bringing in an Elder just to say they had an Elder there. To say there was an Elder in attendance. One of the organizations in Saskatchewan is developing a resource guide to identify all the Elders in the region and identify their areas of expertise.
— Michel Maurice

One has to ensure the person they are learning from shares good and safe information:

There is also the issue of people who identify themselves as Elders or teachers who may not be Elders. Sometimes a person might attend sweat lodge and Sundance ceremonies. They may sit around a drum and sing. They have a smudge bowl and a feather. They start smudging people. They might give themselves an Indian name and wear a choker and necklace, a fringed jacket and moccasins. They call themselves a medicine man. And they may be powerful people. But they could also be lost and themselves searching for a place to belong. Even though they have found a place for themselves, they may be misguiding others. There may be a lot of confusion.
— Tom McCallum

Sometimes when you go and see someone, and you don't know who they are, you have to be careful because you don't know if they are working in a good way or not. **— Tom McCallum**

How do I know who to go to, how do I know if that person is good or not? It's in your heart, and your spirit will tell you how far you want to go. You have to be cautious as you walk your life in every way. You have to be like little children. That's the way we approach our grandfathers and grandmothers. We are little children, their grandchildren. When we approach an Elder, we have to believe in that Elder, so we are not going to dispute what they are saying. We have the choice to take what they say, and make it a part of our lives, or to say no and leave it with them to maybe help somebody else. That's the choice we have.
— Tom McCallum

One way to answer this question is in your own mind. In your sub-conscious mind, ask yourself, do you feel safe? Ask that question to yourself: This isn't bush talk, this is organizational talk. We are learning a lot here. What you have to do is, in your mind, to say, "this is what an Elder is like, this is what you would like to see in an Elder."
— George McDermott

Reflecting on Elders

Elders are: humble, teachers, gifted people, storytellers, known in one's community, and/or possessing a record of good work. Elders have usually done good work all of their lives and work hard to earn respect by helping many people. 'Elder' is a one-word, English understanding of a multi-layered, complex and sacred concept in an Aboriginal worldview. The Elders complied a short list of just some of the Aboriginal language understandings of 'Elder'. Thinking from an Aboriginal language perspective helps us to better understand the various roles that Elders assume.

As Tom describes:

> *Elder is not even a word in our vocabulary in the Cree language. We are coming from an English language perspective and trying to describe someone other than who they are, from an English language perspective. The term Elder is someone who is referred to by the Mormon people. Other people talk about what is an Elder? The way we describe an Elder in our language is that there cannot be one person who encompasses everything. In English, they are trying to lump everything into one person and that is where the confusion comes in. In our community, there are different leaders who have different talents. In the circle, everyone is equal. Everyone has a gift to bring to the circle. We have to go back to our roots; we have to go back to who we are. The whole concept of spirituality is understood from an English language perspective. When you say the term in the Cree language, we say it is the gifts that were given to us as the four-directions people.*
> **— Tom McCallum**

Kihteyayak *— These are people who are called the mature ones, in reference to their age.*
— Tom McCallum

Kisinew *— This is an old person who is nearing the end, or at the far end of life. Older men are sometimes referred to this way by their wives.*
— Francis Dumais

Kiyanew *— This is when you come from a long ways back.* **— George McDermott**

Notakoh *— This is used to describe an elderly woman, an older lady with no room to move, she has run out of room, she has so many grandchildren.* **— Francis Dumais**

Mahtawasitwew *— There are different kinds of talking, like bringing the news, storytelling, telling stories or teachings.* **— George McDermott**

Mamahtoenow *— This is a sacred person, one who can do paranormal things.*
— Tom McCallum

Ohnatawewiwak *— They were the healers.*
— George McDermott

Ohnekanapew *— This is someone who sits at the head or at the front during a ceremony.*
— Albert Desjarlais

Otsapahcikewenow *— This is a person who sees into the future, someone who performs ceremonies or conjures up spirits.*
— Tom McCallum

Lii Viyeu *— The Old People, Elder (in Michif).*
— Tom McCallum and Albert Desjarlais

Working together as a community is important, as George explains:

> *When you are an Elder in the community, you are well known. If it is a small community, you are an Elder to the whole community. Years ago, we were called the healers,* ohnatawewiwak. *All of your herbs were in arms reach. They were easy to get. In those days, if you were a good healer, everybody would be feeling good. In those days, everyone had a job to do in the community. Everybody worked together, combined what they had and exchanged things.* — **George McDermott**

An Elder may have had many experiences and has a lot to offer:

> *To be an Elder is to be a person who has had a lot of experiences. People observe an Elder through time, over the years. They see what a person has gone through, how a person has handled things, how much respect a person is given and knowing the person has been through a lot over the years. When that person is very, very old, he may have a lot to offer and be very helpful to the community. There are not a lot of these kinds of people. As an Elder, a person has to have experienced a lot in his lifetime to be able to share his experiences over the years.* — **Francis Dumais**

> *Every* kisinew *in this world has something to offer. We have to involve all of the elderly, to include everybody. Everybody has something to offer.* — **Francis Dumais**

"As an Elder, a person has to have experienced a lot in his lifetime to be able to share his experiences over the years."

— Francis Dumais

Approaching an Elder or a Healer

The Elders felt that no one in the group had the authority to share all of the traditional health knowledge and healing practices with others, particularly during this gathering. They felt that people needed to know the proper protocols when approaching an Elder or healer. This basic first step was considered to be the most important teaching for individuals who wish to learn about traditional health knowledge and good health.

One needs to prepare oneself when potentially engaging with Elders about the role of tobacco, the importance of cloth (also referred to as prints or flags), and the importance of prayer and/or the pipe. It was considered important for young people to know there are different ways and teachings used by different people and nations. When engaging with healers it is also important to trust the healer and listen to your feelings with your heart.

Discussion also focused on current organizational practices inviting Elders to work with them and the need for the practice of proper protocols like an offering of a pouch of pipe tobacco when possible and/or appropriate.

Albert offers teachings about prayer and ceremony:

> *It is very important to tell people that when you pray, you pray to the Creator's helpers. The offering of tobacco and cloth is for the Creator's helpers. When we talk about our grandfathers and grandmothers, we are talking about the Creator's helpers. The Creator has many helpers. When we make a smudge, we are asking the Creator's helpers to come and help us, to speak for you. That's why we are trying to explain how to do these things. Each Elder you are asking for help should be given at least one cloth and a pouch of pipe tobacco, because you are asking us for information, right from the roots up.*
> **— Albert Desjarlais**

> *When you ask for a pipe ceremony, you have to make an offering of print and tobacco. We ask the grandfathers to come and smoke with us and to speak for us. Without the cloth, there would be nothing to offer them. To give a cloth, is like you are giving them a blanket so they are clothed.*
> **— Albert Desjarlais**

The importance of how you approach an Elder is stressed by George:

> *When you approach an Elder or a healer, you are asking that person to send your wishes to the spirit world, to the grandmother and grandfather spirits. The offering of tobacco and cloth walks ahead of everything else. The tobacco and cloth should be of good material. The tobacco should be clean. It is important to offer a pouch of pipe tobacco, like Drum tobacco. The offering is going to a good place, to the spirit world. You want to keep it clean because you are sending it over there. It has to be done properly as the Elder or healer does not wish to disrespect the grandfathers on the other side. The tobacco offering is so important in my life that every morning when I am home, I go outside and make an offering of tobacco. And every day of my life, I respect that tobacco. That's how tobacco works. It is opening the doors to the spirit world. It is saying, here is an offering, it comes from this person. And, your relative who passed away long ago is there to receive it from you, their grandchild. When you offer tobacco, you are sending a gift to the spirit world. To me, tobacco is opening the doors to the spirit world. People ask me all of the time, "what kind of tobacco? What kind of cigarettes?" This is what my teachers taught me about tobacco and I am glad for this opportunity to pass this on to others.* **— George McDermott**

"If you want to learn about medicines, then you have to come for a walk with me in the bush. When we go into the bush, we are going home."

— George McDermott

To know medicines, George speaks about walking alongside the medicine picker:

> *If you want to learn about medicines, then you have to come for a walk with me in the bush. When we go into the bush, we are going home. I can introduce you to a plant and tell you what it is. It is up to you to get to know it, to talk to it, to give it an offering. Sometimes people throw all kinds of different herbs together into a pot and boil them just because they are herbs. Some of the herbs work together and some of them can make you very ill. You have to be careful which herbs you mix together because you can hurt someone. Just like there are good mushrooms and bad mushrooms, there are good and bad herbs. You have to know which are good, without a doubt. When you pick medicine, you must pick it clean. Talk to it, my little brother. You do not step all over the medicines. You do not disrespect any plants, whether they are big or small because a small plant can be just as powerful as a large plant. That plant's life is a whole new world to people not familiar. It is a different life altogether, it is a different world view. There is nothing to be afraid of in the bush.* — **George McDermott**

Those who listen to us also guide us:

> *For those of us who are walking this trail, this is a part of our lives. The bottom line is always going to be the Elder with the pipe. He will guide us through. The bottom line is the pipe ceremony we had this morning. The spiritual guides are already here. They are listening. They were called this morning to come and listen to us to do their work.* — **George McDermott**

Michel,Tom and Francis describe offerings of tobacco and print or cloth:

> *I take the cloth and tobacco and I bring it to an Elder who is a pipe carrier. He might take the offering and put it in a safe place or they might bring it into the sweat lodge to pray for the organization that made the offering.*
> — **Michel Maurice**

> *That's their blanket, the Grandfather's blanket; it is their clothes.* — **Francis Dumais**

> *The print is very important. It protects your offering.* — **Francis Dumais**

> *Offerings are very important because they facilitate the process of the grandfathers coming. An Elder carries your message to the grandfathers for you. Elders are so kind they will not tell you if you are doing something wrong. They are so kind they will carry that for you. They carry the sickness of all the people that come to them and it can wear them down.* — **Tom McCallum**

Elders could be offered tobacco:

> *In the past, organizations used to give Elders a pouch of tobacco. Recently, in the last year or two, organizations have started giving Elders a small amount of tobacco wrapped in a tiny piece of cloth. Some organizations have a policy to always give Elders tobacco.* — **Michel Maurice**

> *There are people who are telling others that it is OK not to give Elders a pouch of tobacco. If it is a person who cannot afford to give more than one cigarette, then that is understood. It is important to learn the proper protocols.* — **Tom McCallum**

Closing Remarks

These Elders were humbled and proud to be sharing teachings as *"the words of our ancestors"* intended to make *"medicine for the mind."* **(Tom McCallum)**

> *It is hoped this booklet will be used by young people to guide them as they go through life and make the right preparations so everything will go well.* — **Albert Desjarlais**

This was the first meeting held in the series of four Métis Elders' gatherings on traditional knowledge. This group was most interested in not only what was being asked of them, but more importantly, how it was being asked. During the meeting, the Elders felt that the initial guiding questions asked by the Métis Centre represented a Western understanding of Métis health and healing. They were more inclined to teach from a Métis/Aboriginal perspective. They felt that the setting and format was not adequate or appropriate for sharing some information on how to pick and use medicines/herbs. A great deal of the teachings that they were sharing could not be translated into English, nor could they be written down.

Every Elder has his or her own method for teaching others about Métis health and healing. The participants felt that their time would be best suited to explaining some of these differences, discussing the role of Elders and describing the best way to approach Elders for traditional knowledge teachings. From their view, the knowledge does not stand alone. It is part of a larger understanding, a holistic view of the role knowledge plays in Métis communities. There was to be no shared understanding of Métis health and healing at this meeting without the understanding of how Elders and traditional knowledge should be treated.

Contributors

Albert Desjarlais was born and raised on the Elizabeth Métis Settlement and later moved to High Prairie, Alberta. Albert grew up learning the traditional ways. His grandfather practiced the traditional lifestyle in the 1800s, and now Albert has the honour of being part of the sixth generation to receive the teachings passed down in this family. Albert and Alma have been married for over 40 years.

Francis Dumais was born in Beacon Hill, Saskatchewan, and now lives in Bonnyville, Alberta. Francis' community involvement includes meeting with students to share traditional knowledge and culture. Francis spends his winters at his cabin trapping and will one day pass his registered trapline on to his family. Francis has a great deal of respect for the land, the medicines and ceremonies, and is an Elder for the Métis Nation of Alberta, Zone 2.

Michel Maurice was born just outside Green Lake, Saskatchewan. He was raised by his grandparents from the community of Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan, and now resides in Saskatoon. Michel is very involved with the Métis community through his work with the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre and the Saskatoon Police Chief's Advisory Committee on First Nation and Métis Issues. Michel works closely with youth, teaching traditional ways, and works as an Elder at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge.

Tom McCallum was born and raised in Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan, and is fluent in Cree and Michif. He loves to communicate in Cree and promotes the importance of language and how it shapes his world view. Tom has a close relationship with the land and working with medicines. He uses his traditional teachings in his role as an Elder for youth and also in his work with inmates, men's healing groups and in cross-cultural workshops.

George "Lonewalker" McDermott lives in Lumby, British Columbia, and travels extensively throughout Canada and the United States sharing his knowledge of traditional medicine. As the oldest son growing up, George lived with his grandparents and was passed on traditional knowledge about life on the land, picking herbs and medicinal ways of healing. George is often called upon to share his knowledge of herbs and of healing and knows a great deal about the land and ways of knowing and has a remarkable way of helping people physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally.

Recommended Resources

Barkwell, L.J., L. Dorion, & D.R. Prefontaine (2001) *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography.* Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute.

Battiste, M. (2000) *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Battiste, M. and J. [Sak'ke'j] Youngblood Henderson (2000) *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd.

Blondin, G. (2006) *Trails of the Spirit: The Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed*. Edmonton: NeWest Press.

Bopp, J., M. Bopp, L. Brown & P. Lane Jr. (1984) *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality.* Lethbridge: Four Worlds Development Institute.

Hill, B.H. (1995) *Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization*. Penticton: Theytus Books.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (1993) *Native Spirituality Guide*. *Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Directorate*. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) *Métis Perspectives*. *Perspectives and Realities*. p. 199-386. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.

Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Waldram, J.B., D.A. Herring, & T. Kue Young (2006) *Aboriginal Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural and Epidemiological Perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Recommended Websites

Aboriginal Portal Canada
www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Alaska Native Knowledge Network
www.ankn.uaf.edu

Galileo Education Network
www.galileo.org/index.html

Gabriel Dumont Virtual Institute
www.metismuseum.ca/main.php

Métis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre Inc.
www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca

Visions Centre for Innovation
www.visions.ab.ca

CHAPTER 2 — LIVING MICHIF: LII MICHIF NIIYANAAN

The narrators of *Lii Michif Niiyanaan* are Rita Flamand, Grace Zoldy and Norman Fleury with guest Laura Burnouf. The content of this chapter is based on their discussions in Michif about the language during a meeting in Winnipeg, Manitoba in December 2005.

Michif Elders' Gathering

This Elders' gathering provided an opportunity for a small group of Michif speakers to come together to share their knowledge, experiences and wisdom about the Michif language. Speaking Michif was an essential part of this gathering since participants shared in laughter, song and stories. The Michif Elders and guest that attended the Michif meeting often reflected on how fortunate they were to simply be able to speak Michif and discuss issues related to Michif language with other speakers. Speaking Michif leads to discussion about family and community and often included laughter and song. At the beginning of the meeting, Métis Centre staff circulated some questions intended to guide the discussion. The Elders chose to answer some of the questions directly and sometimes they took their discussions in another direction.

Everyone was asked to introduce their families and to share stories and experiences about living, learning and teaching Michif. Discussion then moved to the contribution of the Michif language to Métis health and well-being, and their recommendations to help protect the Michif language. Values, beliefs and practices are taught, shared and passed from generation to generation through storytelling and teachings, in the celebration of our survival and achievements.

"I am 72 years old — yesterday. I've been living as Michif, all my life. I talk Michif day in and day out, at home. My kids, my oldest daughter talks Michif. My other kids understand it very good. My grandchildren are starting to speak it. It's something that, before this English came in, people kind of forgot their Michif language. I mean they didn't forget, but we're using English lots. At home, it was Michif. We lived Michif. We eat Michif, Métis foods. We live the Métis life."

— Grace Zoldy

The following oral stories are a mere snapshot of the lengthy Michif discussions. The Elders felt that the most important information they could share would be to encourage readers to think about Michif. They all felt strongly that Michif needs to be promoted and preserved to ensure that future generations will continue to speak the language.

Themes explored in *Lii Michif Niyanaan* include: Speaking Michif; Living Michif; Traditional Knowledge and Michif Language; Poverty and Perseverance; Family and Relationships; Going to School; International Interest in Michif; Michif in Canada; and, Michif Resources.

Speaking Michif

Michif is a way of life and for Métis, living Michif means every day is lived in the language. Using Michif in the home at mealtimes and during family gatherings around the table with Métis foods was reflected upon fondly. Elders described how they lived Michif with their own parents and grandparents in their homes and how they continued to live that way with their own children. During the meetings, speaking Michif was described as spiritual, as being connected to the land, their homes and family kinship ties.

Lifelong Michif speaker and teacher Grace speaks about living Michif:

> *Michif is not the only language that is spoken in Camperville but my main language is Michif. There's Saulteaux, Cree, and some French. I don't speak French but I speak Saulteaux and Cree very good. I want my grandchildren to be able to speak Michif. When they come over at home, we make flashcards. That encourages me. They*

*are learning. They know what to do. They are starting to understand my Michif, which makes me feel good. When we are eating, when they are all there, we all talk Michif. One of the grandchildren used to go to my dad. He was 95 years old. She'd go to him, "*Papa, pe miichisho!" "Kékwaay?" "Pe miichisho!" *She would talk louder so he would understand. It makes me feel very good that is happening.*
— Grace Zoldy

We get together at home. One of my daughters will cook something and she'll bring it over and we'll all eat. Then we talk and we talk. They hear me talk Michif. The kids hear me talk. When I am dishing up for my grandchildren, I will tell them in Michif what I am doing. We talk in Michif. Then, maybe two weeks later, another daughter will bring something. Then again, we get together, and it's the same thing all over again.
— Grace Zoldy

My parents, my grandparents, and great grandparents all spoke Michif. In the house, I got to speak Michif, that was the only language spoken in the family. A lot of people spoke Michif in Camperville. In our home, we spoke Michif and we still speak Michif to this day. My grandmother looked after me after my mom died, and my grandfather, my father's dad. When my mom died, I wasn't a year old. These are the people that were around me all the time. They are the ones who taught me to be proud of who I am. Already they knew the nuns didn't want the Michif language in the school. They told me, never be shy of your language, and I never was. To this day, I'll talk any place, no matter if there are thousands of white people there. If I see someone over there that I know, I'll just call out, in Michif. These were my teachers and they kept me from going away from my language. I am a very proud Métis. I am very proud to be what I am.
— Grace Zoldy

Norman describes a spiritual connection to his language:

I always wondered, what was Michif? Like, afterwards, we didn't know, that's all we spoke. Then, all of a sudden, I asked my grandmother, nohkom, *I said, "Grandma, this language that we speak, where does it come from?" I surprised her, and she said, "I'll remember and I'll tell you later." Then, she said, "what you asked, me, I thought about it." She said, "you know, God made this world and people. French people speak French, God gave them that language, and, to the people of the land, he gave* Lii Kri. *(the Cree) To finish this circle, that's where we come in, Michif," she said, "our language was a God-given spiritual language, a language of the land," that's how she explained it. It is amazing for a lady that never went to school, she thought it up. She said, "I asked God to help me, so I can explain it to you."* **— Norman Fleury**

"If I see someone over there that I know, I'll just call out, in Michif. These were my teachers and they kept me from going away from my language. I am a very proud Métis. I am very proud to be what I am."

— Grace Zoldy

I am a believer in a greater power, in the Creator, I am a believer in God, because without him, the Creator, I wouldn't be here sitting with you, I am a great believer in that. God might have forgotten for us for awhile, maybe, because of circumstances, we might not have done that work ourselves. Now we are saying "let's pool our resources, let's get together." Who would have ever thought, we are all from different parts of the country, that we would be together here, talking about something where there's a need. To me that brings us together. Our culture brings us together, who we are brings us together; we are in different places for celebration.

— Norman Fleury

I was lucky to grow up with that. I didn't know anything else. I had no questions, until we got older, when we started going to school, and people started marrying out of our culture, that's when we realized we were being criticized for who we were. There was discrimination, but there was none amongst us when we were young. We didn't know what discrimination was because we were all the same; we lived. You spoke Michif to a Michif person. You never spoke it to a First Nations person, or a white person, or anyone else. We spoke Michif amongst ourselves, Lii Michif. *We were very diverse in languages. Saulteaux, they could speak Saulteaux, Sioux, and Cree, those old people. They could also speak Michif, French, very little English. That's where they had trouble, though, because they never went to English schools.* **— Norman Fleury**

Rita explains how she retains Michif:

Sometimes I can't remember a word, because I have forgotten a lot. My husband didn't speak Michif. I spoke English to my kids. So there was nobody speaking Michif, just my parents. I didn't see them that often, or my family. This little book here, brings back so many words. I have another book in Cree, with the Y dialect, Plains Cree, by Anne Anderson. It's an old one, one of the first ones. I would like to get the newer version. It helps me a lot, because of the Cree words in there. It reminds me, when I look at the Cree word, and when I look at the French word, right away I can tell which one we used. A lot of times we used the Cree vowel, instead of the French vowel, but it's mostly the French vowel that we use.

— Rita Flamand

Living Michif

Speaking Michif and living Michif are never described separately. To live Michif means showing respect to Elders and children; and the need to work to earn the respect of others. The Elders' memories of speaking Michif are drawn from a time when their parents and grandparents were still alive and their communities and homes were filled with Michif. These Elders continue to use Michif in their day-to-day lives, but are living in communities where there are few other Michif speakers. Elders show respect for their ancestors by emphasizing the importance of living Michif every day and the use of a Michif world view. Their communities and homes are where Michif is most alive for them. What they remember most fondly are those stories that live on in the Michif language.

Rita remembers living Michif in her everyday life in Camperville, Manitoba:

> *We didn't have a road going out of Camperville until 1940-something, when they first built the road, so we grew up right in the bush; we were isolated. Everyone around me spoke Michif, we were all talking Michif.*
>
> **— Rita Flamand**

Respect is an important part of family life, as Grace tells us:

> *I was taught to respect my Elders. I was punished when I showed disrespect to Elders, to my people or to anyone in general. I was taught to respect people and, mostly, Elders. Mostly my teachers, because they were nuns, they were working for God. I respected them and they didn't respect me.*

"I have to learn to respect my grandchildren and my kids, because if I want to earn their respect, I have to respect them too."

— Grace Zoldy

> *I got punished at home if I didn't do right in school. If I didn't talk right to the nun, well, I really got it at home. I have to learn to respect my grandchildren and my kids, because if I want to earn their respect, I have to respect them too. My grandmother was very, very strict; she didn't want me to ever say anything about anybody.*
>
> **— Grace Zoldy**

The small Métis community of St. Lazare, Manitoba was the place where Norman learned about traditional knowledge and Michif:

> *I was born in St. Lazare, Manitoba, roughly 250 miles from here, northwest, it is a small Métis community with a predominantly French culture; the schools, stores, everything, are all French. There are no Métis proprietors. The only entrepreneurs that were there were the traditional Métis, they were the trappers, hunters, and fishermen. They used to cut wood for the farmers, and stock and thresh for the farmers; they were actually the labourers. Lots of Métis from back home were landowners, they were land-based Métis; they owned their own land.*
>
> *St. Lazare had a rich history, but the problem is, when the old people were alive, like my grandmother, she was born 1875, and my grandfather*

was born 1873. They talked about those things vividly. Then as it was passed on, you lost it, because the speakers didn't say the same thing, they didn't talk about the same thing. When we talk about people who are gifted with history and culture, I'm the one that was given that in that family. My grandmother, she used to say, she said, "you'll tell those people, someday, because the people will want to know."

My grandmother and her father were people of the buffalo hunt. They were buffalo people, buffalo hunters. The local newspaper interviewed my grandmother's brother, who said he took part in the last buffalo hunt close to Saskatoon. My grandmother's brothers, they were young and they couldn't go, so they snuck. To prove they killed buffalo, they brought back a couple of buffalo tongues. But the buffalo were just about gone, that was one of the last hunts.
— Norman Fleury

There was no "other" way to many people at that time since they were living Michif, as Norman remembers:

I grew up very traditional because my grandparents didn't know anything but that way of life. We didn't talk about being Métis. We were. We didn't talk about what we ate and what we didn't do, we lived it. I was one of those. I'm 56 years old, and I was very fortunate to have lived that life. When I was a little boy and I first went hunting, there was an initiation in hunting. I got a rabbit, I snared a rabbit, and my grandmother said, "well, nooshishim*, we will make a feast" because she said "now, you are a little boy," that's the way they talked, now, she said, "it will be much more powerful when they do this feast," because she said, "you will carry that on," she said, "as a man, when you become a man, going through that stage." There were different reasons why we are who we are, because some things were meant to be, and some weren't meant to be.*

I think in most cases, it is your mom's family that you get to know. This is important. I am not saying the paternal side is less important, but it seems your maternal side is what gives you who you are. That's the way I see it. The women seem to have that responsibility. My teacher was my grandma, but my grandfather was also my teacher for hunting and trapping. My grandmother was one of the only women who could hunt; she could shoot with a gun, my grandmother. She would always have a little .22, and her snares, and we would go picking berries, picking medicine. We would bring something home for supper, so that was my grandmother. **— Norman Fleury**

You were talking about foods too, that was so important. Like you were saying, if I cook lii boolet *in the morning, I expect visitors. I always expect visitors because grandma always cooked lots. When Sunday came, she cooked a big pot*

"We didn't talk about being Métis. We were. We didn't talk about what we ate and what we didn't do, we lived it."

— Norman Fleury

of beans, and there was always somebody going to come. If you marry outside your culture, you have to try to teach that person because they don't understand your culture. We lost a lot through marriage to outside cultures. I still make my bannock, and headcheese. We still make all those kind of things, fried bannock and stuff.
— Norman Fleury

Some people who married white people lost their culture totally because they were in denial. They wanted to be white. Then there's a person who is older that really doesn't know who they are, that played this role of being somebody else all these years, and all of sudden gets caught up in not denying it anymore. Their family understands but they need teaching. You lose who are if you try to be somebody else. I'm a Métis and that's what made me strong. When God put you here as a Métis, you're going to die that way. What happens when you don't have it, and you are old, how do you regain that? You don't, you live some other life all your life. Live your own way, you've got be who you are, that's what important, that was my teaching. — **Norman Fleury**

Norman discusses his Métis heritage and wonders if his children know what it is like to be Métis like him:

We are third generation Métis, also fourth or fifth generation. Like my mom was a Métis, her parents were Métis, their parents were Métis, so we've come a long ways and that's where you get your culture. You don't learn culture through a book, you can understand it, but we lived it. That was the difference. Years ago, maybe you grew up in a different culture, let's say, like you grew up in a white culture, but you have a little bit of things that you heard from the grandparents, or something like that, but if you just think it, it's not good enough, you got to just about live it, and we lived it, I guess. We rode horses, went to town with the horses, picked roots and berries. So it's like my children will never be a Métis like me.

Rita agrees:

We are the last ones that are going to know that.

Norman says:

They never will be. They won't be Métis like me. They are so removed by our culture.

Grace says:

We were just saying the other day here, my auntie and I, if you take a young kid out in the bush and give them snare wire, and, say, "OK you stay in the bush for a couple or three days, and

"We also laughed. We were very humorous people, we would laugh at anything. They'd laugh at each other. They never made each other mad. They would joke."

— Norman Fleury

> *you eat off the land," they would starve. They wouldn't even know how or what to do.*

Norman knows Métis children will learn some of the ways of his ancestors:

> *They are lost. They wouldn't recognize the tracks. They wouldn't know the tracks. One thing that our kids, I think will still learn, even if they don't learn everything, will be things like sharing, love and generosity, the kind of things that regardless of who you are, or where you are, you can still teach your family, the important things in life, those kinds of things you can teach your family.* **— Norman Fleury**

Rita explains:

> *They'll never go back to the way of life that we know.*

Humour and family are important to Métis life, as Norman describes:

> *We also laughed. We were very humorous people, we would laugh at anything. They'd laugh at each other. They never made each other mad. They would joke. We also had a culture and that was very important. We had a language, a culture, family, virtues, and we knew the importance of family and relationships. We were a Nation and we knew that. We were always saying, "*Lii Michif Niiyanaan,*" they always knew they were Michif people. You don't forget who you are. They always reminded you, don't forget who you are and where you came from. People would constantly remind you where you came from, and you don't forget that.* **— Norman Fleury**

Special days, such as New Year's, were a time of reflection and celebration:

> *Our family was very, very important; that's what kept us together, our beliefs. Praying, that was very, very important. When celebrations like New Year's came, Christmas was more about Midnight Mass, but New Year's was a big, big Métis celebration. I remember my mom, they'd come into grandpa's place, and first thing they would do is they would kneel down in front of grandpa, and grandpa gave her the blessing, then she'd get up and they'd hug him, they kissed. My mom said, "well, one year is a long time," she said, "you do a lot of things, so your dad forgives you, when you start a new year." She would explain.* **— Norman Fleury**

Poverty and Perseverance

Living Michif often meant experiencing poverty first hand. Humour and remembering better times were ways to make light of the hard times. Métis are known for their perseverance through these periods. The Elders see speaking Michif and having the ability to laugh during hard times as good examples of Métis resiliency.

Hunger is remembered by Rita:

> *I remember, my mom one time, I feel so sorry, I feel so bad when I think about this. I had a baby sister, she was small and she was talking, she spoke already, "Mama," speaking in Michif, "Mama, mama,* ni nootekataan, *I'm hungry." So my mom picked her up, and while holding her, looked in the cupboards, saying, "sorry dear," she kept telling her in English, "sorry dear, sorry, dear." So, my baby sister said, "that's what I'll eat, Mama, I'll eat 'sorry, dear.'" You know, "sorry dear."* — **Rita Flamand**

Grace saw poverty a different way:

> *One day this little guy came, and he brought two little chicks under his jacket. They used to live outside of Camperville. They had cows and chickens. He came with two chicks and he said, "I'm going to sell these," he says, "I want a scribbler." I said, "I'll give you my scribblers." We kept the chickens outside then we had to bring them inside because it was getting too cold. Then when they got bigger, my grandmother killed one, then the other. We had one for Christmas and one for New Years. Just for a scribbler.*
>
> **— Grace Zoldy**

Family, friends and community members helped each other as Norman recalls:

> *Growing up in a poverty stricken environment, I tell my kids, I grew up in a third-world country environment. I remember my sister going to town, my mom gave her a little note and also a list. It was cold, she came back home, she had her toque on, she was freezing, "they won't give me nothing." We had to live with what we had in the house because her bill was too high, so they wouldn't give her anymore. We lived through it. My mom, she had eight kids when her husband died in 1945, and she had 40 cows and 25 horses. She was alone, in February, and it was cold. There you are, your husband's dead. She lived through it. That's what she said, now what would people do today? There was no social assistance, no welfare. There was nothing. She had to sell all those cows and horses before she could even get assistance, like a widow's allowance. They wouldn't say keep those and we will help you. There was just no assistance. My grandparents were next door, so grandpa helped, and my uncle used to help. They would help each other, that's the sharing. They would help each other in time of need. We were always like that. I remember old George Bear, because he was married to my mom's distant cousin, she was a Métis. He knew my mother was a widow, and he would come by with a team of horses and drop off partridge and rabbit, to help. That was a guy from a long ways from the reserve, it was 17 miles away, and he'd come and he'd help.*
>
> **— Norman Fleury**

Norman remembers what poverty meant to his family:

> *I'm not trying to say we were perfect people but I'm trying to portray a positive image because that is what we're looking for because we've had too much negative stuff in our lives. If we start talking about that, you all have stories, we all have stories, we'd be crying, there's a lot of sad stories too. Maybe that's what kept us going, is we believed. Even mom, she had a hard time to raise us all. We used to dig coyote dens, the coyotes were mounted and we used to sell pups. We used to dig Seneca root. Sometimes it was hard, I remember this one time, we always had something to eat, but this one time, I don't know what happened. Anyways, she had the frying pan, maybe that's the first time I ever had toast in the frying pan, with the drippings from meat that she'd fried. That was our meal, that bread. I remember that cast frying pan. She cooked in that. We didn't say, "is that all you got?" We didn't say that. We ate that. Poverty, it was a hard time. A lot of people had hard times. Before my uncle got his old age pension, he had a hell of a hard time, because he was old already trying to work for farmers. I went to visit there one time. She had tea and she had a can of peas. I don't know where she got them from, she boiled them, and put bread in there, and onion, and she made a soup. That's what we had. She invented her own soup. We never said anything. We did see hard times too. And she shared.* **— Norman Fleury**

Norman's grandfather shared with everyone in his family:

> *Grandpa used to butcher two pigs every fall. I remember, we used to put them in a little shack and he would cut all that meat up. When the girls come, his daughters and his son, he shared it all. I was wondering, why do you give all your meat away? "Those are my kids," he said. That was sharing. If he didn't share, he would not have slept well, he couldn't live with himself. If you had lot of something, they'd always give to their kids. That's one thing we did was to share all the time. That was a big, big virtue.*
>
> **— Norman Fleury**

Family and Relationships

Use of Michif language kinship terms *(nohkom, ma taant, mon nohk, mon kozin)* should be recognized as a widely used method of identifying one's Métis identity. Michif kinship terms were often used with great affection, and retaining the use of these terms is critical to the continued use of Michif. The names and terms described important relationships in the Métis community. Importance of the extended family in Métis communities was, and continues to be, key to the health of Métis.

Strength in continued language use is seen by the Elders to reflect strength in community. To these Elders, a strong Métis community is one where we can still hear the vibrant Michif language.

Respect was shown by referring to family members by their kinship names as *ma taant, mon nohk,* as Rita remembers:

> *Learning about respect is something you learn when you are growing up, to respect, definitely our Elders, our grandparents, the old people, always, always, that was something we never laughed about. We had to respect the old people. We didn't call them by their names, our aunts and uncles, we never said their names, it was* ma taant, mon nohk. *Today, children don't say uncle, they don't even say that. We would have got heck if we didn't say* ma taant, mon nohk, *to never call them by their first name. We always respected, right from when we were young, all the people around us were respected. We didn't look down on our uncles and aunties, because they couldn't speak English, a lot of times. Later in life that's what happened, when the kids realized their parents couldn't speak English very well, they were kind of embarrassed about them and stuff like that. We would have never, ever disrespected our cousins, aunts, or uncles. It was one big family, with everybody.* **— Rita Flamand**

Norman echoes Rita when he speaks about family and kinship terms:

> *At one time the old people used to talk about who they were related to, not any more. You never hear people talking about that any more. Even if you weren't related that close, you were related. The relationships were very, very strong. My grandmother used to always call her cousins,* moñ kuzeñ, *or else,* moñ freyr, ma seur. *First cousins, especially when the mothers were sisters and the dads were brothers — that's when they would say,* moñ freyr, ma seur. *That's that relationship, that's how it came to be.* Ni moshoom *(my grandfather),* nohkom *(my grandmother), my grandmother's brothers and sisters were my grandmothers and my grandfathers. They were my grandparents. Like my grandma's brothers and sisters, or my grandpa's brothers and sisters, they were my grandpas and my grandmas. That was the kinship. If my godchild has kids, my godchild's kids are like my children. And my godchild becomes like my own child. Their children are like mine. My first cousin's kids, too, you got to respect those children very much. My grandpa always told us that.* **— Norman Fleury**

"Learning about respect is something you learn when you are growing up, to respect, definitely our Elders, our grandparents, the old people, always, always, that was something we never laughed about. We had to respect the old people."

— Rita Flamand

"They were not teachers. To me, today, I see these people were not professional people. They were there just because the government wanted to say we got them teachers, which they weren't."

— Grace Zoldy

> *That's where we got our teachings, through the grandparents and extended family unit. But our expectations, we expect so much sometimes, then all of a sudden, they are gone and there are no more teachings. That's where you are lost. We took for granted a lot of the things, and that's what happened, they disappeared. All of a sudden, you are living your life, you look around, there's no more* kohkom *(grandmother), and there's no more* moshoom *(grandfather) — they're gone.*
> **— Norman Fleury**

Going to School

Since Michif was spoken at home, the Elders were first introduced to the English language when they started going to school. As young students, they were rapidly and in some cases, quite traumatically exposed to the schools' civilization, assimilation and aggressive christianization. Many Métis families were dedicated to Roman Catholicism but the devastating assimilation of the Catholic schools and Residential Schools in and around Métis communities was often described as extreme and served to erode and displace Métis cultural values and practices. The Elders spoke candidly about their time at school.

Grace remembers "learning" English:

> *They were trying to teach us English, but we didn't know it very good so we had to speak Michif. The way they taught us is they would cut a scribbler in half, and we'd use one part to practice our ABC's, A first, A, the big A, the capital A, and then the small a, maybe for a month. Really. They were not teachers. To me, today, I see these people were not professional people. They were there just because the government wanted to say we got them teachers, which they weren't. That's the way we learned in our school. That's why today we don't have an education, because we were robbed of our education.* **— Grace Zoldy**

School seemed to be focused around discipline and prayer, as Rita explains:

> *I didn't get respected back by the nuns, I remember a nun saying, when I was just a little girl playing in school, "I thank God I wasn't born an Indian." At that time, they didn't call us Michif, they called us Indian. Imagine her saying that, to us, in school. I remember we used to pray so much. Like in the morning, we would go to school, we would kneel down and pray, and then just before we went to recess we would kneel down and pray, and then again, when we came back from recess, and it was going on and on, pray, pray. So this one time I went to school, my sister Rose was in class and one of her friends, someone came and told me in the yard, she said, "oh, your sister is getting strapped and somebody else is going to get strapped in the school." Holy smokes, I ran inside the school, it was during the noon hour and the teacher was just going to start giving*

them the strap. I just yelled at her, and I said, "no! You're not going to give my sister the strap." I said, "I'm not coming to this school anymore anyway," I said, "all we do here is pray, pray, pray. Look at my knees." That's true, my knees were just kind of looking like, flat; it's true! That's all we do here is pray anyway, I was just yelling at that nun, and they were going to get strapped. Already my sister was crying, to beat. So anyway, I just took off, I went home, and my dad said, "what are you doing?" I told him, I quit school. I got mad at the teacher because she was going to strap my sister. You know what he did? He brought me back to school and the nun made me stand in the front and apologize to her in front of everybody, what I said and everything; that's the only reason they let me go back to school. **— Rita Flamand**

Children often ran away from the terror experienced at Residential School. Rita remembers how she and other children had to go and see children who had died while trying to escape:

When somebody used to die, it didn't matter how cold it was, we would have to walk to the mission, all of us kids, to go and look at the dead body. A lot of those kids when they ran away from school, those Indian Residential School kids, when they came back, they would shave their heads completely, and they'd sit them in front of that church, so they would be embarrassed. Those poor kids sat in front, with their heads down, so embarrassed, bald heads. This one time, this one girl, she caught cold when she ran away, and she died. How many of them? I remember them. They were from way up north. Not from Camperville. That's Indian Residential School. My mom was in the Residential School, and she had a nervous breakdown at 12 years of age, in the Residential School in Camperville. When I think of that…
— Rita Flamand

Grace explains more about the children that ran away from Residential School:

Lots of them would run away; they'd find them in the fields, running away from the school because they were far away from home. They would find some of them frozen, in the bush some place. They weren't running on the road because they would be caught right away. They would run by the fields, away from the road, and they would freeze. **— Grace Zoldy**

Speaking Michif in school was not allowed, as Grace tells us about her time at a Catholic day-school:

It was different than the Residential School. We went home after school. The residential kids stayed in the residence and they couldn't speak their language, that's how come they lost their language. There were lots of them from all over the North. In the village school where we were taught by the nuns, we were not allowed to talk our Michif language. The teachers from the Indian Residential School taught us. They told us that Michif was not a language. That's the language we spoke at home. No matter what the nuns did, we never forgot our language. Today, I am so proud of my Michif tongue, I will do what I can so that our language lives on.
— Grace Zoldy

Traditional Knowledge and the Michif Language

Traditional knowledge is embedded in Michif words and in the Elders' stories and songs. Michif teachings are specific lessons taught by Michif language speakers, known generally as 'traditional knowledge'. Specifically though, information transmitted by Michif speakers is usually Métis-specific and originates from a specific community or region.

Traditional teachings and practices that the Elders learned from their ancestors are shared with us in a respectful, kind, loving and humble way. The Elders' discussions were guided by a list of questions focused on how they learned many traditional teachings through their use of Michif. Health is viewed holistically, where the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical are inter-connected, and where sharing stories from the heart, *"that's our medicine, that how you heal."* **(Norman Fleury)**

Traditional knowledge is not necessarily known by everyone:

> *You've got to make yourself aware, that not all Métis or Indian, or First Nations, people know this stuff. Many people are hungry to know, some of them don't want to know and don't care. For those that want to learn, it is a teaching. Some of our people have been so far removed from that. Our grandmother was a medicine woman. But now we are so far removed from it, all they know now is peppermint tea. They don't know the other medicines, but they'll talk about it. This will be a good start to try to teach it again. It is a teaching tool. Because when the Elders are gone, there's nobody else going to do it if it's not taught. But some things are sacred and they don't teach everything. There are some things you don't teach, in book form. You got to leave it to somebody in the community that is interested. That is the one that will walk with it and take it. Not everything goes in a book.* **—Norman Fleury**

To Norman, *ni maamaa* was the foundation of the family:

> *We are fortunate that we lived that life or I wouldn't know that. My grandma always told us, she'd always say to respect your relatives, your family. Not to marry your relatives. Because she said, "it's not good." We talk about the First Nations people who always say Mother Earth which makes a lot of sense because the mothers are the ones that are the foundation of our families. Like it's always, mother.* Ni maamaa. *She is 103, my mom, and she will be 104 in June. She lives alone in Brandon. She always says, "mama," at her age, she still says, "mom." That was very important to them. My grandmother was also a midwife and a medicine woman. Every time she's sore, she says, "if mom was alive, she would be healing me."* **— Norman Fleury**

Norman learned many things from his grandma:

> *My grandma, she taught us all these things to respect with, because she lost her mother when she was younger, but she learned, she had medicine people that helped her to learn,* lii michin, *to learn medicine. All her daughters, my mom had four, five sisters and their brother's wife, my grandma brought all of us kids all into this world. There was nobody else. They never saw a doctor, not once. Even miscarriages, she gave them medicines, stuff like that. She also talked to me about when you prepare medicines, the importance of preparing medicines. She also said the importance of praying, when you picked your medicines up, she said, "you pray there. If you don't have tobacco," she said, "you just kneel down." They used tobacco, lii Michif, at one time. Grandma used to use it, because you know why? It was a Cree woman that taught her those medicines, so that's what she used to do, my grandmother. She also taught us the importance of celebrations like Easter.*
> **— Norman Fleury**

Our grandmothers are our historians and teachers:

> *My grandma never went to school at all. She was the historian, the teacher, she was everything in our family, my grandmother was, the whole works. She tried to teach everybody. She'd say to the little girls that were going to be reaching puberty, she'd say, "your grandmother will come and visit you." We were wondering, who was our other grandma, like we'd hear her say that to the little girls.* **— Norman Fleury**

"Don't treat people wrong. That's another teaching that our grandparents gave us. Not to hurt people. The law, that's it. Living in harmony with others and nature. They always told us, 'don't ever abuse anything.'"

— Norman Fleury

Rita responds:

> *It's been a long time since I heard that. It's so nice to hear these things when you are in these meetings because you forget that stuff.*
> **— Rita Flamand**

Norman says:

> *That's what my grandma used to teach us too, if you abuse somebody, you're going to have bad luck. Don't treat people wrong. That's another teaching that our grandparents gave us. Not to hurt people. The law, that's it. Living in harmony with others and nature. They always told us, "don't ever abuse anything." I remember going hunting with my grandpa, and there was little rabbit in a snare, it wasn't dead. I was just a little guy, you know how you're like when you're small, you think it's like a cat, or a little dog. Grandpa said, "we won't have a good hunt, you'll give us bad luck," he said it in a certain way, there was another way that he said it. There was another teaching, right on the hunt.*

They didn't wait 'til you got home, they taught you right there, to do this, to put it out of their misery, right away, that's something I learned then. I tell people that we are very fortunate that we have the right family, the kinship.

— Norman Fleury

Michif is tied to traditional Métis knowledge, and thus, health and healing as Norman shares:

We have tried to relate our language as best we could into the health field, trying to have an understanding, that it's got not only to do with headaches, and not only to do with heart, but it's also got to do with your feelings, psychologically, mentally and physically. When you are talking about the kind of things that are meaningful to your heart emotionally, you can feel it emotionally also, like that's medicine, sharing stories, that's our medicine, that's how you heal. You don't necessarily have to take a pill every time. It's psychologically that you heal; the storytelling is how you heal through this process. That's the way I see it. When I talk about my history and traditions, it's about an inheritance from my family, like I inherited these things. My grandma healed tuberculosis. She was a medicine woman.

"When you are talking about the kind of things that are meaningful to your heart emotionally, you can feel it emotionally also, like that's medicine, sharing stories, that's our medicine, that's how you heal."

— Norman Fleury

Now I have to say to myself, how interested am I to retrieve some of those medicines, those traditional herbs, and who is going to put them in proper perspective, or is it just a story?

— Norman Fleury

International Interest in Michif

Michif has sparked interest from around the world. Linguists and academics from Europe and the United States, as well as from across Canada, have met and worked with the Michif speakers in this group of Elders. This wide interest from people outside Métis communities has provided a great deal of encouragement to Michif speakers. An increased demand for Michif resources has meant these Michif speakers have had to refresh their Michif language skills. Elders take pride in sharing their first language with an international audience. These Elders continually remind us how important Michif should be to all of Canada since it is a truly Canadian language. Promoting the Michif language in Métis communities is essential to raising awareness of the language and of living Michif overall.

Rita and Grace are both Michif speakers living in Camperville, Manitoba and have welcomed many friends and visitors interested in Michif into their homes. Rita remembers:

I ended up moving back to Camperville after a while and getting married in my home town. I have eight children, 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. I started thinking about the Michif language about 20 years ago. When my kids were older, I thought I've got to do something with my language, where do I

start? I was out there in the bush. There are people who speak Michif in the community. There were dictionaries of the Ojibway, Saulteaux, and Cree languages. I thought, what about the Michif language? There was no dictionary. When people want to do something, and you are really adamant, you try and think of ways to do it. There I was at home, thinking what can I do? My grandparents were dead. My parents were dead. I was thinking, how can I get this language of ours out there before I am gone also, then there will be no one speaking Michif. All these people that speak the language are my age and if we go, then the language is gone.

— Rita Flamand

While I was thinking all this, one winter evening, somebody knocked on my door. I went to the door, and there was this whiteman standing there, a university professor from North Dakota. He said, "I hear you speak the Michif language! We are doing a dictionary of the Michif language." I though he was kidding me, I just couldn't believe it. There are hardly any roads there, in the bush where I live. I invited him in and he played tapes of people talking and singing in Michif. He was going to these places where people speak Michif to get material. He came to see me a couple of times. I was so glad to be doing Michif, with a professor, yet, I said to him, "I'm not surprised you are from the States. They don't do things like that in Canada; they don't even know our language here in Canada." That's that Michif dictionary I have, that's the one. Did he ever lift up my spirits when he come and told me they were doing a dictionary. I was just so excited.

A few years later, Peter Bakker, came to see me. I was just leaving to go to Winnipeg in my truck. There's just one road coming to my house. I met this guy coming on a little bicycle. He's a white-man, so I opened my window and I said, "yes, who are you looking for," and he says, "I am looking for Rita Flamand." I couldn't believe it. I said "that's me." He said he's a linguist from Denmark. He learned about this language, this impossible language, he called it, because these linguists heard about this language that was part French and part Cree. It was all mixed up and they thought it was too hard. He said that's why nobody studies that language, Michif, because it's too complicated. That's what they say, it is an impossible language. Just like the platypus, that's how unusual it is, so they don't want to study it. He came to Canada, and he was staying with Métis people all across Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and the States. By the time he came to my place, he was already speaking Michif, would you believe. Because he's a linguist, he knows all these other languages. He came to see me about this Michif language, too. It was wonderful. He would go everyday with his little bicycle uptown to visit people that speak

Michif. He'd tape them and come back in the evening with his little tape recorder, and I would listen and help him. It was so nice.

— Rita Flamand

After that, another person came to find me out there in the bush. He was a reporter from Toronto; his name was Geoffrey York. He came to interview me about the Michif language and it was right in the front page of the Globe and Mail. *My sister-in-law, who lived in Toronto, said her husband left for work and picked up one of those papers. He saw my name, and my picture in there, and said, "what the heck is Rita is doing now?" This is how my Michif started, there were all these people who came.*

— Rita Flamand

Grace also worked with Peter Bakker:

Like she said, Peter Bakker came and he was talking Michif. My dad and him would go to Duck Bay, where ever there were Michif people, they would go out there and visit. They made all kinds of tapes. Peter gave me tapes that he made with Métis people in surrounding area, even in North Dakota. He has made a lot of tapes with us.

— Grace Zoldy

Michif in Canada

In Canada, there is an increased focus on Michif as an endangered Aboriginal language. The Elders in this group have seen decades of change on the state of Michif language in Canada. Despite this attention, Michif is still in danger of extinction, and increased awareness on the state of the language still needs to gain support. Technological innovations have meant changes to language instruction and have helped create Michif resources that have increased communication between speakers and language learners. The Elders had an optimistic view on the future of Michif in Canada and provided suggestions on effective ways to promote it.

Rita talks about participating in national Michif gatherings. She illustrates the regional diversity of Michif:

I have attended the annual Michif conference. It brought all the people who speak Michif together for the first time, and we got a good sense of the Michif language as it is spoken by the people that were there. We've had about four conferences now. We were going through a learning experience, finding out who speaks Michif. It was an eye opener for me; that's what those Michif language conferences did for me. It made me aware of the way we speak Michif in Manitoba, with part French, the Michif language. The more west you go, to Saskatchewan and Alberta, you start to lose the French nouns. I have heard some speakers up in northern Alberta where some Métis people speak Michif French. The Michif that's spoken in British Columbia comes from Manitoba. It went all the way to B.C. I notice the Michif over there are originally from the Winnipeg area, from

Manitoba. But now I am thinking, OK, that's enough now. We had a few good sessions of becoming aware of what the Michif language is about, how it sounds. I realize different provinces speak a bit differently. Some use the French, some don't. It gave me a good understanding of how Michif is spoken in all of Manitoba. In Ontario, they are mostly Saulteaux, and they have a different Saulteaux than we do. They speak it a little different, a different dialect. But I would like to hear them more. What I would like to do is give any available funding to the people who speak Michif, who have Michif organizations, who are truly just Michif. Let's do something with the standardization. You are writing it different. I am writing it different. Everybody is writing it different. Let's get together and let's amalgamate and have one standardized Michif. I think if we are going to say this is Michif, we should get together and standardize it, let's all write it at least the same way. We can all speak it all different a little bit. Each area would use their dialect, whatever way they use. Because Michif is so different. You can't measure it with English, or you can't measure it with French. Michif is a unique language all on its own. It should stay that way and we should deal with it that way. **— Rita Flamand**

Grace discusses the uniqueness of Michif:

Leave it as it is, because it is unique. There's no way you can change it. That's what Peter [Bakker] told me. He told me the Michif language is one of the most unique languages in Canada. At an annual assembly, he said, "if I was the Prime Minister of Canada, I would make Michif the first language." He's working hard on Michif language all the time. He's worked on Michif for a long time. **— Grace Zoldy**

"He said, 'if I was the Prime Minister of Canada, I would make Michif the first language.'"

— Peter Bakker (as told by Grace Zoldy)

Writing and Teaching Michif

International researchers seeking out Michif speakers in a small, isolated community in northern Manitoba raise questions, concerns and possibilities. Much of the research is being done by academics in other countries. Why has Canadian scholarship around Michif not been nurtured? The Elders felt that more attention and resources should be paid to the protection and study of Michif in Canada.

There is a great deal of debate about writing and teaching methods for Michif. Since this language is critical to the health of Métis communities, it is in need of effective and ethical modes of transmission. The Elders in this group discussed several options they have applied to teaching and sharing Michif.

Developing a writing system for an oral language is a great accomplishment. Rita shares her excitement about teaching Michif:

My girlfriend that lives in Winnipeg told me there was going to be an Aboriginal interpreter's course at Red River College. They were going to be teaching Michif, Ojibway and Cree. She said, "why don't you try and go?" And I said, "holy

"I'm 74 now. When I was 70, I said, 'I am going to just devote my life to Michif language.' I don't know if I'll be able to remember anything by the time I'm 80. So that's what I've been doing."

— Rita Flamand

smokes, that Michif, they're going to teach Michif, well, of course, I'm going to try." So I got sponsored and I went to Red River College to take that course. There were 16 Ojibway and five Crees. I was the only Michif. Nobody spoke Michif but me. I took that course, and from that course, I learned the writing system of the Aboriginal languages, the double vowel system. When I came home, I thought, well, why not? I can develop it, I can develop it into Michif, use the double vowels. Part Cree and part Saulteaux, some of our language, some words are in Saulteaux. That's when I started developing my own writing system. **— Rita Flamand**

I've had all these people looking at my work. I would do it this way and I would do it that way, until finally I developed my own system. I would like to have the Michif language standardized so we can all use it. That's where I am at with my Michif language. I am passionate about it. I got myself a computer; I have been working with the computer and sending e-mail. I figure I have a good writing system for the Michif language. Its different than the Turtle Mountain dictionary, which is an excellent Michif dictionary, but it's good, that Michif dictionary is excellent. I am still frustrated with nothing constructive happening with the writing system of the Michif language. If we are saying we want to standardize it, let's do it the proper way. Let's all get together and see how we can put all our work together and just have one system, have it standardized, so we can start doing Michif work, Michif books and stuff like that. That's where I'm at, living in the bush. It's nice out there. I like doing my work in the peace and quiet by the lake. I am ready to get that Michif language off the ground. **— Rita Flamand**

Anytime we have anything to do with Michif we are excited. Many years ago when I started my Michif, so much has happened with the Michif language in spite of thinking that nothing much has happened. When I first started, there was nothing. No Michif, nobody was speaking Michif. Just us back home, but to go out, you never heard anybody, or anything about it. **— Rita Flamand**

When I was a little girl I used to go and play with Grace. I'd go to her grandma's and her grandma would be reading something, a great big book. I'd go there and look at it and think, what kind of chicken writing is that? Then I thought to myself, what is that, what is that? I never forgot that. Ever since those days when I went to your grandma's place, I never forgot that syllabics, I was always thinking about how it was written. **— Rita Flamand**

I'm 74 now. When I was 70, I said, "I am going to just devote my life to Michif language." I don't know if I'll be able to remember anything by the time I'm 80. So that's what I've been doing. **— Rita Flamand**

Grace and Rita share their experiences teaching Michif using an apprenticeship method. Grace tells us:

> *We had that immersion where they come into our homes and live amongst the Métis people, just learning Michif. This is what we have done. I think we have really done good, because these people talk Michif. It's a very good program. I wouldn't mind to see people coming into Camperville and living with us and learning Michif. They say it's hard, but to me it's not hard because I live it. I can't blame some people when they say it's hard, it must be hard because I know there's an awful lot of stuff that's hard on me, even in English.*
>
> **— Grace Zoldy**

Rita responds:

> *I had an apprentice living at my place. This is what this apprentice program is about. It is an immersion where you have a student living in your house with the Elders. The old person, the senior, he talks to them in Michif, all day with everyday things, and it's an immersion, you are right there with the Elder; they just talk to you in Michif, Michif. What the student used to do with me, we used do it in the morning, and then he would go to Grace's in the afternoon, and go talk to Grace, and Grace's dad, he was still alive, the old man. That is the way we did it, he stayed at my place. There was no money. And I'm an old age pensioner. I was doing this for free for the language. I thought this is my contribution to the Michif language.*
>
> **— Rita Flamand**

Michif Resources

Creating accessible resources for Michif language learners and speakers is critical. Many of the Michif speakers and teachers are elderly and in rural or remote areas. Many Elders, including the ones in this group, have been creating resources solely from their own desires to preserve the language. With little or no funding, supplies or collaborative support, the Elders have run an immersion language program and have created written teaching resources. The future of the Michif language and Métis culture relies on access to and promotion of Michif resources.

Grace discusses some of the barriers they face in working on Michif resources:

> *After I found out about my Michif language, I tried to encourage other people, other Michif people. I tried to explain to them exactly what Peter [Bakker] had told me, this is very important. Now, there are a lot of people that are taking a real interest. They want to be able to learn and speak in front of their kids. That's probably the best way to start because there are people like my cousins who all speak Michif, but they use it only amongst themselves, when the kids are not there. They don't speak it in their families, and the kids are left out. Some of the teachers are getting the mother to talk to the kids in Michif. Now today, they are just starting to come together and they are all talking.* **— Grace Zoldy**
>
> *There are people who are going into the Michif language but it is a disadvantage in not being around it all the time. But they are taking a real interest in Michif and that's one of the good*

things. At least this way, we know when they see something written, they know it's not dead. I want to see some books in Michif. Even though I am starting to learn to write Michif, it's kind of hard for me. I've translated prayers. Some are being used by a university. They asked me, so I sent a couple of pages of my prayers. They phoned and they told me they were very, very happy to get them and that they are going to put them in a book with different languages. **— Grace Zoldy**

It would be nice to have a little centre where we can keep things on the Michif language.
— Grace Zoldy

Gatherings and a long-term commitment to Michif are important, as Norman tells us:

When you are talking about different stories, this is just the beginning of Métis, you are not going to get it all, in a few days. We could sit here and talk about different stories, you can talk about your spirituality, about governance, or justice. There are different areas that you can cover; arts, medicine, there's so many things you can cover and it would take forever. The thing is you have to make sure you have good gatherings. You just don't come in for a few days, let's do that work and get out of here. That's not good enough, that doesn't give respect to what you are trying to get out of the work. Because you can't rush anything, like this morning, we were sitting the three of us, we could have sat there for how much longer, we were talking, and the first thing we said, "oh, it's ten after, we've got to go." That's the way it is, we touched on many different subject areas this morning, we talked about different things. It would be nice if there were cultural camps for Elders, also, not only just youth, but cultural camps for Elders, a cultural camp where there is an old log house with an old cook stove, where you could go and visit, with beds, and other comforts, that's what you used to do.
— Norman Fleury

We've talked about things for too long, now we have to learn if we want to use those things, we have to identify the proper people in our communities, we still have people out there who are interested in learning, who have potential, that we could invest in, to say, let's get some money and send them to learn from the Elders. This is just a beginning, but there has to be continuity in everything we do. If you just say well, we had some meetings and we tried, and that's it, that's not good enough. You're not going to go anywhere with it. That's not your fault. Your heart is in the right place, but if you don't have the money to carry on, it won't go anywhere. Where there are health needs, there should be no boundaries. It's like the Michif language should have no boundaries. We should be able to work together. I am here because I am going to help other people; I am going to help share with other people. We used to have these meetings, and I said, "where there's language, there's no boundaries." We should help each other. Money's the big problem, and I don't think you can always measure success with dollars and cents. We are learning from each other. This is putting us on the map, mentioning who we are and what we are all about, recognizing the speakers and talents in the community. **— Norman Fleury**

Grace shares:

> *When it comes to meetings, these people hurt me lots of times when they come out and say, "this is what we should do," and that is where it stays and nothing happens. You know, it just builds up my hopes sometimes.* — **Grace Zoldy**

Summary

Michif speakers speak from an Aboriginal language perspective and they speak about a way of life, of 'living Michif.' Well-being and holistic health were connected to the Elders' views about Michif language throughout the discussions.

Language motivates them and aligns their view of Métis life through their Michif words, stories and songs. Michif language is accompanied by an unparalleled pride and enthusiasm for Métis people and culture. Their desire to maintain a distinct identity when they faced a lifetime of assimilation and colonization is admirable and demonstrates the power that Michif language has for Métis.

The Elders emphasized the importance of revitalizing the Michif language. In their decades of living Michif they continue to explore the best methods to teach the language. They hope that their stories will encourage younger Métis to learn Michif. Daily use of Michif, remembering stories in Michif, singing in Michif, using Michif kinship and relationship terms, recounting community histories, discussing words and seeking the advice of other speakers are all ways that the

Elders hope to revitalize the language. Creating an open and welcoming dialogue on Michif can also help build pride and strength in Métis communities.

Michif is not simply an endangered or 'dying' language. It still has an impact on many areas of Métis lives, especially for these Elders. What this work on the language does is to highlight and emphasize the importance of revitalizing Michif. There is an imminent possibility of the language disappearing, but as our Elders and communities still live Michif today, it is not gone yet. Creative and innovative approaches to teaching the language, along with dedication, will ensure Michif is spoken for generations to come.

Contributors

Rita Flamand is from Camperville, Manitoba. After completing an Aboriginal interpreter's course at Red River College in Winnipeg, she became one of the first people to work on the development of a writing system and dictionary of the Michif language using the double vowel system of the Ojibway and Cree languages. Rita has worked as a translator, teacher, and nurse, and is a master Michif speaker. She has developed conversational Michif lessons for beginners that include audio CDs available at the Métis Culture and Heritage Resource Centre Inc.

Norman Fleury is a translator, educator and writer of the Michif language. His achievements include co-developing educational materials such as a Michif language CD and video documentaries, writing a Michif dictionary, and developing handbooks on Michif and the Métis. He is presently director of the Michif Language Project with the Manitoba Métis Federation, chair of the National Michif Working Group with the Métis National Council, and, chair of the Council of Indigenous Elders Group in Brandon, Manitoba. Norman continues to be an active and proud member of the Manitoba Métis Federation where he was a founder of the Southwest Region. He has also worked as an administrator, counsellor, life-skills instructor, health worker and researcher. Norman lives with his wife Ruth Anne, daughter Chantelle, and son Marc, in the small farming community of Woodnorth near Virden, Manitoba. Norman's mother, Flora Fleury, is a great inspiration to family members. She continues to reside in her own home in Brandon, Manitoba and celebrated her 105th birthday on June 22, 2007.

Grace Zoldy was born at home in Camperville, Manitoba in 1933. Grace dedicates her life to teaching Michif and has volunteered her time for over 40 years working with the Michif language. She has hosted language immersion students in her home over the years. Grace lives in Camperville, Manitoba and says she has "lived her life Michif." She still speaks her Michif language at home day in and day out. Grace has a son, two daughters and six grandchildren who are the "apple of her eye" and the "love of her life." Her hobbies involve the outdoors. She enjoys harvesting herbs, making teas and cooking anything.

Recommended Resources

Bakker, P. (2002) *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics, No. 10). New York: Oxford University Press.

Barkwell, L. J., L. Dorion, D. R. Prefontaine (2001) *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography.* Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute.

Barkwell, L., R. Flamand and N. Fleury (No Date) *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin: The Heritage of the Canadian Métis. Volumes 1 & 2.* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications.

Campbell, M. (1995) *Stories of the Road Allowance People.* Penticton: Theytus Books.

Government of Northwest Territories. (2003) *Cree Language Children's Series. NWT Language Program.* Fort Smith: Northwest Territory Métis Nation.

Manitoba Métis Federation. (No Date) *Canadian Michif Language Dictionary.* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications.

Métis Resource Centre (No Date) *A Michif Colouring Book for Children. Illustrated by S. Dawson.* Translated by R. Flamand. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) *Métis Perspectives. Perspectives and Realities.* p. 199-386. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.

Recommended Websites

Aboriginal Languages Initiative
Heritage Canada
www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pa-app/progs/ila-ali/index_e.cfm

Aboriginal Portal Canada
www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Gift of Language and Culture
www.giftoflanguageandculture.ca/index.html

Kid's Stop — Languages, Michif Language
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/5060_e.html

Louis Riel Institute
www.louisrielinstitute.com

Métis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre Inc.
www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca

Métis Nation of Ontario — Michif
www.metisnation.org/culture/Michif/home.html

Michif and Métis Cultural Site
www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/creelang/

Pemmican Publications Inc.
www.pemmican.mb.ca/

Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture
www.metismuseum.com/main.php

CHAPTER 3 — MÉTIS WOMEN AND FAMILIES: WE GOT A MOOSE, MOM!

"There are many, many stories. It is important for us to get these down on paper, because when we are gone, who's going to tell these stories when the Elders are gone?"

— Rose Boyer

The narrators of *Métis Women and Families* are Angie Crerar, Rose Boyer, Marilee Nault, Alma Desjarlais, Rose Richardson with guest Karon Shmon. The content of this chapter is based on their discussions about Métis women and their families during an Elders' gathering held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, January 2006.

Métis Women and their Families: *We Got a Moose, Mom!*

This Elders' gathering brought a small group of Métis women together to share their knowledge, experiences, and wisdom about themselves and their families. For these Métis women, family histories go back a long time — six or seven generations — to the arrival of the first European men, many of whom worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and married First Nations women. Each spoke of their mothers and grandmothers as teachers and role models whose memories they continue to cherish and revere today. The many conversations about family relationships show that the most important teaching is the centrality of family.

There were poignant stories about the loss of a parent or parents, of displacement and relocation, and memories of hardships experienced while growing up in poverty. Despite this, there were also joyful and humorous memories about childhood and growing up as Métis women. Strong feelings of love and respect for parents and family members was demonstrated in the pride with which each talked about the challenges and successes of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The Métis Centre asked the Elders to think about some questions intended to guide the discussion. For the most part, these questions were answered and elaborated upon. The Elders were asked to tell us how traditional knowledge practices contribute to family health; how to live a healthy life; and, to identify issues and share their experiences about their families and communities. Each was asked to introduce their family and extended family, to share stories about growing up, and thoughts on the roles and lives of girls and women.

The women discussed the different challenges faced by Métis children, youth and parents. They identified experiences that affect Métis health and identity today: Residential Schools; absence of a father at home; child abuse; family violence; threat of sexual predators in the community; poverty; prejudice; discrimination

or racism; foster care, foster care in non-Aboriginal homes; drug and alcohol use, abuse or addiction; and gangs, school violence or bullying. The Elders at this gathering felt that these experiences significantly affect Métis health and identity today.

The information in this chapter is a result of the lengthy and enthusiastic conversations the Elders had with one another. The following themes were explored and included: Courtship, Marriage and Family; Life at Home; Sexuality; Residential School; Education and Achievements; and, Religion and Spirituality.

Courtship, Marriage, and Family

The importance of knowing one's relations and family genealogy is viewed as a core of Métis identity. Of note is the size of extended families over three generations ranging in number from 30 to 50 to over 100 individuals (including foster children). This is in sharp contrast to the size of today's smaller extended families. Children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are valued highly by these Elders.

Learning how to look after children is considered an important teaching. Each child is recognized as having a unique talent or special gift. It was stressed that it is up to each of us to help children to explore and discover their talents and gifts. There is also something to learn from the experience of failure. Listening, caring, sharing, respect, and self-respect as qualities that need to be taught to help children and youth thrive.

In their roles as Elders and advisors in their communities, some of the women faced special

challenges in working in schools with youth who may come from homes where there may be child abuse, family violence and/or substance abuse. Bullying and youth violence were described as common occurences either at the corner store or when grandchildren were going or coming home from school. The need for support for youth who are in trouble or victims of violence, support for the family unit, and to Elders as caregivers in the community were stressed.

Angie discusses her relationship with her family:

> *My mother died when I was very young but I remember her teachings and I live by it today. I still miss her but I know that she is by me; I have never actually lost her, not spiritually. For me, it's been hard growing up. It is hard without a mother. Especially when I had my younger brothers and sisters to look after; we did it because it was a way of life. There was no such thing as welfare. There was no such thing as children being taken away because the next relative looked after the children. Children stayed within the family circle. I have raised a lot of children in my family, my nieces, my nephews. And it is a way of life for us; we just took them into our homes and our hearts and did the best we could. We shared everything that we had.*
>
> **— Angie Crerar**

> *My dad was very proud when he was telling us stories about how he met my mother. My mother went in the convent in Fort Providence. My Aunt Colombe (Mercredi), was walking to church with my mom one day, and the men were all there, eyeing the convent girls, looking at them. My dad went to my grandfather, and said, "that woman there, walking with Colombe, I want to marry her." Grandpa went and talked to the priest. He found out her name was Rosie Taniton. She was an orphan and her parents had died from the plague. She was taken from Tulita (formerly Fort Norman) to Fort Providence. She had two brothers that were alive that she never saw again. That's how he met my mom and married her. He always said he loved "my Rosie." After my mother passed away, we knew he was lonely, we said, "dad why don't you get married again?" He said, "no, there will never be another Rosie." Mother died January 15, 1948. My dad passed away January 15, 1978, exactly 30 years to the day after her.*
>
> **— Angie Crerar**

Angie's mother wanted to ensure her children were well prepared for life and love:

> *I remember as a child, my oldest brother, Freddie. One day, all of a sudden he dressed up his dogs. He had a dog team. All dressed in ribbons and bells and away he went. I was too young to*

"Children stayed within the family circle. I have raised a lot of children in my family, my nieces, my nephews. And it is a way of life for us; we just took them into our homes and our hearts and did the best we could. We shared everything that we had." — Angie Crerar

understand then. All of sudden we hear all these bells and we see a woman in this sleigh going up and down the river, about three or four times, going past. Then he comes; he brought his future wife home to meet my mother. Mom was very nice. She started questioning her, "does she make bannock, did she sew?" She wanted to make sure she was prepared. That was the courtship. In those days, it was taking a woman, giving her a sleigh ride, advertising to the whole community, taking her down the main drag, showing, she's mine. Later on I asked about it. That is awesome, bringing your bride home to your mother. I love that. **— Angie Crerar**

We got a moose! Angie's father taught her to be humble and to say "we" rather than "I":

When I was five, six, my dad made me a little carry-all. I had my own two-dog team. I used to go out on the trapline with my dad. They had a small one-room cabin, with a little heater, apple box, and bunk. We used to stay there overnight when we went to the trapline. Then we'd come home next day. I felt so good. "We got a moose! We got a moose! We got a moose, mom!" My dad taught me how to say "we." Not so say "I," to say "we." He taught us a lot of things. My dad is my role model; he always has been and he always will be; both, he and my mom. I live today to make them proud of me because I love them so dearly. Without them, I wouldn't be half the woman that I am today. The love they gave us was unconditional. Didn't matter what we did. He'd say, "why'd you do that?" I'd go, "Dad, I didn't mean to do that" and he'd hug me. That's what I missed most is the hugs, after mom died. After that we went to Residential School. There's a tradition in our family we carry on. When we meet each other, we hug. We are a very close family.
— Angie Crerar

"I felt so good. 'We got a moose! We got a moose! We got a moose, Mom!' My dad taught me how to say 'we.' Not so say 'I,' to say 'we.'"

— Angie Crerar

Rose Richardson remembers her mother fondly during hard times:

I grew up just like everybody else; we were dirt poor and starving half the time and learned how to live off the land. I was raised by a single parent. My mom raised us because my father deserted us when we were really young. We were raised by strong moral standards and virtues. We talked about kindness, gentleness, cleanliness, thankfulness, and reverence to one another. Sunday was the day we should revere the Creator and it was a day that we didn't work. Everything was all prepared the day before. We put out our embroidery and everything. We put up embroidery curtains, just for that day. It was really important to us.
— Rose Richardson

I remember my mom as being very kind and gentle. She never raised her voice at us. I don't remember getting any physical discipline. If

anything happened my mom would just tell a story. Or, if you looked in her eyes, you knew if it was wrong. — **Rose Richardson**

Angie's parents and grandparents were her teachers and she teaches her children:

It is very important that we never lose sight of what we've been taught by our parents and grandparents, because we are who we are by what we've learned and how we've lived. We can't lose that kind of life because it was the foundation of who we are today. My childhood was my happiest time, and from then on as an adult I had to work to enhance the gifts and values that I live by. — **Angie Crerar**

There are some things I will leave behind to my children, the way you tell stories, sitting around and telling stories to my grandchildren, about what life was like when I was young. It is so different from today. It was a different world altogether. They can't understand there was no TV, no radio, no roads, no cars; it is hard for them to understand. So, I start by telling them a story. Close your eyes; imagine this… and it really works, they love it. They say, "I can really see it!" — **Angie Crerar**

Love for one's family builds unity in the home. Angie explains:

There was so much love in our home. My dad would always say to us, "you've got each other. You've got to have unity. Be there for each other." Another thing he taught me was to take pride in my heritage. He'd say, "you are Métis, don't

you ever forget it, be proud of who you are. You are not going to have an easy life. Métis never do." He told me, "you have a special gift in you. You have leadership skills, you have a gift and you have to use it. Do not be afraid to make mistakes, you learn by them. Some days you won't succeed, some days there will be successes. Some day you are going to help there to be a Métis Nation. They will take their rightful place in society." He was talking like that, 60, 70 years ago. I am so proud and happy to have played a small part in achieving some of the things that were started more than 100 years ago. Each of us has something special, that's part of you, it grows like a seed, it grows and spreads. Every one of us has that special thing. Sometimes we don't recognize it but it's there. Other people recognize it. — **Angie Crerar**

By speaking to many people and living a positive life, you are able to learn many things:

> *My dad taught me that you've got to believe in yourself, you've got to believe you have it in you. Be courageous. Talk to people, don't be afraid to talk to people, you learn that way. If there is a problem, don't be afraid to go to somebody. When somebody comes to you, never, ever turn them away. If you don't have the answer, look for an answer. Never go to bed with an unkind thought or hate in your heart. Forgive and forget. "Kindness," he said, "is something that you give; you don't give something and say what are you going to give me? You give with your good heart. Someday it will come back. It may not come to you, it may not come back to your children, but it will come back to somebody that needs it in your community."*
>
> **— Angie Crerar**

To Marilee, her mother was wise and taught her about raising children:

> *The teacher that influenced my life the most was my mother. We spent a lot of time with my mother. She taught us how to clean, to care for ourselves, to cook, and to appreciate what we had. Sunday was always a time that we shared together as a family at dinnertime. You could guarantee, it didn't matter how many were around the table, whether there were six or eight of us, there was always chicken and mashed potatoes.* **— Marilee Nault**

"The most important teaching for me was learning how to look after children. They were giving me lessons on how to care for children in the future, my own children, and other children as well."

— Marilee Nault

> *The most important teaching for me was learning how to look after children. They were giving me lessons on how to care for children in the future, my own children, and other children as well. I got married at a very young age and had four children. To this day, I really, really care for children and I work with youth groups twice a week. I have foster children, we have been fostering for 14 years. We raised one of our grandchildren.* **— Marilee Nault**

Rose Boyer and her mother were good friends. During the school year she lived with her aunt and uncle. She learned many things from both of the women in her life:

> *My aunt looked after us during the school months and we would go back on holidays to stay with my mom and dad in the bush camps. It was my aunt who taught me how to iron, to embroider, and make breakfast. My brothers, two of my brothers and myself, went to live with my aunt and uncle. I was eight, and my two brothers were seven and six years old. We went to live with them. The boys had to saddle and harness the horse in the morning to a buggy or a cutter in the wintertime. They were only six, seven years old. I had to make the porridge and the lunches. During those years of growing up in school, I*

learned to sew on mom's sewing machine. It was given to my mother when she turned 65 and my grandmother was 105. That sewing machine was very, very old then. My mother gave me that sewing machine. I learned to make a pair of pillow cases and I gave those to my aunt. Those were my two most important teachers, my aunt, who was like a second mother to me, and my mother who was so dear, so dear to me. I often tell my children, when my mom passed away, I lost my best friend, I lost my mother. She was everything to me. I don't ever remember raising my voice in my entire life to my mother. In fact, I would take her part, I was so fortunate to have a friendship with mom.

— Rose Boyer

Alma is very close with her family and teaches her children about traditional ways:

We are a close family. We try and teach the kids our way of life which we put aside for awhile. We also use herbal medicines, the traditional medicines. Our grandkids help us pick medicines. We do a sweat lodge, we sweat with our grandchildren, and they all sing with us. I think that is what brings us together to be a close family.

— Alma Desjarlais

I always tell my children to do the best they can on their own, to teach their kids the right things. It is very hard for young people to raise children with so many things distracting them, and to get involved, even at school.

— Alma Desjarlais

Rose Richardson explains how children were cherished and taken care of:

There was a lot of caring and sharing. Now we hear little catch phrases, like it takes a community to raise a child. Well, long ago, before there was interference, everybody was so caring. They looked after one another and after one another's children. If there was a pedophile in the community, that pedophile didn't go off to jail, that pedophile was identified by everyone in the community. If you saw that person walking down the street and there were kids walking by, the kids were pulled off to the side. You would say "come here," and they would be taken home by another adult, or they would just be helped. If a family was drinking, the welfare was not called. The family would go there and get the children, or somebody would go there and look after the children for somebody else. It was because people felt a responsibility to look after children. Children were regarded as very special because they were everybody's future. It brings so many memories back.

— Rose Richardson

Life at Home

Each of the women was taught from a very early age to contribute to the family household. Lessons taught by their mothers and grandmothers included "never give up," "believe in yourself," "forgive and forget," "give with a good heart," and, "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." Caring for one's younger brothers and sisters was a norm as was being taught by one's mother, aunt or grandparents. Families looked out for one another and when someone in the community needed help, there was someone in the community to offer assistance. All took pride in learning how to sew and embroider. Lessons were learned in

observing both positive and negative behaviours in family and community.

Marilee tells us how she kept the housework going as her mother also worked outside the house:

> *My mother tried to teach us how to cook and clean, to look after ourselves, but it seemed like I was the one who always had to do the house cleaning and keep the place going and stuff because my mother worked too. We were poor. I can remember my mother used to make us underwear out of flour sacks, we had to wear them. We didn't have a choice.*
> **— Marilee Nault**

Rose Boyer remembers how children made contributions to the household at a young age:

> *I live here in Saskatoon but I come from the Road Allowance People, one of the clans, from the Glen Mary district. My mother died at the age of 67. Fortunately, right now 13 of us are living and the oldest is 74, my brother. I remember my brothers going out to work in the bush at the age of 11 and 12 years old, cutting logs in Green Lake. They would go out at four o'clock in the morning, to go and work in the bush cutting wood. They were men at the age of twelve. As the oldest daughter, I helped raise my brothers and sisters. I learned to make bannock, to iron and wash at the age of seven and eight years old. Today you would never see a child that age being able to do that. They would never survive. We survived those kinds of things because we had to, we had to do it. I never complained, you never complained. There were five girls and we'd fight over the flour bags. It's my turn to get one, to get whatever. This particular one stuck in my mind. It was called Buckeye flour, and you couldn't get the printing out. My mom made panties, bloomers, and it had Buckeye in the back. Mom used to go out and snare rabbits. We always had rabbit or something on the table. She made a big garden.* **— Rose Boyer**

In the old days, Rose Boyer recalls her life on the Freeland:

> *That reserve was there and we had the white community which was Glen Mary, the Swedish and Norwegian people, and we were in between. We were proud Métis. We weren't called Métis, we were called Halfbreeds. "There's the Halfbreeds." We would go to school and they would say, "here come the kids from the Road Allowance,"*

we were the Road Allowance kids. To me, it never really hurt me that much because it was the way of life, because that's what we were and I was kind of proud of that. They moved us from the Road Allowance on to a piece of land. They gave us a little piece of land to build a house and moved us up to what they called the Freeland. So when we went to school, it was "here come the kids from the Freeland."

— Rose Boyer

When Alma moved to the Métis Settlements, her family left their Elders. She learned a lot from her parents and she shares that knowledge with her children:

I come from East Prairie Métis Settlement near High Prairie, Alberta where we moved in 1969. We moved with four little kids and had four more over there. We left our old Elders where we moved from, so we were on our own over there raising our kids the best way we knew how. We carried what we learned from our parents, like preserving food, canning, having a big garden. To this day, I do that. I make my own jams. I still have a garden. I try and teach my kids that.

— Alma Desjarlais

"They moved us from the Road Allowance on to a piece of land. They gave us a little piece of land to build a house and moved us up to what they called the Freeland."

— Rose Boyer

Hard work and creativity were a part of life at home for Rose Richardson in her youth:

We were hard workers and because we were poor, we learned to share and appreciate what we had. Because we were poor, we learned how to survive, make a garden, to hunt, and we learned how to do beautiful work. I can't remember how young I was when I learned to sew, because we couldn't afford things that came in the Eaton's or Sears catalogue. We looked at that for our designs and we found old clothes, an old jacket, and you pulled them apart and re-designed them.

— Rose Richardson

Angie speaks about making do with what you had, as well as sharing with others in need:

Everything in those days was made from flour sacks that you used to bleach. All our curtains, our tablecloths, bed spreads and pillow cases were all embroidered. She taught us how to embroider, how to work with beads, but most of all what she taught us was what's in here, inside us. This I take very seriously. Something that I live by is to never say anything about anybody. If you can't say anything nice about anybody, don't say anything at all.

— Angie Crerar

Share what you have. We learned to share at a very young age. I remember my mother making bannock and saying, "take this to that woman down there." So I would run, I'd take that hot bannock over. And when my dad killed a moose, it was all divided. Even when we went fishing, everything was taken to someone, maybe

someone who had just lost her husband, or taken to that one, over there. I am used to sharing, it is a way of life for us.

— Angie Crerar

The values and respect taught by my mother kept me, that is why I survived it because it was so different. I was happy as a child. I remember we did things together. We did all kinds of different games. We all had chores; we had to do our chores. I don't remember ever talking back to my parents. We did family things. I remember lying down and mother telling us stories. I remember a few of those stories today. Some of them were hilarious. She was a very happy-go-lucky person.

— Angie Crerar

Listening and hearing are valuable lessons that Angie learned:

I am still trying to find out who I am. My dad always said I have a special gift and I am still trying to figure out what it is. What is it that I have to offer? We all have a reason to be here. What's the reason for my existence? I educated myself a lot by listening, by talking to Elders, and hearing. Listening and hearing are two very important things that I learned over the years. Sometimes you listen but you are not hearing. That was taught to me by an Elder at a very early age. I do a lot of educating to the non-Aboriginal people in our community. I am educating them on our culture, where we come from, who we are.

— Angie Crerar

Alma recalls crafts and life by the lake:

When I was growing up, most of us lived in log houses. We lived by the lake. My role models were my grandmother and my mother. Back then, even though we thought they were poor, people were very clean. Log houses were always clean. Everything was ironed. And there was lots of embroidery work. People put out their best on Sunday. We went around with my grandmother picking roots. My mom was always sewing to help my dad out. She did beadwork and made moccasins. Another thing I remember doing when we were kids was digging Seneca root, selling them and making money. Picking berries, canning them, and selling or trading for other kinds of foods. We learned a lot of good things.

— Alma Desjarlais

"Wintertime was the time of storytelling. Generally there were Elders, or your parents who would tell stories. They would tell all kinds of stories with morals in them, with the objective to keep you at home." — Rose Richardson

Hard work was a fact of life for families:

> *Women, they all worked hard along with the men and they never complained. So did the kids. We created our own games. I don't think we were ever bored. I guess the greatest thing they taught us is the family, the family life. We carry it on, from my grandmother, my mom and us, teaching our kids. But the herbal stuff comes back after getting older. I enjoy doing that and I always think of my grandmother. I wish she had taught us more but she didn't. I think they waited for us to be old enough to be taught anything. I try and teach my grandkids what kind of plants they are and they help us pick them.* — **Alma Desjarlais**

When Rose Richardson's family was together, storytelling was an important activity:

> *It was little games that we learned to play together. Wintertime was the time of storytelling. Generally there were Elders, or your parents who would tell stories. They would tell all kinds of stories with morals in them, with the objective to keep you at home. There were a lot of stories about spirituality and the supernatural.*
> **— Rose Richardson**

Teachers can provide valuable lessons through storytelling:

> *I have a lot of teachers in my life, some teaching me what I wanted to be, like my mom, and others teaching me what I didn't want to be. A hobo is the one that taught me that I wanted to travel because he came home and he would tell all these beautiful stories of where he'd been. He'd jump on the train and he'd go places. Then he'd send letters home to his mother. To me, that was brave. I knew that I'd never be a hobo, I would have to work to get to places. That's what life is all about. Life is what you make it. We can look at all the positive things we've learned and pass it on, and we also can talk about some of the negative stuff to make sure we're the ones that put a stop to them.*
> **— Rose Richardson**

Sexuality and Parenthood

Discussions about sex or sexuality were taboo for these women when they were growing up so sex education was not a norm for young women. Sex, and in some cases pregnancy, often occurred without previous knowledge or discussion with parents, relatives or caregivers. There was frank discussion of the challenging realities faced by young mothers today in lone parent households. The Elders had little sympathy for men who ignored their responsibilities as sexual partners or as parents.

An absence of traditional teachings about women as sacred and givers of life was discussed by all in attendance, none of whom were given an opportunity to learn these teachings in their youth. To respect women as givers of life, to

teach self-respect to young girls and women, and recognize children as gifts, are teachings that need to be shared with children and youth today.

Angie talks about the limitations of her education and the different education her daughter received:

> *The nun took all the girls from 13 up in the solarium, the little ones went to bed and she told us, "now you are going to go out into the world, we are not going to be around, you are going to be on your own, with your families, your friends. There will be no one there telling you what to do every minute. When you're out there, you are going to meet boys. And you're going to like them and they are going to like you." She told a story that really didn't explain anything, so we really didn't learn anything or learn about boys and girls. That's the way it was explained to us. I heard it again, every year after that, same thing.* — **Angie Crerar**

> *When my children were growing up they had sex education in school. I explained to my older daughter that women were special in having the power to give life. That was something that women should be proud of. That's why women are more powerful because they can create life. They said we took that in school but they liked the way I said it — for girls to respect themselves. I said, "don't forget there's consequences to your actions, in being sexual. If you're having sex, there's consequences and responsibility." I scared the hell out of them, I think. Anyway, the way I look at it, the way how we dealt with these things, we did it with love and understanding. And they do the same thing. I've got granddaughters now. Now, they plan these things. We didn't believe in birth control. I think that's why there were so many children, the way we were brainwashed by the Church. I felt so humble every time I had a child, who am I to create this life, look at this beautiful baby. It is awesome. Sometimes we are in a mad rush and forget to be thankful, to be grateful.* — **Angie Crerar**

The transformation from girl to woman was not taught thoroughly, as Rose Boyer explains:

> *When I had got my period my mom said, "now you leave the boys alone. Don't play with the boys." I didn't know what she meant. I thought she meant, like, playing house outside because I was still a little kid at heart. I suppose she wasn't taught how to talk about it, so she didn't*

know how to tell me. I learned from having children and trying to explain it to my girls and my boys. Then my boys wouldn't listen to me, they thought I didn't know anything, they wouldn't listen. I've taught every darn one of them how to wash the floor, dishes, their clothes, to iron, and make meals, every one of my boys. Today their wives, are they happy! They know how to do it. I taught them — if you get a girl pregnant, you damn well better be responsible because that girl is not going to pay for it on her own. **— Rose Boyer**

Youth today experience peer pressure about sex which complicates life, as Rose Boyer explains:

I see what men do to young girls. Like coaxing them to have sex, getting them pregnant and then leaving them high and dry. The men seem to get away with everything and the women, the girls, are always left with whatever — could be a transmitted disease, or pregnancy, and they are the ones who have to bear the punishment without protection. Then there's the peer pressure in the school. There are several that are pregnant right now. What's happening to society? Is it the girls and the boys fault? No, I think it's us, as grandmothers and mothers, we are partly to blame. We should take responsibility and open up and tell these kids, this is wrong, this not the right way. I don't know what the answer is but I would like to hear some other views, though, maybe that is the way we can fix things that are broken, by listening to others. **— Rose Boyer**

I think somewhere along the line, the whole idea of a warrior and manhood got lost along the way too. A warrior at one time was a man who looked after his family, was a hunter and made sure that the family had enough food. He looked after the family. All of a sudden, manhood became how many babies you can have.
— Rose Boyer

"A warrior at one time was a man who looked after his family, was a hunter and made sure that the family had enough food. He looked after the family. All of a sudden, manhood became how many babies you can have."

— Rose Boyer

Alma shares the support her granddaughter received during menstruation:

One of my granddaughters had her first period. Her mom called me to come and be with her, to bring some things for the giveaway. Where they live, some of the families do a lot for their girls. They kept her in a house with an old lady for four days. They tied a scarf on her head. They brought in a woman, the young girls who are going to be having their period and the ones that have already had their periods. They sit around and teach them to make crafts and different things. They taught her cooking and how to clean the house. Then we sat around talking to the girls. They also said when a young woman starts having her period for the first time, that she can heal people with her hand. That's the first time I heard that. Anyway we went through that for four days. On the fourth day

they invited four women with their pipes. They came and did a ceremony. First, they smudged four places and we followed her. There were two doors, a door here and door there, smudge here and there. She carried water in a little pail, that is life, water, and they piled little sticks at the end of her journey, there. We followed her, with the ladies praying. Then she picked up the little sticks, and gave them to us. I told her I would take mine and put it in the fire when Moshom *(grandfather) makes a sweat (lodge). Then we went in and they started the pipe ceremony. They had two older women, one younger, and a young girl, serving the food. They had a giveaway of all the things we made and the gifts we brought. All women; it was so nice. That's the first time, at my age, that I saw that.* — **Alma Desjarlais**

Sexuality was so taboo that Rose Richardson recalls never discussing anything about her body:

It was almost taboo to talk about these things. Like you, I never had anybody tell me about (becoming a woman). It was a shock to me; it was a shock to my body, to my whole system.

"They had two older women, one younger, and a young girl, serving the food. They had a giveaway of all the things we made and the gifts we brought. All women; it was so nice. That's the first time, at my age, that I saw that."

— Alma Desjarlais

I still couldn't tell, I'd lie quietly and not get in the way of anybody. I don't know why I had these beliefs. There are other girls in my family and they certainly didn't grow up with the beliefs that I grew up with. Like I grew up thinking that if you kissed a boy that you would get pregnant. That didn't happen. I missed out on a lot. We didn't talk about things like that. When you ended up getting your period for the first time, maybe it was the second time when you finally told. Then they just said, "oh, her grandma came to visit her." The next time they said, "her grandma's visiting her again." Finally I made the connection. I gradually learned on my own. I didn't talk to friends about it. It was common. I grew up. — **Rose Richardson**

She discusses how she learned where babies come from:

I grew up doing a lot of work, working with my sister, raising her children. I never really knew where babies came from. I heard about Planned Parenthood, and figured family planning is when you get married and you say, "OK we will have a baby." The doctor told me, "listen, do you know where babies come from?" I said, "of course I do, do you think I'm stupid or something, I'm grown up, I'm married, of course I know." He said, "talk to your sister-in-law." I thought, oh, yeah, forget it, I know where babies come from. Then the doctor asked me again, "do you know where you came from?" I said, "yes." I said, "well, you know it was this way. I was born in October and there was snow on the ground. My mom said a white rabbit came by and dropped me off at the door so a rabbit brought me." We didn't have storks, a rabbit

brought me. He said, "you have to talk to your sister-in-law." But then of course, I never did, because I knew my sisters-in-law. Then the shock, when I had a baby, "what is happening?" I didn't know. After the second, and third, I finally got the grip of what was happening. The last one became family planning. When people say, how come you only had five? I'd always say, well, I finally found out what caused it.

— Rose Richardson

Residential School

Residential Schools in Canada had and continue to have devastating intergenerational impacts on Métis and other Aboriginal families. The schools' aim to 'christianize, civilize and assimilate' generations of Aboriginal children in Canada affected many Métis families on a very personal level. Children were removed from their families for anywhere between one to 14 years. Separation from parents, cultural annihilation, abusive treatment from Churches and clergy, separation from communities and siblings and overwhelming assimilation attempts were just some experiences that left many Métis and other Aboriginal families with intergenerational traumas. The Elders at this gathering, especially those who attended the schools themselves, had strong feelings about the schools and they made it clear how the legacy of these schools continues to affect them today.

Descriptions about the beauty of one's culture, and shared laughter of childhood games played during childhood or family contrast with the darker and painful memories of Residential School, described by one Elder as "unbearable." Still today, there is tremendous grief and sorrow expressed at the mention of revisiting some painful memories as children or youth. Experiences are recounted in painstaking detail bringing in sights and sounds, from decades long since passed, and bringing moments into the present, evoking emotions that are both positive and negative, long since tucked away. There is a keen desire expressed by all to examine the past, recognize and acknowledge any harmful or negative experiences, to heal.

Angie remembers the loneliness and hardships experienced at Residential School:

Like when I was growing up it was so different then. I went from one world into an entirely different, cold world. I felt alone and lonely so many times. There were about 120 girls in the Residential School. On the other side of the building, were the boys. I had a lot of cousins there. We were not allowed to even speak. They

tried to take my identity away. They told me I was a savage. I was not a Halfbreed. Those days we weren't called Halfbreeds. They put us down. When we spoke out, we were punished. We were not allowed to speak. Their way was the only way. Otherwise we would go to hell if we didn't listen to them.
— Angie Crerar

Residential School broke ties and trust between the Church and Métis people:

I spent more time on my knees that anything else. I find a great big difference in the way I was brought up compared to when I was put in the convent after my mother passed away. That's when I first encountered cruelty. I found the nuns to be hypocrites because they would tell us that they came there from the love of God to teach us, yet what they did was brainwash us. That's the first time I was hit, the first time I was called savage, and the first time that I ever learned to lie. We lied to protect ourselves. It took me many years to get over it. I don't lie. It's against all of my principles. But in there, we had to. And then you had to live with the guilt. I also went to confession and made up lies, too. What would we do in there? **— Angie Crerar**

Angie was often punished for speaking up at school:

I get very emotional when I talk about that because it is something I buried for many years. They would say, "I love God, that's why I left my home and family just so I could teach you savages." To me that was degrading. I always talked back because I was taught to speak up for myself. Many, many times I was punished because I stuck up for the others. I had two younger sisters there. One thing I did make a promise, because my mom and dad were both in Residential School, that when I got old enough, it was going to stop. When I was married, I took two sisters out of there. My children, my nieces and nephews, all the rest, will never see those doors again. I made that promise. **— Angie Crerar**

We were fortunate the government finally saw the error of their ways and closed all the doors of the Residential Schools. After that, another system was created, called welfare, where our children were taken away and are still being taken away. I speak very strongly about this. I work with the provincial and national government on issues pertaining to our children. **— Angie Crerar**

Education and Achievements

Education, like schooling, is key, as is learning that takes place in family homes and the community. The Elders spoke passionately about their love of learning, both formal and informal education, viewed as critical to individual survival and essential for Métis. Values such as trust and respect, knowing how to listen and to hear what is being said, are important. Sharing, helping others, and thinking positively, all contribute to our learning and education as Métis women, as healthy role models in families and contributing members to communities. For most of these Elders, learning how to care for family came before attending school.

These women's successes as role models and mentors within their families and communities were celebrated. Each of the women held in common working within their communities to contribute to the health and wellness of Métis, particularly with children and youth. Some advocate on behalf of Métis rights and all speak about the need for funding and resources for programs and services for Métis. These Elders, they take pride in saying they "walk their talk." There is a critical need to share and develop traditional cultural and health information resources amongst Elders for use in their work and respective communities.

Angie prioritizes continuous learning in her family:

> *Every year I take life skills to try to improve myself and to be able to help others. My experiences and life's hard knocks are what really have taught me. I've always tried to improve my lifestyle by taking training. I do a lot of training and keep education as a priority in our family. All of my children have careers. My grandchildren are following in their footsteps. But it's not only family, when you live in a community, everybody's family. We are all very close, we work at it, we try to help other people.*
>
> **— Angie Crerar**

> *Education goes on and on, every day. Today, I learned lessons around this table. It means listening and hearing what people are saying. Sometimes you can feel the hurt when people are talking. You can feel when they back off and when they want to go forward. You can feel it. You can also feel the friendship. Maybe if I share my feelings, I will help someone. I have been lucky in my life. I work very hard at happiness. You can't expect to be happy all the time and not work at it.*
>
> **— Angie Crerar**

"Maybe if I share my feelings, I will help someone. I have been lucky in my life. I work very hard at happiness. You can't expect to be happy all the time and not work at it."

— Angie Crerar

Community recognition is an important achievement:

> *I have received many awards in my life. One thing that touched my heart and made me really proud of who I am and the people that I worked with, is when I was voted Elder by the community by about 300 people. I cried at that meeting; I was totally honoured. Since that day, I represent our region as Elder at many, many tables.* — **Angie Crerar**

Marilee is proud of her identity and her ability to speak about issues she cares about:

> *I don't have a high school education. I've always had to fight for everything I've learned. I was very young when I got married. My education has been in one-room schools and learning to fight for who I am and to be proud of who I am. My life's work and my education is raising children, teaching children right from wrong, in working with children and instilling in children the importance of education. You have to have an education to get anywhere in the world now. I used to be very quiet and shy and I wasn't very vocal. Somewhere along the line, you get tired of listening to negative things in your life and you start speaking up. Now I can go to any conference and speak to any issue. I am not afraid to get up there and speak in front of people. I've been asked to do a lot of presentations because I am very vocal. I look directly at the people and I never speak on anything that I don't believe in. I have to believe in something before I get up and speak. Everything I've learned, I've learned hands-on. I deliver workshops and I have worked at the national level. I am really*

> *proud of what Métis youth are doing at the national level to bring education to youth.*
> **— Marilee Nault**

Rose Boyer loved school and aspired to be a teacher, which she now realizes she is:

> *I was good in school. I was an exceptional student. I was on the top of the list. I loved it. I had all A's, A+'s in my report card. I showed it to my kids, they said, "Grandma, Mom, were you ever late a lot of times, you were absent." I really loved school. When my dad took me out of school at the age of 14, I actually cried because I wanted to be a teacher. That was my goal in life, to become a teacher. I guess I did become a teacher. I became a teacher. I became a nurse. I became a doctor. I became all of these within the home, with the teachings of these two women who taught me. They taught me well.*
> **— Rose Boyer**

"It's important for us as grandmothers and mothers to tell these kids that, not only is education important, but it is also the day-to-day things that are just as important."

— Rose Boyer

Education and learning happen over a lifetime:

> *When I look at the term, education, it is a lifelong learning. It starts from day one to the end of our life. We encourage our kids to get Grade 12 and to go on with their education. Education is lifelong learning and we, as grandmothers and parents, also have to teach at home. Society puts an emphasis that we have to have that education, to get employment, to get a job, make money and to make a living. That's all the way down the line. It's important for us as grandmothers and mothers to tell these kids that, not only is education important, but it is also the day-to-day things that are just as important.* **— Rose Boyer**

> *I didn't graduate either. I was taken out of school when I was in Grade 8. I was 14 years old. I went back to school after my husband got sick and I had to get a job. I went back to school and I got my Grade 12 through the community college in Prince Albert. I took a hairdressing course and a cosmetology course. I graduated and became a hairdresser. Then my husband got sick. He had a heart attack so we had to move to Saskatoon so he could be close to the hospital. I had to quit my job there and became a mom and a wife again, to help to look after him. That was my education.* **— Rose Boyer**

Alma learns many ways, from many people:

> *Education covers a lot. You learn a lot from other people. You see lots and you learn from there. I think you learn to get along with people. I guess that is why we stress to our kids to finish school. We also get our education from the way we were brought up.* **— Alma Desjarlais**

Rose Richardson's education was based on where she lived:

> *The system dictates what type of education we need for the environment we live in. When I live in the bush I need to be aware of my environment, the way the animals behave, the weather, and everything else. The education I would need is based on where I live. At one point in my life, money dictated what type of education I needed, the amount of rent I would have to pay, because I couldn't just go live in the bush and make myself a bush house. I had to work to pay rent and utilities. Obviously, the direction now is academic needs. You can't just go work anywhere without an academic background. Your education is dictated by the environment you choose to live in. I could probably survive in both worlds, but that was because I had to work hard to make sure that I created opportunity for myself and my children. I really worked hard when I went to school to get my bachelor of education degree. I knew people who encouraged me. I am so proud that we now*

have Native organizations that foster academic programs with support systems in place to help young people to cope and survive. There were none when I went to school.

— Rose Richardson

Religion and Spirituality

There is a shared sense of pride and belonging when talking about one's spirituality and relationship to faith. The practice of religion, in comparison to spirituality, varies depending on the individual. Although these women were raised in homes where religious practices, daily prayer, and attending Church were held in common, leaving the Church at some point was a shared experience. Everyone stated they were spiritual, in prayer and in their daily living. Overall, these Elders valued their spirituality highly. Some had experienced or struggled with a perceived tension between religion and traditional practices and beliefs. Most of the Elders reconciled these divided loyalties through acceptance or acknowledgment of a belief in higher power. Everyone indicated that their faith contributed to their own personal health and wellness. For most of these Elders, spirituality is ingrained in their lives and practiced daily.

Angie practices her spirituality throughout the day:

I pray all the time. Yesterday, I prayed on my way here. It doesn't have to be in a church, with your neighbours talking about how people are dressed. You hear that when you go into church, and there they are, praying. It's your lifestyle, its how you live, inside and out. That's more important than going to church and criticizing everybody else. I am a very spiritual person. I pray at all occasions. I pray from my heart. I don't go, "Our Father", and cite the rosary, I just pray for what is needed. **— Angie Crerar**

Now I believe in God Almighty, he's all love. I believe there's a Creator and there's a reason why we are here. My role, what is my role? I keep learning all the time, trying to get that bad feeling out, but I buried it and once you've buried something, it's hard, it's really hard, cause you are never truly ever happy because you haven't dealt with the issue. But to me, spirituality is here, inside. I know I am not alone. I have prayed many times and I feel comfort. I feel at peace so many times. And I am not in a church, I'm not in a building. I could be out walking. I could be doing anything but I talk, my thoughts are up, I always pray up.

— Angie Crerar

Happiness often takes work, as Angie reminds us:

I've come through a lot, lots of my life has been spent dealing with these kinds of issues. Some of us go through hell on earth. We do our punishment here on earth by all the trials and everything that we go through. In order to gain our own happiness, we have to work at it. I am not as troubled as I once was now, because I've dealt with some issues. But there are times, especially with Residential School, where it goes down again. Now, we've started a healing journey. I'm still not quite ready to really open up because it is too painful. There are a few things I will bring up, but I still find it hard. — **Angie Crerar**

I think one of the biggest things in my life, after I lost my mom and we were put in the school, is that it felt like nobody cared. I felt alone, and helpless. That's the ugliest feeling in the world because you knew, no matter what you did, you couldn't get out. Where you lived, there was fence. But I don't want to go there. Spirituality has helped my life. I have bettered myself because I learned to know who I am, and I know I have a lot to offer, because of my knowledge, my expertise, around people, like you. — **Angie Crerar**

I went to Sunday school and was in the choir. I can still hear the Latin taught to the boys. It was the boys that were taught how to respond in Latin. I found a big difference between the incense we had in Church and sweetgrass. I related more to the sweetgrass because, not only does it make me feel good, I really believe in it. It makes me feel so good after I cleanse all those thoughts. Sometimes, you get frustrated, or hurt, or you think, what's the use? I use sweetgrass and I feel so good, like Mother Earth. I relate to it more.
— **Angie Crerar**

Marilee reminds us that prayer can happen anywhere, at anytime:

I'm Roman Catholic and was raised Roman Catholic. Always went to Church on Sundays and sang in the choir for years and years. When I got married and started having kids, I didn't have time to go to Church. I have always felt all my life that you don't have to go to Church to be able to pray. I try to pray every day. — **Marilee Nault**

Respect for other's beliefs is important:

To me the biggest thing is respect, respect for each other's religions, that it comes from the heart, that it's you, yourself that wants to do it or you, yourself that does it because you want to. There's a big difference between the Catholic religion and the Aboriginal way.
— **Marilee Nault**

"When I got married and started having kids, I didn't have time to go to Church. I have always felt all my life that you don't have to go to Church to be able to pray. I try to pray every day."

— Marilee Nault

Rose Boyer remembers how religion was experienced in her community:

I wasn't raised a Catholic. I was a Protestant, Anglican. We were raised in a very spiritual home. I didn't know anything about Catholics or the other religions around us because the community was all Anglican, Protestant, even the reserves. In our home, we never went without having prayers in the morning before we went to school. We had a prayer for each meal. It was just a way of life; it was just something we all did. Each of my aunts, and my mother's sisters, kept their mother. My two great-grandmothers, they both read the Bible in Cree. They both read Cree. One died at 105 and the other one at 91. They were the pillars of that community, as Métis, but were never distinguished as such. One was called mom by everybody. We called her Granny Maggie. Her name was Margaret Humpherville.

— Rose Boyer

Grandma read the Bible off the table, then we would read a little passage, and she would read another. Then we would all kneel down and say Our Fathers, sit up and say another little prayer, and away, we would go to bed. We took it for granted that that is what we would do at night and in the morning before we went to school. Then we had our prayers at breakfast, dinner and supper. Each one had to do this; each one had to sit beside grandma, to read part of this Bible. She would read, of course, in Cree, and then we would read a little passage in English. Each one of us would do that. That was my upbringing at my aunt's and uncle's place when we were going to school.

— Rose Boyer

There were different customs associated with going to church:

We never, ever missed Church on Sunday. I found it so funny because none of the girls went to Church without something on our head. We had to have something on our head, whether it was a kerchief or a hanky, or a hat; the women loved hats. They didn't care if there was anything on our feet, because a lot of us had bare feet, no shoes, in the summertime. We'd have to make sure our head was covered, but our feet, they didn't care.

— Rose Boyer

That was my spiritual upbringing. When I got married, it changed. I became a Catholic

because my husband was Catholic. I had to go to classes to become Catholic because I had to raise my children Catholic in order for him to keep his faith. So I agreed to that. To me there was no problem. I learned how to become a Catholic. My kids learned from school because they went to separate school. They learned all their catechisms in school and everything else. I quit the Church because I saw the hypocrisy. **— Rose Boyer**

We were poor and I had nine kids. I used to makeover clothes for them; they had made-over clothes. I sewed for them. I went to the doctor's office for 17 years with my kids. The nurses used to say, here come the best dressed kids in town, because the kids had made-over clothes. They never had brand new clothes, but they looked brand new to them, their little white shirts, bow ties, and little overalls. But you never felt equal to them in Church. You would always see that little bickering and whispering, behind your back. So I said, "I'm not going to Church anymore. I don't need this. I don't need people talking about me. That's not Church, that's hypocrisy, if I ever seen anything." **— Rose Boyer**

"We quit going to Church when we decided we could pray at home. That was before we did the sweats, now we do the sweats. That's where we get our health, spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally." — Alma Desjarlais

Alma practices her spirituality in many ways:

We were Catholics growing up, both our parents and grandparents. I was very fortunate to learn at a young age, that it is not the priests that forgive you, if you do something wrong. Our grandfather told us that, "he's just another human," he said. He's not the one, it's the Creator that forgives you if you do anything wrong. We very much respected the Church. Like everybody, we talked Latin and didn't understand ourselves. We had the sweetgrass, the pipe, the drum, and the traditional medicines. They had their own way of prayers. **— Alma Desjarlais**

We quit going to Church when we decided we could pray at home. That was before we did the sweats, now we do the sweats. That's where we get our health, spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally. I believe our prayers. We were taught that when you light sweetgrass it takes your prayers up to the Creator. I believe in that. I tell my kids to carry on the belief in whatever way they want. **— Alma Desjarlais**

We learned the traditional way about traditional medicines. My grandparents did the medicines. So did Albert's parents. We respected them. I didn't bother the medicines until I was 50. That's just respecting it. I really enjoy helping Albert now and our kids are learning. One of them is always helping us, to pick medicines, and in the sweat. All our grandkids sing with us. We all hope we are doing the right thing either way. We still go to Church but not as often as we did before when we were raising our kids. **— Alma Desjarlais**

Rose Richardson's spirituality changed over time:

> *I wanted to be a nun, for years. Mainly for the security because the nuns always had proper clothing and food, so I guess that was really the reason, because I felt that all the nuns became nuns because of that need for security. Gradually my spirituality evolved into something bigger and stronger. I was always spiritual and to me spirituality is something more that you feel, you can't actually see it, but you feel it more than anything else. It is what is in your heart, that's what counts.* — **Rose Richardson**

> *You always had to wear a hat. You prayed in Latin and it felt like prayer, because you didn't have to prove anything to anybody. It was just like speaking in tongues, you didn't know what you were saying, but it sure felt good.*
> — **Rose Richardson**

Rose Richardson shares teachings that came to her in dreams:

> *I grew up with strong Christian Catholic beliefs, some of them I kept, and some of them I changed, in terms of going back to traditional ways. I didn't go back for a long time or I didn't even try to experience it because of the way I'd been brain-washed. One day I'd have this medicine woman come over and she'd say, "if you want to become involved in the sweats and the Native way, you can't go to the Church." Then I dropped the Church for awhile and I'd go to sweats. Then, I'd feel lonesome and go back to the Church. Then I'd be with the Church, and the priest would say, "if you want to become involved in the Church, you have to quit the sweats." Then I would go back to the sweat. I'd burn sweetgrass and everything and feel good, but then there was something in me missing, so I'd go back to the Church. Then I'd be involved in receiving communion, visiting the sick, taking communion to the sick, and back to my old routine. Then I'd be lonesome, and then finally one day, I thought, this is enough. I felt like a yoyo going back and forth. Finally one night I prayed and I said, "God you are all powerful, my Creator, you are so powerful, why do you send these people to me? You send me this woman, and this priest, and other people, and I go back and forth. Why do you send people to me to tell me what to do? You are all powerful; you tell me, just tell me. Give me direction." I said, "but don't tell me right now, because if you do, then I'll probably be so scared I will never pray any which way. So tell me in my dreams, and when I get up, I'll know you have given me direction." So I went to sleep and I dreamt of a storm coming and this black cloud coming. This voice, this voice of the Creator said, "there is a storm of trouble coming your way and the only way you can ward it off is to start praying. Ask the Creator to take away the evil forces that come at us from the different direction, and replace it only with what is good and holy and according to his will, only with what is good and holy and according to your will. Take away the evil forces that come at us from lower places, crawling, creeping underground, take them away and replace it only with what is good and holy and according to your will. Take away the evil forces that are within my mind and my heart and my body, and replace it only with what is good and holy and according to your will." He told me how to pray, and I prayed. I looked back to the east, and the clouds broke up and the sun shone through.* — **Rose Richardson**

It was teaching me that I had become almost ritualistic, in terms of repeating what I saying, over and over again. Right after that dream, or vision, I had another one. There was a hill. On one side of the hill coming from the east, was a lady wearing white buckskin. On top of the hill sat a person who wore a hat like mine. I stood back and watched. The lady came up. She was carrying sweetgrass and a peace pipe. She looked at me and smiled. She went up to this person, whose back I could see, and she gave this person the peace pipe. She took the Bible that he was holding — I always say he because I don't know who it was. She raised up the Bible and the peace pipe, they were together. She showed it to me. The peace pipe was in the sun, the peace pipe and Bible together formed the image of a cross that glowed. It shone and had an aura around it. She smiled at me, and as she gave it back to that person, she melted into that person. I watched, and as I watched, I melted into that person. At the end I sat there with the Bible and the peace pipe. I knew that was my answer. There was only one Creator. It really made no difference who came along or how I prayed, there was one Creator, it made no difference if I used the Bible or the peace pipe, I was praying from my heart. Ever since then, it really makes no difference who comes to me. I just smile and sometimes I tell them my vision. — **Rose Richardson**

Summary

In the initial series of Métis gatherings (2003-2005), when all of the Elders were asked to describe what healthy Métis communities meant to them, they often mentioned families. Métis women's health is inherently linked to a family's health. In traditional and contemporary Métis families, women have often been the primary caregivers for children. Many of the Elders shared stories of how their understanding of Métis health both starts and ends with their family's health. Healthy families are a strong indicator of healthy communities.

All of the women who attended the meeting had faced trials in their lives. They considered these trials as defining moments in their lives as Métis women. Impacts of Residential School, colonization, religion, spirituality, racism, family violence and community struggles shaped these women's lives. Strength of mind through adversity and maintaining prosperity through what has been a collective Métis experience makes each of these women's stories converge together. The Elders reminded us, with these strengths, burdens and stories, women may feel alone, but they also represent a collective experience.

The women invited to this *Women and Family* Elders gathering were chosen because of their dedication to their families and communities. They are all community leaders and have been involved with Métis organizations for decades. A great deal of their work and community service is driven by their dedication to their own Métis families. While many of these women are experts in other areas as well, it is their knowledge on the importance of family structure in Métis communities that is central to their teachings.

Contributors

Angie Crerar was born in Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories. Angie was taught the Métis way of life. Together with her husband, Doug, she has raised 10 children, 23 grandchildren and now has two great-grandchildren. Angie is an active community member in the city of Grande Prairie where she has lived since 1966. She is very proud of her work with Elders, the local Friendship Centre and several Métis organizations, including the Métis Nation of Alberta. Angie has received several achievement awards, the most recent, a Caring Canadian Award presented to her by the Alberta Lieutenant Governor.

Rose Boyer grew up as the oldest girl in a large Métis family of 17 children. Her father was Colin McKay and her mother, Marjorie Plant. The family lived on the "road allowance" of the Glen Mary district of Saskatchewan before relocating to a Métis colony at Green Lake, and later to Meadow Lake, in northern Saskatchewan. Rose has lived in Saskatoon for many years. She has nine children, 39 grandchildren, and 27 great-grandchildren. Today, she enjoys preparing traditional Métis foods, crocheting, knitting and spending time with her grandchildren.

Alma Desjarlais was raised in Frog Lake, Alberta. Her parents were Marcel and Mary (Horse) Cross. Her grandfather, John Horse, was Chief of Frog Lake for many years. Alma and her husband of over 40 years, Albert Desjarlais, had eight children and an adopted daughter. Today, they have 24 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Alma and Albert work closely together as a team who doctor people in the traditional way. Once a week they hold a sweat lodge ceremony and welcome people who come for healing. They also share their knowledge with others at various meetings and conferences. Alma and Albert live in the East Prairie Métis Settlement, in north-central Alberta.

Marilee Nault and her husband, Elmer, have raised four children and have been foster parents to several children over the years. They have 10 grandchildren. Marilee is actively involved in the field of Métis health with the Manitoba Métis Federation. She serves on a number of boards and committees including the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Marilee has served on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "D" Division, Aboriginal Policing, and Manitoba Métis Federation, Southeast Region, Boards of Directors; both for 14 years. She has also worked with the Manitoba Aboriginal AIDS Task Force and Nine Circles Community Health Centre, with each for about nine years. Marilee very much enjoys singing with the family band, "Backroads Country," and playing "good old Métis music."

Rose Richardson was born in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. She was raised by her mother who taught her the many benefits of hard work in learning how to survive using available resources in the region and the traditional knowledge of her Cree and Métis ancestry. Since early childhood, Rose has been guided by dreams

and visions that led her to learn about plants and medicines. This knowledge has helped her to raise her five children. She credits her spiritual beliefs with having given her strength throughout her life. Rose completed a bachelor of education (with distinction), served as a school board trustee, and continues to be a spokesperson on Aboriginal issues. She is currently working in the field of special education with the Island Lake First Nation School. Rose and her husband, Ric, travel as far away as Europe to speak at various venues and locations, universities and events, to share their knowledge about plants and medicines with people who are seeking health and healing.

Recommended Resources

Bailey, N. (Director) and C. Welsh (Writer). (1992) *Women in the Shadows*. Montreal: National Film Board.

Barkwell, L.J., L. Dorion, D.R. Prefontaine (2001) *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute.

Bennett, M. (2005) *Annotated Bibliography of Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research*. Vancouver: Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group.

Campbell, M. (1973) *Halfbreed*. New York: Saturday Review Press.

Canadian Women's Health Network (2005) *Canada Needs a Health and Healing Strategy for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Women*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group. 8(1/2): p.30-31.

Farrell Racette, S. (1991) *The Flower Beadwork People*. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Gabriel Dumont Institute.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2006) *Aboriginal Women: A Profile from the 2001 Census*. Ottawa: Women's Issues and Gender Equality Directorate.

Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (2004) *Naspici Niyomahcihowin (Continuous Good Health): A Community-Based Research Project Examining the Health Needs of Aboriginal Women in Saskatoon*. Winnipeg, MB.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) *Métis Perspectives. Perspectives and Realities*. p. 199-386. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.

Status of Women Canada (2002) *North American Indian, Métis and Inuit Women Speak about Culture, Education and Work*. Prepared by Carolyn Kenny. Ottawa, Ontario.

Recommended Websites

Aboriginal Portal Canada
www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group
www.awhhrg.ca/home.php

Aboriginal Youth Network
www.ayn.ca

Canadian Women's Health Network
www.cwhn.ca/indexeng.html

Gabriel Dumont Virtual Institute
www.metismuseum.ca

Métis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre Inc.
www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca

Native Women's Association of Canada
www.nwac-hq.org/

Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence
www.pwhce.ca/index.htm

CHAPTER 4 — LAND AND WATER: EVERY LIVING THING NEEDS WATER

"This is our land. It was given to us to take care of. We haven't done a very good job but we're still on it."

— Marion Larkman

The narrators of *Land and Water: Every Living Thing Needs Water* are George Fleury, Sonny Flett, Jack McIvor, Tom McCallum, Earl Scofield and Marion Larkman. The content of this chapter is based on their discussions about land and water during a meeting held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, March 2006.

Land and Water: Every Living Thing Needs Water

This was the final gathering in the series of four meetings with the groups of Métis Elders. All were asked to share their earliest memories about growing up on the land, to talk about their teachers within their families, and to describe the formation of their relationship with the land and water in their early years.

The Elders described his or her earliest childhood memories growing up on the land, learning to hunt, fish, trap, gather berries and medicines, watching the changing seasons, and *"listening to the land come alive"* **(George Fleury)** in the spring.

Elders who attended the Land and Water meeting were selected because of their close and long-term relationship to land, knowledge of hunting, fishing and trapping, knowledge of work on the land, their work with youth, belief in environmental preservation, and their abilities to link their lives and stories to the life on the land. Central topics that arose from this meeting were: Teaching and Learning about the Land; Connection to Land; Hunting, Fishing and Trapping; Life and Work on the Land; Reliance on the Land and Water; Water; Dispossession and Environmental Damage.

What came through most resoundingly in this meeting was the emphasis on 'traditional knowledge' as not something of the past, but something that should be considered in a contemporary context. The Elders promoted a view of traditional knowledge that was not only rooted in ancestral stories and oral histories, but knowledge that is current, contemporary, sustainable, and in this case, quite critical. Knowledge of the land, climate and water is traditional knowledge, but it is by no means knowledge of the past. It is current and it was of great concern to the Elders, who have, over their lifetimes seen drastic changes occurring.

Teaching and Learning about the Land

Some of the most vibrant memories of the land were the earliest memories of being taught lessons on the land as a youngster. Even though most of the Elders now reside in urban areas, they still recall some of their fondest memories

as those they experienced outdoors with their Elders and teachers. There is an intrinsic link between language, stories, teachings and the land. The land speaks to you in ways words and written language cannot.

George remembered learning while on the land:

> *I was taught in the spring. That's when you watch, when you see beauty, the beautiful signs of what nature has to offer, like the grass growing. The best part of it was you would get out early in the morning and you'd hear the birds chirping and singing. That was a language of its own. I learned harmony, how to appreciate that, because it meant so much. It made you feel good. You're alive and the environment around you is alive. I was told if you watch; the grass is going to grow. They would teach you about gardening. You would have to nourish the garden by getting water for your plants. The beauty of nature had so much to offer. During the summer, we used to take the wagon and go out and make a living, doing whatever we could, working for farmers. When the berries were fresh, we'd stop and pick berries. We'd stop along the roadside, make a fire, and fry some saskatoons. Then, we'd go back to crushing chokecherries. That was something else and you don't see that anymore; I long for it. The thing I still do, if I get a chance, is I go out. Like, cranberries, they freeze in the*

winter, and when I was shooting rabbits, going out hunting, I used to pick a handful of cranberries, frozen cranberries and eat them.
— George Fleury

Hunting and snaring was part of everyday learning and life:

My parents taught me how to catch rabbits, to make a snare, to go in the bush. I would follow my dad. I was very young, walking behind him, asking him questions. "How do you do it? How high do you hang this and how come it's got to be so big?" "Well, if you make it too big, the rabbits are going to go through it, if you make it too small, he's going to push it aside, so you have to be perfect." They showed you how to do it. I learned and I respected rabbits. I was told you have to get up early in the morning to go and get your rabbit; otherwise you won't have it. Magpies used to steal my rabbits and I'd get mad. That was the learning part and that was a way of survival. **— George Fleury**

He felt the land, itself, was a teacher:

My teacher was the four seasons of our universe, in combination with my parents, and the spirit, the Holy Spirit, God, as I understand him today. I learned by watching what we had to do in order to survive in each season. Winters were very hard and cruel to the Michif people where I grew up. You didn't have anything to really count on; no money. You had to go out, set traps, catch rabbits, weasels, squirrels, beavers, whatever. If you caught two or three rabbits a day, you were lucky. Even if you caught one, you were lucky because you had some food. If you were able to shoot a deer, you were real damn lucky because you had provisions for a couple of weeks. But the greatest hardship about winter was that if you didn't have any horses to haul your wood, you had to carry your wood on your back. You'd take your axe and bring back a couple of trees and your shoulders would hurt, but you'd still have to do it in order to keep some heat in the house. Houses then were hard to heat because they were log houses and it was cold in winter. In the morning you would wake up and you would have to chop the ice in order to get to the water and you always waited to see who was going to get up first to make the fire. I got wise to that pretty quick.
— George Fleury

Tom remembers his teacher, his grandmother:

That's what I remember about my grandmother, she was always going like this, crushing, crushing, that's what she'd do, steady. We would haul water for her and saw wood. We would kill birds for her, because she ate anything from the bush, there's nothing that she wouldn't eat. Then she'd cook a stew for us, she'd feed us, and she'd sit

"Winters were very hard and cruel to the Michif people where I grew up. You didn't have anything to really count on; no money. You had to go out, set traps, catch rabbits, weasels, squirrels, beavers, whatever."

— George Fleury

us down and tell us stories. She was an incredible storyteller. That's what I remember about growing up back home. My grandmother, she'd used to take me out in the bush; she'd dig up roots and she'd feed me those roots. I didn't know what they were. One of them would look like a carrot, a long white thing, oskatas. *I didn't know what it was for, but she fed it to me. We'd tap the birch trees, and other trees, poplar,* emestasoyin, *is what you'd say. You'd take the bark off and eat that sap. We did all those kind of things. Also,* oskana, *those bones off moose, or deer, you break them and eat that marrow, that's called* epastasoyin, *that's what that's called. We used to do that, that was so nice, the consistency of it was so soft and it was rich, it just kind of melts in your mouth. None of these people know that now. That's my growing up years as I remember.*

— Tom McCallum

Connection to the Land

Métis people view all parts of the earth as animate and essential elements of life. Métis people have connections to the earth that were described by the Elders as physical, spiritual, emotional and mental. Stories told about connection to land were specific to the speaker but there were some common experiences about being Métis on the land. All of the Elders had eloquent and practical thoughts about how we are all connected to the land. All of their stories, even though they may not have referred to the 'physical earth', still were part of both the land and water.

Marion provided the group with thoughtful reflection on responsibilities of Elders:

That's what I said, "it's a 'me-me' world," but we have to get rid of that, if only for the next generation. The generation now have got to realize, it can't be that way. If we must live on this land and have a good environment with good water and good air, we have to share those responsibilities. **— Marion Larkman**

Tom shared selections of traditional knowledge teachings about the connections between land, water and human beings:

The four seasons; they are always there. No matter what our people went through, they are still here too. To me that tells us about the resilience that we have as people, and it represents the red willow. The red willow is one of the hardiest plants in the forest. It can withstand the severest winters, where other trees will crack; red willow won't. Fire can go through it, it'll continue to grow. The only way you can kill that red willow is to take the root out. That's what they have tried to do to our people by stealing our identity, right? They took our little children away. They said that we have to get the children. We can't do anything with the adults, but with the children, we can re-program them. But they didn't know that we have that cellular memory that I talked about; that we still have that memory inside of here and we know who we are. Something is always not quite right, whether you get a doctoral degree and walk in that world, there'll always still be something missing. Until you start to work on it, when you start to question it, then we will start to work with it. That's that resiliency we have as a people, that's shown by the young people that we have. They have that cellular memory. You can learn

lots from young people because they've got the memory of everything that we have talked about.
— Tom McCallum

Tom continues by talking about our 'cellular memory':

What I was told, when I talk about this cellular memory, because we are still connected to everything no matter if we are what we call living here, or else in the next world, or wherever we are, there's still that connection and we are not disconnected in any way. I have been told by the Elders, that we are here in spirit. Say we are a little circle, and that's the spirit, the energy, if we want to call it that. Then there's our mom and dad over here, before they were our mom and dad. We have a journey to walk on this earth, now, who is going to help us on that journey? Well, there are two people here that are living in such a way, that are part of our journey, and that can help you learn. It might be a nuclear kind of family where they are all going to support you and everything, or it might be a really, really difficult journey. They might split up and you are going to be left alone, then that's your journey. Those are the people that are picked, our parents, because they help us with our journey. That's all part of the fulfillment of our journey when we come into this physical world. **— Tom McCallum**

You have to be gentle, like the spring wind, caressing somebody, the warm sun behind it, and you feel really good. That's how you must affect people that are down. Like the grass that you walk upon, when you look back you see your footprints, but if you look long enough, one blade of grass comes up, another one, and finally, they are all up. That's how your kindness must be given.
— Tom McCallum

There is a reciprocal arrangement between us and the land:

In the justice system that we knew a long time ago, there were consequences. You had responsibility for something, and if you didn't carry out that responsibility then there would be a consequence to face. If you didn't have those berries, if you didn't pick those blueberries, you're not going to have any all winter unless you can trade with somebody. A lot of times maybe people didn't want to trade, because that's for them, they had picked that for themselves. So, there are consequences to everything.
—Tom McCallum

Tom goes on to describe how land, language and stories are all connected as well:

Most of us don't even know our language, that's how lost we are. That's why it's so very important, one of the reasons why it's so very important to

"That's that resiliency we have as a people, that's shown by the young people that we have. They have that cellular memory. You can learn lots from young people because they've got the memory of everything that we have talked about."

— Tom McCallum

get back the language, is to know who we are. I'm not saying that you don't know who you are just because you don't know your language, but it contributes to your identity. That's one of your greatest identities, because the Creator gives you a language when he put you on this earth. He gives you language to describe who you are and what you are about. Your connection to the whole universe comes through that language. It is much more than the spoken word; it's not only the spoken word. It is a whole state of being and a way of viewing things. — **Tom McCallum**

It is a value system that we are talking about and what we need to be strong is our origins. You have to know them very, very well, because once you know who you are, that identifies who you are, that's your identity in the whole universe. If you know your identity, then you can do anything you want after that. It is the people that have gone somewhere else that don't have their identity. But if you are very, very deep rooted — like trees, poplars will grow 20 feet under the ground to look for water, some have very deep roots, and others don't — the ones with very deep roots are the ones that understand who they are, who believe in themselves very, very strongly. They are the ones that are very, very grounded and no matter what comes along, they will never deter, nothing will shake them. The ones with shallow roots are the ones that will get blown over.
— Tom McCallum

Earl shares his thoughts on all of the Elders' gatherings and how each one has been connected to the land:

I would like to tell you how much I appreciate being with you and thank you for all your loving care. It shows love, compassion, caring and dedication. When I think about the pictures that we took at the Métis Elders gatherings held at the Nakoda Lodge, that beautiful setting in the mountains, the mist in the morning and rainbow coming over the mountains, the Canada geese on the shore walking along beside the lodgings, honking and talking to one another — Canada goose talk. It was nice to be together, to learn about the traditions, to hear the music and the drumming. I enjoyed the sweat lodge. I enjoyed Desjarlais and his family singing in the sweat lodge, and the heat; some of them get pretty hot. I've been in some sweat lodges where you just about pass out. It's always an experience and it revives you, renews your spirit, and brings you closer to your ancestors. I hope to get together again. Che megweetch.
— Earl Scofield

Tom returned to stories about his time in Ile à la Crosse and reflections on land:

Niya, *I was one of the fortunate ones who grew up in the North,* sakitahkwak *it's called in my*

language. The French people call it Ile à la Crosse, which means Island of La Crosse. Ever since we were young, our only way of traveling was by canoe. We had a wooden canoe made out of wood with canvas on the outside. My mom used to make a bed for me about three-quarters of the way toward the front of the canoe. I'd lie on my side and my ear would be to the bottom of the canoe. Sometimes there were little ripples; you could hear them, chkchkchkchkchk; *it used to hum me to sleep. It was so beautiful. There were times when we were going home and my dad would have to shoot a duck and that would be our supper when we got home. We'd go through* le jean, *the bull rushes. When we went through the bull rushes, that canoe sang, because the bull rushes go into the side of it and it has a sound. You can have an aluminum canoe or a fibreglass canoe, but it won't have that sound; they sound dead when you go through the bull rushes. When you have a wooden canoe, the bull rushes and that canoe sing together. If you ever have that opportunity, take those wooden canoes and go through the bull rushes and you will see what I mean. That's my remembrance as a child.*
— Tom McCallum

Marion felt the connection between Métis people, the land and our responsibilities we have to keep the connection:

This is where we come in, we are Aboriginal people. We are born of this land. Our ancestors were here. We are of Aboriginal ancestry, all of us that sit here. We had the knowledge, but we've never, ever had the privilege of giving it. They would never call us into a school yard and say, "come on into our school today and teach the kids how to build a fire and cook outside where you eat outdoors in the fresh air." They have never asked us that. They have pushed us aside. They want our knowledge, but they don't want us to share it with anyone else. They want to box that and put it underneath the couch so no one else will ever use it and that's bad. We should have a youth sitting here from your area and your area, we should have one youth from each area that we came from, to bring them here, set them here. They can't say anything, all they can do is absorb what they hear, and they will take it home and they will be speaking to other youth. They will say "do you know what I heard from all the Elders that I sat with this past weekend?" You would be surprised at how fast, better than a fast moving newspaper, because once it gets across, it's good. — **Marion Larkman**

Hunting, Fishing and Trapping

Hunting, fishing and trapping are a part of Métis life and their holistic connection to land and water. No matter how trendy the topic of Métis hunting and fishing rights is in the popular media, it was not questioned in the Elders' discussions of land and water. Their views of hunting, fishing and trapping as a way of maintaining and thriving in their own economic structure and feeding their families was only seen from a sustainable-future point of view. Their definitions of hunting, fishing and trapping did not come from court decisions, political posturing or external sources. It is a way of life. Like language and culture, it was indivisible from Métis life. For both rural and urban-raised Métis the 'time of the hunt' meant nourishment not only for the body but clearly also for the soul.

Marion was the sole woman in the discussion. Her perspective was essential and complemented the men's views on hunting, food procurement and life on the land:

> *I was the eldest daughter. I did the same things you guys did, hunt, fish, and trap with my dad. He made sure I learned how to wash dishes and wash clothes, and everything else. Ours was really hard work. The only thing we knew how to do was hunt and fish. That was survival.* — **Marion Larkman**

Sonny has hunted and trapped on much of the same land that he did when he was young:

> *I went for a spring hunt ever since I was 12 years old, with my dad. When he got older he turned the [trap]line over to me. Even when I was working when I was a younger guy, single, I would always go for spring hunt. No matter if I didn't kill very much, it was just to see everything come alive in the spring. You'd hear the robins coming in and you'd hear the chuckeggs at night. You'd hear the blackbirds in the Delta, the yellow ring blackbirds always singing. Then the frogs start coming and it's like everything comes to life. It's just nice, all the geese and the ducks. It's a nice environment to go out in the bush and listen to all that. You haven't got that anymore. You're losing it. Even if you go out there, you haven't got all the birds and songbirds you had a few years ago; it's changing. I guess we've got to live with the change, but I feel, growing up as a young fellow, it was all the things that we had that we were so grateful for that we're losing.* — **Sonny Flett**

Tom describes how commercial fishing and trading companies played a part in Métis roles in hunting and fishing for their families:

> *Those little shacks in the back we called them* cipascion, *and a hole in the ice, we call* le tramboire *that's what we called it. There are all these words that we used when we talked with people from Canoe Lake. When we used words like* tramboire, tambour, *stuff like that. They'd say* "maka mena emestikosimoyen, *you're speaking French," that's what they'd tell us, those Cree-speaking people. My dad could speak the two, Michif and Cree. My grandmother and my mother, they all did that, so that is why I have an understanding of both. We say* wapoosh. *That is a variation of Michif. That is the only language that I knew, I didn't know any other language until I went to school and we learned English. They taught us English in school. Before that, it was French that they taught in school. Everybody lived off the land and fished for food. There were not too many commercial fishermen. Everybody trapped, because that was a way of getting your food in addition to getting credit at the Hudson's Bay Company.* Atowkamik la companier, *that's what my grandmother used to call it,* la companier, *the company.* Atowkamkohk, *some people would say,* atowkamkohk, atow *means a buying house, where you go and buy stuff.* — **Tom McCallum**

Jack also spoke about the role of commercial fishing in Métis families:

> *In order to survive on the land, the breadwinner was dad. He would spend a lot of time out on the trapline or at commercial fishing camps. The older brothers would kind of follow in his*

footsteps but that didn't last too long because in our era there were jobs opening up, like in '58, when the mine first started. My older brother went to CN. Today, any one of us could be thrown out in the bush and survive. You knew how to survive because you were taught that at a very early age and you never forget.
— Jack McIvor

George shared some hunting and survival techniques he learned as a young man:

One thing I was taught about hunting is there are two species of wildlife that would provide survival for you if you were lost. You could eat a partridge, raw. It's good for you, it's nutritious and it won't hurt you. Also, a porcupine is like that, cooked, and it will keep you alive. That's why, they'd tell us, don't kill those things unless you need to. Those are tricks of the trade and our ancestors knew them. I learned about certain herbs you can use but there is not an abundance of them anymore. **— George Fleury**

The land produced clean foods:

I remember my father teaching the survival techniques that we used to use to catch rabbits. I talk about it, about hanging snares in the winter time, but there is a technique to catching rabbits in summer, as well… We used to go stealing eggs, mud hen eggs, and even blackbird eggs; we used to steal those. And gophers, that was fun. Get a pail of water, pour it down the hole; put a little snare in there. Boy, he comes out and you just snare him out. Those are funny things. Today, you talk about that and people don't know what you are talking about. They think you are crazy and wonder how could you eat such a thing.

Well, you know, animals in those days were clean. Even to this day, you tell a person, a muskrat was the cleanest animal going. All they eat is those little wee plants underneath the water and they are sweet. Have you ever eaten a sweet plant from underwater? That's what muskrats eat. And a rabbit, they are clean too, because all they eat is a little bark and they eat grass as well. And you know everybody eats pork chops; I won't even tell you what they eat.
— George Fleury

Sonny recalled the long-term relationship between trading companies and independent trappers:

My dad used to trade for Colin Fraser. The Hudson's Bay had traders in there who would buy fur. The trader would tell them there was fur if he heard that somebody killed a bunch of fur. They would try to see who could beat each other, Colin Fraser and the Hudson's Bay. They never had any money. It was just to trade for a load of groceries: flour, lard, baking powder, and cloth to sew. They would try and beat each other there to buy the furs. There were no dollars. They would

give you so many pelts for so much flour; it was all in trade. It was good. I really enjoyed listening to the old timers when they were telling us about that. That was our pastime really, living off the land. There was a lot of hunting and fishing, a lot of ducks, and trapping and stuff in that area. I used to go out with my Uncle Duncan. My dad would take me out when we were really young, nine or 10 years old. The first gun I had was a .22. A little short bar, we called them a .22 ace, a little rabbit gun they used to call them. That was my first gun; the next one was a .410. I liked hunting in the bush, going out trapping. I still do it today. I tell my kids; I like it and enjoy it.
— Sonny Flett

Sonny, who still resides part time in Fort Chipewayan, Alberta, still speaks fondly of his home, community and trapline:

We lived in a little tent outside in the bush, just a tent. We had a little stove, cooked outside on that. I took a liking to the spring and everything out there. Next year he got a registered [trap]line in the park. I still have that line. When I was 16, he passed it on to me. I would go out to the trapline in spring and spend time at the lake. Then I got old enough to work, so I started to work. I'd always come back in the spring. I liked the environment down there. There was a lot of hunting, trapping, fishing, anything you wanted; lots of food on the land. I decided to stay there. Like I said all these birds were chasing me around all over so I decided I better catch one now. I've travelled around all over the place but I love Fort Chip. I was born there and I am still there. I was born and raised there and after 71 years of it, I'm still in the bush. **— Sonny Flett**

Life and Work on the Land

Fresh berries, plants and meat from both animals and fish are well known as some of the healthiest foods you can obtain from hunting, fishing and 'bush food' procurement. Picking and catching your own food is renowned by 'experts' as a way of maintaining good health. Not only does it provide essential nutrients, minerals and anti-oxidants, there is also physical activity associated with 'bush food' that can only be found in these methods of gathering food. Good work on the land meant a good life on the land. The connections between the physical gains from this life have already been described as being directly related to the well being of spiritual, mental and emotional realms. There was definitely more to be said for being able to eat from the land. The work that goes in to it means so much more than being able to go to a store for food.

Tom spoke about the stages that meat has to go through to reach the pemmican stage:

That food is right there, it is all ready. The first stage is wiyas, *the meat itself.* Kahkiwak, *then* ewohikanak, *and the fourth stage is* pimmihkkan. Pemmican *is what white people say, we say* pimmihkkan, *because we add* pimi *to it, moose grease or bear grease. Then we add berries to it, to flavour it, in a different way.* Takwohiminana, *is what we used to add to it, chokecherries;* takwahamin *means you crush them. That's what you add and that keeps the consistency. Then they turn it into a brick that holds about 15 pounds of meat and it will keep forever. Whenever you are going somewhere, you just take a little chunk out; shave it, eat it, and*

"I grew up on the land. Them days when you grew up on the land, you learned at a very early age what you had to do to survive, especially when you came from a big family." — Jack McIvor

> *that's it, you're gone. You're eating and walking at the same time. There was no breakfast, dinner and supper for us. It wasn't like that. We ate when opportunity presented itself,* kakapahk, *when you get off the lake and the canoe; you make a little camp, that's when the women cook. Those are the kind of things I remember. It was wonderful growing up in the forest.*
> **— Tom McCallum**

Earl remembered his childhood and the work-days of his mother and stepfather:

> *My stepfather was looking for work in the mine so we moved to Timmins, Ontario, up in the North Country. He walked to all the mines trying to find work. They had signs up at that time; only English-speaking people could apply. They wouldn't give a job to people who couldn't speak English. I would haul wood out of the bush with my four dogs, bring that wood home, put it on the saw horse, get the buck saw out, and saw my wood up. That's how we heated the house and that's how mother did the cooking. In the wintertime, we'd move the top layer of snow away and get the crystal snow underneath, put it in the copper boiler, and put it on the stove. We washed our underwear that way. That's what I remember about the land. Of course, we'd hunt and put snares out for rabbits and shoot partridge in the summertime, and live off the land. The land was good to us; we didn't realize how good it was to us years ago. It's not like that any more.* **— Earl Scofield**

Jack remembers how all of the family had their role in work on the land:

> *I grew up on the land. Them days when you grew up on the land, you learned at a very early age what you had to do to survive, especially when you came from a big family. There were 12 of us. Mom and dad made 14 and jobs were very scarce. There were a lot of things you had to do to make everything work good in the family. Everybody had a job, not a job where you got paid, but you had a duty to cut wood and haul water. The bigger boys would go out, cut the wood, and bring the wood home with the horse. Everything was designated to the appropriate age. There were things that the younger ones would do. That was growing up.*
> **— Jack McIvor**

George also recalls his father's work at making log homes:

> *As I grew up, I realized that there were many changes that were taking place. Because of the way we made our livelihood, we would go out and help farmers by cutting scrub. In them days, that was a change in itself, cutting scrub and clearing bush so they could plough it and plant some oats or grain. I wasn't used to doing that but I got used to working because I was introduced to an axe very early in life, cutting scrub. I learned it's a trade in itself. My dad was a very good axe man. He would carve logs and build log houses. He was a master at it. He*

could swing that axe and I watched him. He could even make sleigh runners. He would carve a sleigh runner and build a sleigh out of ordinary wood. I remember my father carving. He went to the bush and he searched, pretty near all day, and he would come back with a log and he would start carving. I was fascinated. He made a little horse for me and I cherished that until it was old and broke. Those are the things I remember.

— George Fleury

Tom recalled some women's roles:

We'd go when it was time to pick berries; we'd go to different places, epicyahk, *we'd move to that area and that's where we'd pitch our camp, pitch our tent; then,* macipicihk*; that would be in July, when the moose would come to the water. That's where they eat the plants and the bugs are driving them crazy, so they want to go in the water. That's when we would go over there, moose hunting.* Epansawehk *is what they say, to make dry meat, to take it through the whole process until it gets to pemmican.* Kahkiwak, *when the women cut up the meat, they slice it up into long thin strips. They hang it over,* aponas, *we call that thing that we hang the meat on, and they smoke it. It's not just smoke, there's fire, too. There's a mixture of fire and smoke and you've got to get it in just the right place. If you get too much smoke, then it won't work. If you get too much fire, it won't work, it'll burn the meat. You have to be there all the time. You have to watch that to make sure it's at just the right place, between smoke and fire, that right combination for it to come out right. Then, we have that* kahkiwak. *You take strips of it with you and you can eat it like that, it's ready to eat. The second stage is what we call* ewohikanak, *when you pound that dry meat. You take all the fibres out and it is like the consistency of fibreglass, but it's loose and that's all pure meat.* **— Tom McCallum**

Reliance on the Land and Water

There is a reciprocal relationship between humans and the earth. Dialogue on Métis reliance on the land focused on food procurement, animals, medicines but also how the land has been used for progress and in many cases, Métis jobs and livelihood. Recurring themes of resilience, reliance and perseverance were discussed in their conversations about how they lived off the land. There was a collective appreciation for the gifts that the earth has given the Métis people.

Jack discussed how through the Depression, people's survival relied on what the land could provide:

During wartime, the Second World War, there were many people in the North. They heard there was a war going on but it didn't reflect upon the lifestyle of the people because that lifestyle

continued. You had your rabbits and you were living off the land. It didn't change; it was still the same, whereas further south, people were suffering and starving, there was a depression. There was always a form of depression where we were, so to speak, because there wasn't always that much but there was enough to survive. **— Jack McIvor**

Sonny followed the changes between times of survival and times of progress:

I can see the big changes but I guess we have got to go with progress. I remember a lot of ducks, lots of everything, fish and other stuff. Our pastime in the summer was to go across the island. There were no motors. You had to walk; we'd cross there and fish all day. We'd eat fish and bannock, right there. We'd enjoy ourselves swimming and fishing. With the fall coming, we'd have to go berry picking. The strawberries ripened first, then gooseberries, and raspberries. In the fall, it was cranberry and blueberry picking. We'd go out about 12 miles out to the lake and we'd stay there for a week, picking berries. They had hundreds of pounds of berries, cranberries. I remember it was really good for colds and stuff. If you had a cold, they would give you cranberries with a bit of sugar inside it. Every day was good. **— Sonny Flett**

He added some memories of his school days and the need for firewood:

In the summertime, my uncle William had a horse and he used to lend me the horse to go and haul water to people's places. Fifty cents a barrel; I would get 25 cents and he would get 25 cents for the horse. In them days, everybody would drive the horse down to that sandy beach, with a cart, and a 45-gallon drum. In the wintertime, I used to haul it with my dog sled. It was just on a Saturday when we weren't going to school. I remember going to school in the cold days, winter ones, we had to take a billet of wood. Each student had to take a billet of wood to make a fire in school. Sometimes we'd play hooky. If we didn't take any wood to school there would be no school that morning, it would be too cold. That was the thing, we had to take wood to school, everybody. So, it was nice and if there was hardship, like I said, I didn't feel it was hard. **— Sonny Flett**

Pemmican was, and continues to be one of the greatest sources of Métis food and a way they sustain themselves over winters:

I still make pemmican at home for my mother. I made some last week and last year, too. I pound up the dry meat, caribou meat. Nowadays with the white man's style, you don't pound up the

"We'd go out about 12 miles out to the lake and we'd stay there for a week, picking berries. They had hundreds of pounds of berries, cranberries. I remember it was really good for colds and stuff. If you had a cold, they would give you cranberries with a bit of sugar inside it. Every day was good."

— Sonny Flett

meat; you use a blender. I call it blender meat, instead of pemmican. All the sinew gets caught all around on the thing at the bottom [of the container]. You pick the sinew out and make pemmican balls. Long ago, they used to use either saskatoons or blueberries. They would dry up with the grease and you put sugar in there. You always had something; it would give you nourishment. When you were paddling, it was always beside you. That's the way they done it there. I still do that for my mom. Once in a while, she wants to have some dry meat or pemmican and I do that for her. — **Sonny Flett**

Water

Water is life and it has critical meaning for all cultures. Water, on the land and in our homes, is important to Métis because of their reliance and connection to plants, animals, fish and birds that rely on the water as well. Our Elders spoke with eloquence and respect for the water. They unequivocally explained the connection between all of us to land and water. Many of their teachings were quite sacred to the understanding of all Métis people.

Sonny centered the discussion; "every living thing needs water":

It is very important for life. I can see what is happening in my area, just in my lifetime, the changes that have happened to the water system. One of the old timers used to tell us down there, he's not with us anymore; he was a First Nations person, Sal Marten, one thing he said, "the water is the boss of Mother Earth; the water controls everything." When you start thinking back, I always think of that message that he said at that meeting, start taking a closer look that everybody needs the water; every living thing needs water. — **Sonny Flett**

He shared his perspective of water as medicine:

It's really important knowledge about these things with medicine. Water is a living thing. Your water is running down from the mountains, down in there, the mountains doing their share up there, they're running down, there's nothing in there. This water is alive; it's coming down the stream. It's going into a bigger stream, to make use of something else, to produce for something else, the bugs and the fish. That's why this is so important. We are not doing enough things for the water. It is the number one thing that we should be working on. — **Sonny Flett**

Earl recalled early childhood memories of life on the land, reliant on water:

When I was just a young lad in the early 1930s we moved to The Pas, Manitoba. I used to go down on the Saskatchewan River and fish with a nightline, put the sinker on the line, and have two or three hooks off to the side, put frogs on the hooks, swing it around over your head and throw it upstream to catch pickerel at night. You could drink the water right out of the river at that time, it was clean. We hunted blackbirds with slingshots and picked blueberries, saskatoons, cranberries, up north. That's how we survived off the earth. We never thought about pollution at that time like you think about it today. You could drink the water right out of the river; it was a fast flowing river. There was only the sawmill at the town and it wasn't polluting the water so

the water was clean. People had to buy water. The water man would come around with a big water wagon. You would buy two pails of water for the house. Water for washing clothes was caught in the rain barrel from the roof of the house. We used that water for the washing and for washing your hair. It was nice soft water. This is how we were raised with my grandpa and grandmother. My grandfather would buy furs. He raised his family and he would always help others. We appreciated the land as children, but we didn't realize how important the land was to us. Do not complain when it rains, the rain nurtures Mother Earth. Rain nurtures the produce of Mother Earth, supplies the rivers and lakes with fresh water. It is the life blood of Mother Earth. Every plant, the forest, the animals and humans cannot live without water. Thank the Creator for our land and water.

— Earl Scofield

Earl shared his sincere concerns about the state of our water:

I am very worried about our water. I am very, very worried about our water. They see the handwriting on the wall that our water is going to be in jeopardy more and more. You watch in the newspaper, you will see more and more articles in the newspapers about water. It is very important that we protect our water and try to keep our water clean, to keep our rivers and lakes clean. I know some of the lakes up in the Far North have gone dry. Even the melting of the ice, the rivers, and the snow; melting is changing the course of the rivers and the supply of water. It is very important that we keep the water in mind. As I said in the past, we all need water, whether it is a dew worm, the fish in the river, the otters, muskrats, and beaver; they are all water animals and they need water. The trees that give us oxygen and the medicines need water. If we don't protect our forests, our forests are being cut down left and right and they don't care. It seems like they don't care about the oxygen level, survival of fresh air is very important. Water is going to be a commodity on the market; it will be more precious than oil. **— Earl Scofield**

"Water is going to be a commodity on the market; it will be more precious than oil." — Earl Scofield

As Tom says, we are all here because of water:

I have been told that everything started with a drop of water. That drop of water is where all life came from, before anything, before the earth and sun and everything, life, water. That's what I was told. Everything came from that. That medicine wheel, all the organisms here, that all life is sustained by the drop of water. One drop of water sustains all of it. **— Tom McCallum**

As well, water is part of all of us in a physical and spiritual way:

Water is the most precious ingredient that there is, from my teachings, the ones that have been taught to me, water is life; without water there would be no life. Because we are what we call related. The earth is three-quarters water and there is a purpose for that. Most of us don't understand why that is, because we only look

at it from a scientific perspective. But what is it from a traditional perspective? What I have been told is we are also three-quarters water, the human body, and we have our blood veins all over to carry blood and oxygen to all parts of our bodies. Therefore, we are related and are an exact replica of the earth, Mother Earth. Her blood veins are the rivers and a lot of them have been diverted, stopped and dried up. When that happens, then some part of it starts to die off. We see that, where the land is drying out, where there's no more waterfowl, the muskrats don't live there any more. There's nothing there to live on; that area is slowly dying. When one part of it dies, it affects all the other parts also.

— Tom McCallum

In addition, George speaks about how water is our gift:

It is so crucial that we try to relay this kind of message to our young people, to tell them the importance of what we take for granted every day. We are wasting away all of the things for our survival that have been given to us by our Creator. I believe very strongly that water is our most crucial need to live on this earth. We won't be here much longer, without water. That's what's so important about the water; it is also a healing medicine. If you know how to use water, it'll help you. — **George Fleury**

Dispossession

There are only a few Métis communities in Canada that have a formal/structured land base. For decades, Métis were known as 'free people' and for most of their lives they were considered landless on their own homeland. A question that is often over-simplified and left to colonizers to interpret is: "If the Métis have no land, how can they be connected to it?" In some cases, Métis were and are connected to the land by their constant dispossession from it. There is a very true and honest way to learn the value of land when you are steadily and forcibly removed from it.

In the Elders *Land and Water* gathering, the story of Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba, as told by George Fleury, is incredibly moving. It is the story of a community that was once a vibrant Métis town. In short, it was deemed by the Province of Manitoba via the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (1935) that the town of Ste. Madeleine, which was located where farms were to be restructured for drought relief, should be removed. All residents of Ste. Madeleine, who were all Métis, with large families were forced to move from their homes. They had their houses burned, their animals destroyed and they were instantly dispossessed of their land base. The story of Ste. Madeleine has not been forgotten by the former residents and descendants of the town. It is a living tribute and legend for Métis as a contemporary story of Métis dispossession in Canada.

George remembers Ste. Madeleine:

I did write a story about myself and how life was after Ste. Madeleine. It's tragic. I want to tell you a little bit about what happened in 1939 when we were forced out. All our animals, our dogs were all shot. They were all taken away from us. They came along and killed all the dogs. They said the dogs had a virus and they were sick. But what

they were doing actually was they were taking away our livelihood because dogs were trained to hunt and to haul stuff. In the wintertime they would use them to go and get a bag of flour and the dogs would bring you home. I remember that. After we moved from Ste. Madeleine to the corner, my uncle had brought me a little dog, a newly born pup, in late fall; it saddens me to think of it. It's not that I hate dogs, I don't. But I refuse to have one, for that one particular reason. I remember the RCMP. They would come along in a snowmobile and they would go from house to house. Supposedly, what they were doing was searching for meat, deer meat; you weren't supposed to have deer meat. If they had deer meat, they would take it away from you. But what they were actually looking for was if you had a dog. Just to oppress you, they would take your dog away. I remember this particular incident, it was in the evening when we were having supper and we heard a snowmobile coming and I didn't have time to hide my dog. They were there prior, a couple or three weeks before, and I was able to run away and hide my dog in the bush. I took it in the bush and they couldn't find it. But this particular night, they surprised us. My little dog, I had my little dog, and when the RCMP come in the place, dressed in their big buffalo coats, well, I walked in. My little dog got scared, he was running behind me as if to say, save me, keep me. And, I couldn't do anything. What they did, they took my little dog. The one policeman hung on to my little dog and put it underneath the runner of the snowmobile and the other one ran over it. I hated policeman after that. I just grew hate. It took me a long time to get over that. I talked about my dog, Rex, with my sister. That's how I became associated with dogs again, after we lost that one. I love dogs but I feel sometimes that it's going to be another loss and I don't really like to go back, to lose, to that time when I learned how to hate. I have to forgive and I've done that because I've got two boys that are RCMP. They don't know my story. I told my youngest son, I said, "maybe someday you can read what I have written, so you can get to know me." And, he said, "Dad, I will." So he's going to read that, but it's OK. I can take it. He needs to know about it. Because there is nothing worse than leaving the worst behind for your kids to find out later after you are gone. I believe, be open, tell them now and they will respect you and love you for it. When I lost my mother, I looked after her, going through the funeral. When it came time for my dad, he knew he was going. He said, "when my time comes, I want you to look after me like you looked after my mother." We knew each other. That's what I am saying; get to know who you are leaving behind. They may want to tell your story, be it bad or good. There's nothing worse than neglecting, ignoring or not giving. Give while you have a chance. — **George Fleury**

He goes on to describe how they not only lost their homes and their land, but they lost a way of life:

When we moved from the community of Ste. Madeleine, we went to a community called Fouillard Town. From there we moved out to the farm. My father used to work around the farm and the farmer was good enough to give us some land. He gave my father six acres of land, down in the valley, so dad built a log house and we lived there. We got to town very

easily. From there I started school in a white community. I had a difficult time because I couldn't speak English and the kids used to laugh at me. It's OK to laugh. Today, I realize it's great to be able to laugh, as long as it's humorous and not directed to hurt, or discredit, or harm you… But the changes that took place; after cutting scrub, the farmers started using bulldozers and cutting away at the bush. That was a drastic change, because where we used to hunt the bushes was gone and there were no more rabbits. All that was taken away from us; it was strictly prairie and you couldn't hunt anymore. Those changes really had an effect on me because then I had to conform to the ways and norms of white society.

— George Fleury

I guess when I talk about changes; there is so much that happened after the bulldozers, and everything else. People just kept carrying on, our roads were re-routed and new roads were made. Today we've got miles and miles of road. No matter where you go, you've got a road. One time there was bush there. There were valleys and ponds and water and all that has been disturbed. I wish sometimes at this age, that I could still go back and do the things I used to do when I was in Ste. Madeleine, as a kid, because that's where my attitude and my way of life were moulded, back home with the people that were there. I remember going from bush to bush looking for berries. It was fun. If you got tired, mom would tell us, go and sit there in shade for a while. When you were with your siblings, you were able to talk, and you would talk in your own language. You don't do that anymore. It seems like when you go someplace, it's more structured. You have to watch what you say because you might offend somebody. It's easy to offend people because everybody is an individual of their own. Everybody has their own agenda. **— George Fleury**

Environmental Damage and Change

There is a long-term memory that all living things have. Tom spoke about 'cellular memory' in the discussions of all living things. All of the Elders in this meeting had their own stories and distinct connection to their environments. They have long-term accounts and have carried on oral history of their lands that have seen drastic changes over the last few decades. The impact of industry, oil and gas exploration, and logging has had very personal, long-term and irreversible effects on Métis land, in their view. They have seen first-hand evidence and increasing evidence of climate change, environmental pollution and environmental destruction. When you read and reflect on the other passages in *Land and Water* on the critical importance of land and water to the Métis, you can see what a counter-effect the environmental destruction has had on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual lives.

Jack saw how many of the changes in the environment affected people directly:

People were happy and everybody helped each other. Violence wasn't there in our days, like it is now. I guess the greed of people nowadays and the corporate people are destroying our lands; that's the thing. I think there should be a moratorium on some issues. Instead of having six sawmills on the river, the government has to step

in and say there's only going to be two. You have to control it a little better. There's a lot of hard times growing up on the land but I think that the main thing I remember is that you did what you had to do. You were happy. You made your own recreation and you made do with what you had to do and basically that's all it was. I wish we could do that but I don't know how to come up with a plan to make that happen.

— Jack McIvor

George shared his concerns for the changing climate:

Take notice to what is happening to the atmosphere, the whole atmosphere is changing. The South is now experiencing the kind of weather that we are accustomed to, like harsh winters, rain and snow storms. They are getting that down south. They don't know why that is happening. It could be because of the disturbance created by what's happening from down here. Everything goes up in the air and it's polluted up there. When it starts to come down, the whole thing is changing. I guess the issues that are confronting us is that our environment is constantly being disturbed by destruction, pollution, fire, trying to re-route rivers away from their natural environment, and disturbing our wildlife. Our food that was given to us by nature is no longer pure. It's chemically fed. Our birds and wildlife are dying because they cannot survive due to the chemicals that are thrown into Mother Earth.

— George Fleury

Sonny, who lives in Fort McMurray, Alberta, sees drastic changes, first-hand:

With the oil outfits up north, it takes three barrels of water to produce one barrel of oil. You can imagine, in 2010, if there's going to be five million barrels a day leaving Fort McMurray, five million barrels a day for that oil, how many million barrels of water will that take? We are in trouble with water. They talk about the glaciers up in the North with climate change. If you look at the Athabasca River, the glaciers are melting faster. That's the Athabasca River, right next door. Eventually the glacier will be melting a lot faster, and there's not going to be any more water over there. I don't know how to work on it but you got to continue working on the water. With the water coming down the river, it's no good anymore. Long ago in the fall, you'd go out hunting along the river in the fall. You'd take a flashlight, an amber one, you'd take it out, and see thousands of these little bugs on the river. It's duck food and it's fish food. Now when you put a flashlight on there, you're lucky if you see five or six of those bugs. Last fall, those bugs were just not there anymore. I think we are having a serious problem. **— Sonny Flett**

Sonny opens discussion about the sale of water to the United States:

With that free trade, they are going to get our water one way or the other. It's a tough situation we are living in. We got to do more work about it in how we are going to keep it for the plants. They are clearing off the land now. All the trees that are out there that are standing up; they all hold water. That's why Mother Nature put them there. You've got the leaves and you've got all the brush in the summertime. When it rains, it all goes down there and it keeps all the moisture there.

The sun can't hit through the leaves so it doesn't take the moisture away. But by clear cutting, when the sun can hit what's left, it takes the moisture right away; it all evaporates. This is a problem we are having. They have no consideration for human beings, of what living means. Maybe by working together we can try to save some of it, try to see how they can put something back. It's a tough situation that we are faced with. It's not bad with you and I, our time here, we might be still around and we can still make a living. But when our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren are brought up, what are they going to have? The water is going to be so polluted, it's dangerous. How do you know this is good water? We are buying this bottled water today. In a few years time, maybe that'll be all gone too. It's a tough situation. I really think about how we can work on water. What is the proper thing to do with water? — **Sonny Flett**

He adds his thoughts on deforestation:

I don't know how you can say it, but there have been big changes in my area. Industry has taken over. We will have nothing. The water coming down the river, there are five pulp mills on the river. Al-Pac is one of the largest pulp mills in the world. Like I said, 225 truckloads a day to keep that mill operating, 15 townships they clean out. And reforestation, they are not doing enough reforestation. They say we are going to be out of spruce and pine in 10 years because we are ignoring reforestation practices. It is a sad situation but we have to keep working. I think the big issue is how do we protect some of this stuff? We have to keep working on this with industry so it will be well known that the younger generation needs these things to survive. If we all work together we can probably send some strong messages out there.
— Sonny Flett

Tom adds his thoughts on trees and water as the lungs of the earth:

The trees are the lungs of Mother Earth. Our lungs are made of thousands and thousands of tiny little hairs that sweep and clean the air. Now we cut all those hairs off; there's no way that we are going to be able to breathe. We cut off all the trees. Mother Earth can't breathe any more. The trees need water. They are three-quarters water, too. I have been told. It's not me that has that knowledge; this is what I have been told. Without the trees, that water is not going to be there.
— Tom McCallum

Marion spoke about the role that each of us plays in environmental deterioration:

We should not be throwing plastic in the fire and let it go off in the air so it comes down in somebody else's back yard. That's not right. Those of us that are left, we never would have thought of doing that when we were growing up. We were very environmentally wise. We had to be, because we were eating the food that we were taking from the woods, from the lake, that was ours. It was put there, given to us and we have to look after it. We didn't throw stuff in the lake so the fish would be contaminated. — **Marion Larkman**

Marion wanted to emphasize the responsibility we have to future generations:

> *We learned that and we have not taken the time to teach our next generation, the baby boomers, the ones in their 50s, we didn't teach them that. It was after the war of conflict with other countries, they had a fight and we forgot our little ones, forgot the ones that we had, they are the baby boomers. They looked at us and said maybe we should be giving things away, but had we shared all of our knowledge, we wouldn't be in the environment that we are in right now. It's a bad one. If you tossed us out there on the side of the road, we wouldn't live because there's nothing left. You can't eat anything off the ground, you can't drink the water, in fact, you shouldn't even sit in the sunshine anymore because of the pollution. We have done that, our generation. Fifty years or more ago, we started it, and it's time we put on our thinking caps. We can't let the next generation down. We've got to put it down on a piece of paper where they can read it and say, well, they made a mistake but they seen it and here it is, they tried to rectify it. When you put it down on paper and leave it, it'll be maybe three generations down the road before it changes again.*
> **— Marion Larkman**

Marion helped to close the discussion with her wishes for our land and water:

> *First of all, we have to thank the Creator, because he was the guy that gave us the water. We need the younger generation to stand up where we haven't stood up to the government and said, "leave our land alone." Because I tell you, soon, we are not going to have any water that's any good. Right here on this earth of ours, this is where we are. This land where we sit right here is our land. It's not just a song. That is true. This is our land. It was given to us to take care of. We haven't done a very good job but we're still on it.* **— Marion Larkman**

> *I want to thank everybody for getting together again. It is nice to see the same faces we began with. Let us never, never forget that we want to teach our youth and our young ones, to tell them what we've been through and how to make it better. I hope to get through to some of the youth in my area, and tell them just how important it is to always leave a nest egg behind. Don't take everything and throw it away. I am glad to see all of you. I am always so pleased to see you. Mind you, I think of you, two or three times a week, you cross my mind. I wonder what you are doing because we are at the stage where the door is starting to creak a little bit open and we are getting on in years. We don't know how long we are going to be here but let us use the time that we have got and be sure and plant in our children, our youth, exactly what we've been through, and what they should do from now on. Don't destroy our land, because our land is very precious. Till we meet again, I will not say good-bye,* kawapmini kina. *I will see you all.* **— Marion Larkman**

Closing Remarks

Emergent themes include sharing memories of growing up in northern communities, learning to hunt, fish and trap, to gather berries and medicines, and the role of parents, grandparents

and extended family members in teaching young people to survive on the land. The experiences of these Métis Elders are diverse, yet they had many shared experiences. Each has observed significant changes to the environment within their lifetimes, not only to the land and water, but within the social fabric of Canada, and, in particular, in the experience of youth today. The sharing of traditional teachings about the water greatly enhanced our understanding of water as life and the need for each to give thanks for each day.

During their youth, each individual was charged with the responsibility of contributing to the family household, by hauling water and/or chopping wood, snaring rabbits, trapping and hunting, preparing dried meat or pemmican, seasonal gathering of berries and/or preparing medicines, or, cooking, cleaning and caring for younger siblings. Preparation is key when survival is dependent upon the land.

Based upon the rapid pace of environmental degradation and continued obliteration of vast geographical regions of the earth, the group expressed grave concerns about the survival of future generations in recognition that water is life and that *"every living thing needs water"* **(Sonny Flett)**. The assault to the earth is irreversible.

Finally, we are reminded that it is up to each generation to accept the responsibility to teach younger generations to learn from our experiences, mistakes and successes — *this is our land and it was given to us to take care of.* — Marion Larkman

Contributors

Marion Larkman was born May 9, 1926 on the Curve Lake First Nation Reserve and raised on a Métis settlement at Burleigh Falls, Ontario. Marion was a trapper, served in the military during the Second World War, was a mother of 12 children and an active member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, of which she is a founding member. A proud and outspoken Métis woman, Marion was very proud of her Ojibway, Cree, French and Irish ancestry. In recent years, Marion dedicated her energies to preserving and protecting Métis history, values, traditions and pride in Métis arts and culture. She very much enjoyed being an oral historian and said, *"It's not fiction when we tell a story; it is the truth about what happened to us."* Marion passed away peacefully in December of 2006. She was well known in many places and much loved and respected by many.

Earl Scofield was born in Saskatchewan and lived in Manitoba as a child. In his younger years, Earl enjoyed hauling wood, setting snares, and hunting in northern Ontario, near Timmins, where his family moved when he was seven. At the age of 18, Earl joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and flew 17 missions as a tail gunner. He describes the experience as a thousand airplanes loaded with bombs flying at night, all up in the air at the same time, where *"you had to be careful about collisions."* In January, 1945, the plane Earl was in accidentally veered off the runway, through a building full of bombs, came to a sudden stop, blew up and burned. Earl went flying and landed, safe, without his

size 12 boots. Earl wore size 12 flying boots, his comrades called him "Boots." Earl is a father of four children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Earl is now remarried to an Elder, Mohawk grandmother with many step-children. Earl had six brothers, one of whom was killed in Wales and another at the Battle of Antwerp during the war. Retired in 1982 from Chrysler Corporation as an electrician, Earl has since kept active with the Royal Canadian Legion and serves on the National Métis Veteran's Association Board of Directors and as a senator with the Windsor-Essex Métis Community Council of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

Tom McCallum was born and raised in Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan, and is fluent in Cree and Michif. He loves to speak and communicate in Cree and promotes the importance of language and how it shapes his world view. Tom has a close relationship with the land and working with medicines. He uses his traditional teachings in his role as an Elder for youth and also in his work with inmates, men's healing groups and in cross-cultural workshops.

Jack McIvor is a fluent Cree speaker, trapper and recreational pilot. He was raised in Cross Lake, Manitoba in a family of eight boys and four girls. Jack has been actively involved with the Manitoba Metis Federation and served for six years on the Regional Health Authority for Manitoba Health. Today, Jack has two sons, two daughters, 12 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. He is grateful for the traditional knowledge that was handed down to him and encourages young people to be respectful and honest with everything in life.

Sonny Flett was born and raised in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, where he raised a family of seven children. Sonny worked in buffalo management with Wood Buffalo National Park for eight seasons and in water resources for 25 years with Alberta Environment. Since his retirement in 1992, he has worked as a consultant to initiatives that include traditional knowledge component leader for three and a half years with the Northern River Basins Study, the first study of its kind to focus on traditional environmental knowledge, and with the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources for four years, bringing students out on the land in the fall near Lake of the Woods in Manitoba. Sonny has served as a councilor representing the communities of Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay and Fort Fitzgerald in Ward 2 of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo for close to six years. Today, Sonny has seventeen grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

George Fleury was born in Ste. Madeleine, a traditional Métis community in Manitoba, where his family lived until they were forced to leave their home in 1939 under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act which saw the town designated to become pastureland. George became involved with the Manitoba Metis Federation in the mid 60s, and helped to organize the Southwest Region in 1968, where he served as vice-president for 11 years. Afterwards, George worked as an addictions councillor with the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba for 20 years. Since his retirement, George enjoys activities such as carpentry and farm work. George is a fluent Michif speaker and an accomplished musician. He enjoys sharing his music at Métis events and will sing Michif songs upon request.

Recommended Resources

Barkwell, L.J., L. Dorion, & D.R. Prefontaine (2001) *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography.* Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute.

Cajete, G. (2000) *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence.* Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers.

Flett, L., Bill, L., Crozier, J. and D. Surrendi (1996) *A Report of Wisdom Synthesized from the Traditional Knowledge Component Studies. Northern River Basins Study Synthesis Report No. 12.* Edmonton: Alberta Environment.

Johnson, M.L. (1992) *Lore: Capturing Traditional Environmental Knowledge*. Hay River, N.W.T.: University of Calgary.

Kawagley, A.O. (1994) *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit.* Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press.

Littlebear, L. (2000) *"Jagged Worldviews Colliding." Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Edited by M. Battiste. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Lopez, B. (1986) *Arctic Dreams*. New York: Vintage Books.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) *Métis Perspectives. Perspectives and Realities*. p. 199-386. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.

Suzuki, D.T. (2002) *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature.* Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Zeilig, K. & V. Zeilig (1987) *Ste. Madeleine: Community Without a Town.* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc.

Recommended Websites

Aboriginal Planet

www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet/

Aboriginal Portal Canada

www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Alaska Native Knowledge Network
www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications

Arctic Council
www.arctic-council.org

Atlas of Canada
www.atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/index.html

Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources
www.cier.ca/index2.html

Centre for Indigenous People's Nutrition and Environment
www.mcgill.ca/cine

Environment Canada
www.ec.gc.ca

Gabriel Dumont Virtual Institute
www.metismuseum.ca

Great Law of Peace
www.greatpeace.org/contents/greatlaw.htm

Métis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre Inc.
www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca

Nitsitapiisinni - Stories and Spaces: Exploring Kainai Plants and Culture
www.galileo.org/plants/kainai/index.html

Northern River Basins Study Traditional Knowledge Component Findings
www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water/nrbs/sect3/sect34.html

Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture
www.metismuseum.com/main.php

AFTERWORD



This book is an English-language based, written compilation of Métis languages, stories, traditional knowledge and oral histories as told by a group of Métis Elders from the Métis homeland. Métis Elders featured in *In the Words of Our Ancestors* were originally selected by their provincial organizations as community representatives and experts in Métis traditional health knowledge. The group of Elders who contributed to this collection was, at the end of the meetings, a mix of Elders selected by their provincial organizations and by the Métis Centre because of their expertise in a certain area.

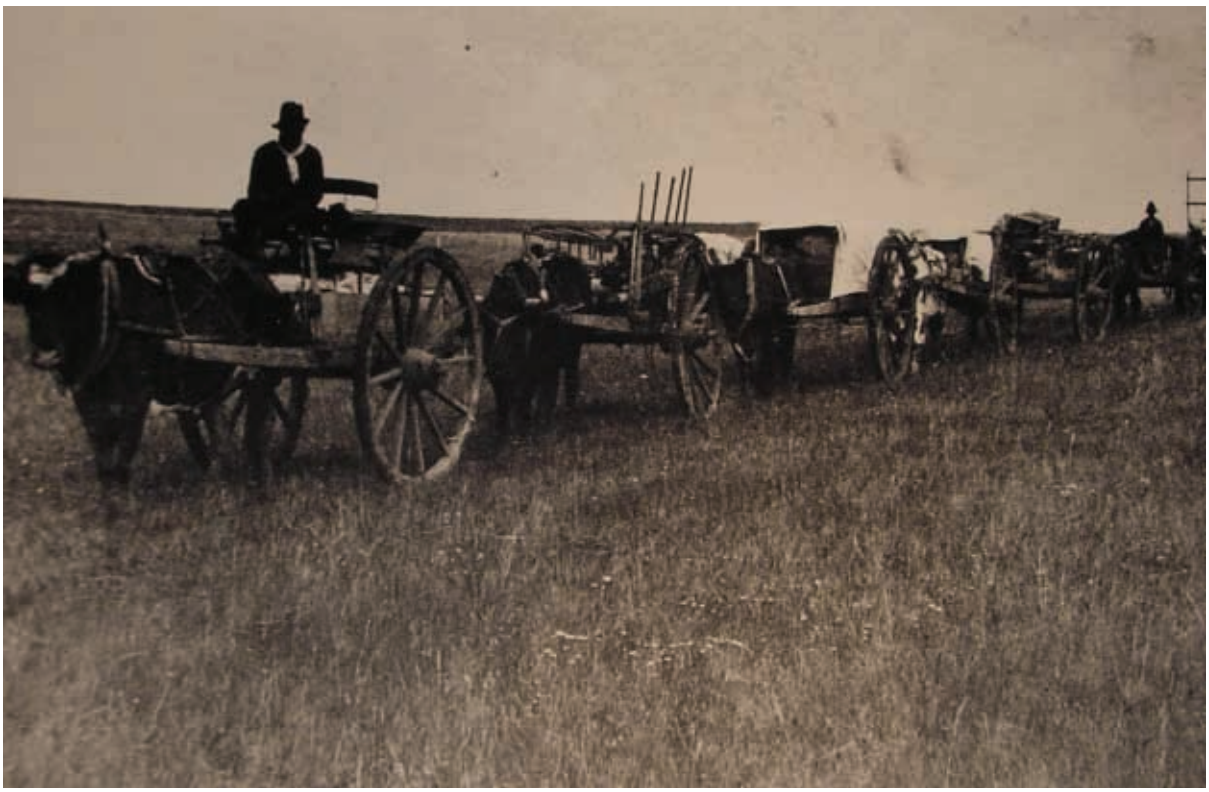
Divided into four groups based on areas of specialization and expertise, the Elders shared personal stories and community histories in order to transfer their understanding of health and well-being. Even though the Elders were asked to refer specifically to four different themes; Elders and traditional knowledge, Michif language, women and family, and land and water, many of the themes and discussions ended up being quite similar. Métis Centre staff provided the Elders with written discussion questions and in all cases the Elders led the discussions and gave a great deal of context and history to each answer and response. Some chose to follow the question guide, some declined the questions.

The four themed meetings held in November 2005, December 2005, January 2006 and March 2006 in Edmonton, Saskatoon and Winnipeg were spread apart chronologically, but in the end, seemed to converge. Although the Elders spoke about very distinct themes, much of their discussion turned out to be quite similar. They were not prompted, nor were their responses predicted ahead of time so the similarity in responses was somewhat surprising. During early analyses, the diverse group of Elders, from every part of the Métis homeland, had very distinct and divergent views. However, after extensive review of the collection of Métis traditional health knowledge, a great deal of the information shared between the Elders and the Métis Centre was based on a series of similar Métis principles.

Use of Michif and Métis languages, shared histories of perseverance through times of hardship, influence of Church and government, facing racism and discrimination, honouring the memory of ancestors and ancestral knowledge, stories of resilience, pride in Métis people, hunting, fishing, trapping, and thoughts about living off of the land were some of the most common stories that connected each of the thematic meetings.

Even though the Métis Elders felt quite passionately about the topic that they were chosen to speak about, they all seemed to have shared values and experiences that permeated through each of their stories. As they taught us about healing, traditional knowledge, Michif language, women and family, and land and water, they told stories of a collective past and truly Métis-specific point of view.

It is hoped that this collection of traditional knowledge leaves the reader with enough freedom to read through the knowledge, take what is most important to him or her and interpret it accordingly. These words represent the lives of an extraordinary group of Métis Elders. It is a collection of things they learned and what they wanted others to learn. What did not make it on the page were those parts of the discussion that were both spoken and unspoken, either intentionally or unintentionally. There were selections that stayed in the meeting room and in the hearts and minds of the Elders. What ended up being shared with the Métis Centre staff was a great deal of unspoken material. The language, laughter, smiles, songs, grief, animated voices and sacred knowledge that accompanied the words written in this book will always be part of the entire experience of the Métis Centre Elders' gatherings. That is the best and most unique part of the traditional knowledge experience. What cannot be shared in writing is always just as valuable as what is written.



INDEX

Métis Centre Elders Gatherings 2005-2006 Top Left Photo (left to right) Top: Albert Desjarlais, Francis Dumais, George 'Lonewalker' McDermott. Bottom: Michel Maurice, Alma Desjarlais, Tom McCallum. **Top Right Photo** (left to right) Grace Zoldy, Rita Flamand, Lois Edge, Laura Burnouf, Norman Fleury. **Bottom Left Photo** (left to right) Top: Tom McCallum, Jack McIvor, Sonny Flett. Bottom: George Fleury, Marion Larkman, Earl Scofield. **Bottom Right Photo** (top to bottom): Marilee Nault, Rose Boyer, Angie Crerar, Alma Desjarlais, Karon Shmon, Rose Richardson.

P

R

S

T

V

W

Y

Z

PHOTO CREDITS

Archives of Manitoba

Inside Cover (top left); *Louis Riel's council, 1885,* Northwest Rebellion File 10, **Page 8;** *'Halfbreed traders, 1872-1874',* Boundary Commission File, N14100, **page 35;** *'buffalo, 1923'*, Department of Mines and Surveys File, **page 37;** *'Halfbreed scouts',* Boundary Commission File 1872-1874, N14060, **page 38;** *'dinner on the prairie, 1860',* Fur Trade File 11, N18043, **page 45;** *'depot at Turtle Mountain',* Boundary Commission File, N11953, **page 52;** *'Halfbreed hunters camp',* Boundary Commission file, 178, N14107, **page 83,** *'Kakabeka Falls, 1890',* **page 91;** *'Halfbreed guide',* Boundary Commission file, N11969, **page 94;** *'Métis log house, year unknown',* **page 107** (left); *'Red River carts and skin tents',* Red River Cart — Transportation file 2, **page 108;** *'The Halfbreeds and ox cart train, 1870',* Red River Cart — Transportation file 4.

National Archives of Canada

Page 69; *'Qu'Appelle Residential School, post 1907'*, **page 70;** *'sewing room, Qu'Appelle Residential School, year unknown.'*

Christi Belcourt, The Breath

Inside Cover (top centre); *'vest and drum'*, **page 7;** *'Marion's Hand'*, **page 11;** painting by Christi Belcourt, **pages 13, 42, 66, 84, and Dedication;** *Marion Larkman.*

Ken Frazer, Frazer Studio

Page 3 (Table of Contents, left); *'Steve Demontigny',* **page 3** (Table of Contents, centre); *'cart and flag',* **page 16;** *'beaded bag',* **page 19;** *'hands and beads',* **page 23;** *'cloth and tobacco',* **page 25;** *'offering',* **page 27;** *'furs',* **page 30;** *'Turtle Mountain sash',* **page 32;** *'fiddle and sash',* **page 46;** *'lii saeñchiur de flechii',* **page 55;** *'dishes',* **page 56;** *'beadwork',* **page 59;** *'quilt',* **page 64;** *'beaded moccasins',* **page 72;** *'sash and pin',* **page 76;** *'rosary and beads',* **page 107;** *'moccasins and cart.'*

Ingrid Misner, Artistic Impressions Photography

Inside Cover (bottom centre); *'scrip and buffalo',* **Inside Cover,** (bottom right); *'Dakota',* **page 5;** *'scrip and Métis symbolism',* **page 9;** *'Riel',* **page 10;** *'Dakota',* **page 17;** *'cart at Upper Fort Garry',* **page 29;** *'Michif and Métis symbols',* **page 62;** *'Seven Oaks House',* **page 74,** *'St. Boniface',* **page 88;** *'red willow',* **page 110;** *'cart.'*

Métis Centre at NAHO, Photos by Lois Edge and Tricia Logan

Page 26; *'MC Elders, July 2006',* **page 51;** *'MC Elders, February 2005',* **page 109;** *(all photos).*

DEDICATION TO MARION LARKMAN

This book is dedicated to Marion Larkman (1926-2006).

Marion was known across Canada as a 'Grandmother of the Métis Nation'. Even though she has passed on, many consider her ever-present. The knowledge she shared and the stories she told live on. Marion was always eager to share, not only the knowledge of her ancestors, but also the knowledge that she felt she acquired from her children and grandchildren. As an Elder, she was passionate about engaging with youth.

Some memories of Marion:

"Marion Larkman was a mentor, comrade and a dear friend. She presented me a beaded badge with the letters N.V., Native Veteran, and a beaded poppy on it."

— Earl Scofield

"All of the Elders had a great time at Batoche in July, 2005 (during a launch of the original Métis Elders and traditional knowledge booklet.) I remember Marion Larkman saying, 'I feel like a movie star', signing the booklet. It was a great privilege to get to know her and also all the rest of the Elders. We have grown to be a big family."

— Alma Desjarlais

OUR HEALTH, STRENGTHENED BY SHARING

The Métis Centre is a national, non-profit, Métis-controlled centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). The Métis Centre is dedicated to improving the mental, physical, spiritual, emotional and social health of all Métis in Canada. We are a centre devoted to promoting Métis health issues through public education and health promotion.

The Métis Centre has adopted and refined NAHO's objectives to reflect, from a population health perspective, the unique health research and policy needs of Métis. Our objectives are to improve and promote the health of Métis in Canada through knowledge-based activities; to promote health issues pertaining to Métis through communications and public education activities; to facilitate and promote research, and develop research partnerships, relating to health issues of Métis; to foster the recruitment, retention, training and utilization of Métis in the Aboriginal workforce in the delivery of health care; and to affirm traditional healing practices through validating holistic traditional practices and medicines and ensuring such practices receive recognition.

Métis Centre
National Aboriginal Health Organization

220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1200
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9

Telephone: 613.237.9462
Fax: 613.237.8707
Toll-Free: 877.602.4445

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
ᑲᓇᑕᒥ ᓄᓇᖃᖅᑳᖅᓯᒪᔪᓄᑦ ᐋᓐᓂᐊᖅᓈᖏᓐᓂᓕᕆᓂᖅᒧᑦ ᑲᑐᔾᔨᖃᑎᒌᑦ

MÉTIS CENTRE @ NAHO
CENTRE MÉTIS @ ONSA