

*Through the Hands of Our Elders ...*

issue

01

# Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge Series:



SPRING 2005

## Profiles of Métis Elders







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**Special Thanks**

*The Métis Centre would like to thank all the Elders who have attended and shared their wisdom with us at the Métis Elders' Gatherings.*

## Taannshi Kiyawow,

Métis health, traditional knowledge and healing practices have always been intertwined in the lives and experiences of Métis people in Canada. Traditional knowledge is the collective knowledge of our people contained within our communities and passed down from generation to generation, through storytelling, observation and the sharing of experience. Using traditional medicine and understanding the importance of our connection to the land form the basis of Métis culture, language and traditions.

This booklet, the first issue in a series entitled Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge, profiles 14 of the Elders involved in our on-going Métis Elders' Gatherings. Each Elder involved is committed to working with the Métis Centre to help protect, provide access to, and share Métis perspectives of traditional health knowledge and healing practices.



Labrador Tea

## Métis Elders Gatherings

*Our Elders are respected as our teachers and guides.*

In 2002, the Métis Centre, in association with the Métis National Council, co-hosted the Métis Health Policy Forum. This historic event brought together Métis leaders, health professionals and practitioners, educators and researchers, Elders, youth and community members to discuss Métis health.

At the forum, participants suggested to the Métis Centre that we should establish partnerships with Métis Elders so that their wisdom would become a part of the health information, research and policy initiatives undertaken by the Centre. Accordingly, the Métis Centre began hosting Métis Elders' Gatherings in early 2003. The gatherings bring together participants from across Canada to provide a forum for Métis Elders, seniors and healers to share traditional health knowledge, healing practices, and medicinal knowledge with one another and the rest of us.

*Our health is dependent upon the health of the land and water.*

Métis Elders at the gathering told us that traditional knowledge and healing practices of Elders are rooted in Aboriginal languages. Our history and experiences, shared through storytelling, contribute to Métis health and wellness. Our health is tied to our culture, values, beliefs, practices, and traditions. Finally, our health and survival are dependent upon the health of the land, water and our environment.



# Michel "Michael" Maurice

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



Michel Maurice was born just outside Green Lake, Sask. He was raised by his grandparents Marie Kipling and Harry Maurice, who were originally from the Métis community of Ile a la Crosse, Sask.

Michel has many fond childhood memories of swimming and fishing in the summer and lacing up skates in the winter. He left school when he was 15 years old: "At that time Grade 8 was all you needed, so I went to work clearing bush for farmers," remembered Michel. "I'd start at 7 a.m. and work for 10 hours and get paid three dollars a day."

He worked as a bumper exchanger for 20 years in Saskatoon before retiring. Throughout his adult life, Michel has continued to stay involved in the community by sitting on the board of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre and the Saskatoon Police Chief's Advisory Committee on First Nation and Métis Issues. He is an Elder at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge, a centre created in partnership with the City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon District Health Board, and the Métis Nation.

Michel enjoys supporting youth and counsels First Nation and Métis youth at Nutana Collegiate in Saskatoon. "It takes a while to build trust with the youth," explained Michel.

*They want to know who you are. The younger ones are more trusting. I work with three and four year olds and I tell them that it is okay to call me 'Moshum.' Sometimes when I go to a community event, I hear these little voices calling me, Moshum! Moshum!*

*Michel Maurice*

Michel attends the Métis Elders' Gatherings to visit and learn as much as possible about traditional ways.



Mullien



# Tom McCallum

Burnaby, British Columbia

(Acuhk Askatum / White Standing Buffalo)



Born and raised in the historic Métis community of Ile a la Crosse, Sask., Tom McCallum was immersed in Métis culture and language from the beginning of his life. He is fluent in Cree and Michif, and as people who know him will attest, he is a brilliant orator and entertaining storyteller.

Tom loves to speak and communicate in Cree and understands the value and importance of the language and how it has shaped his own worldview. "When you speak that Aboriginal language, it's a state of being—connected to the whole universe."

*On the hierarchy of dependence we human beings are the most dependent. Why our people always use tobacco is because the spirits saw how feeble we were and wanted to help us. And because everything in the universe works on a system of balance, if the spirits give us something, we must give them something back to restore the balance. The spirits being so close to the Creator and so far ahead of us in their development did not have any need for what we could offer them from our human existence.*

*In the wisdom of the spirits, they created a plant called tobacco and gave it to us, so that whenever we called upon them to assist us we would offer tobacco in return...This is why tobacco is so important and is always the first thing we offer.*

Tom McCallum



Maplebud

Tom credits his grandmother, who was known as La petit Norde "The Little Northerner," for his first lessons in traditional knowledge and oral history. She was very well known in his community as a midwife and for her knowledge on medicines. Tom also spent two years with Cree Elder Rose Auger "out in the bush," where she shared with him her teachings and knowledge of plants and animals. Tom follows the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and is knowledgeable about many different healing and spiritual ceremonies.

Today, Tom uses his traditional teachings in his role as an Elder for youth and families with the First Nations Urban Community Society in Burnaby. He has also worked with inmates, men's healing groups, and cross-cultural workshops.



# Elmer Ross

## Bobcaygeon, Ontario



Elmer Ross was born on his grandfather's farm south of Hubbard, Sask. and learned traditional values passed onto him by his grandparents as a child. Elmer remembers throwing a knapsack on his back and skiing out to check his trapline as a boy.

When he was old enough, he would saddle up a horse and ride out to his trap line. Not only a trapper, Elmer also learned the traditional skills of skinning and stretching hides.

Respecting his family's wishes, Elmer moved to the town of Hubbard with his grandparents when they gave up farming so that he would have access to a better education. Married in 1951, he and his wife Vera (née Tindall) moved from the west to Ontario in search of better pay and employment security. After working in a variety of jobs in different cities in Ontario, he entered the Ontario Provincial Police force in 1955, where he served as Detective and Supervisor until his retirement in 1988. All in all, Elmer served with the OPP for 32 years.

During a difficult period while battling cancer, Elmer wrote a poem entitled *Metis Lament*. "I enjoy sharing this poem with other people because it helped me get past a tough time," explained Elmer. "It's important for us to be proud of where we come from and the poem is about feeling proud of who we are as Métis."

*We must stand together as a nation and be proud of our heritage and be kind and gentle to our brothers and sisters. We are a family of Métis in this great universe who stand equal to all others on this earth.*

*We give thanks to our great creator for all the great gifts and wisdom he has given us. We will continue to follow our guiding light and carry forth our sign of infinity into the future because we have a God-given right to stand tall as proud Métis.*

Excerpt from the poem *Metis Lament*  
by Elmer Ross

You can read the poem in its entirety  
on [http://www.naho.ca/MHC\\_Site/C/perspectives.html](http://www.naho.ca/MHC_Site/C/perspectives.html)



Fireweed Flower

# Francis Fisher

## Prince George, British Columbia



Francis Fisher was born on a farm in Gerald, Sask., where his great uncle Wilfred Belhumeur and great aunt Mary (Desjarlais) raised him in traditional fashion. Francis is proud that his uncle was "related to the Riel family," which makes him a distant cousin of Louis Riel. Francis was about four or five years old when he first went "bush rabbit hunting," and he fondly recalls the times he spent hunting and trapping with his great uncle Wilfred.

Francis was born into a family of Michif language speakers. Explaining that the Michif language is "made up of Cree verbs and French nouns," Francis only started speaking English when he was around three or four years old. In 1999, Francis moved from Saskatchewan to British Columbia where he remains actively involved in his new community and conducts Michif workshops in Prince George and Cranbrook.

*Language is an important part of the culture; everything looks different from an Aboriginal perspective.*

*Francis Fisher*

"It is important to keep the Michif language going," said Francis. "Culture is important and we have to keep it up. Language is an important part of the culture; everything looks different from an Aboriginal perspective, and teachings provide that window to see the world in a new way." Francis realizes it is "hard to get Elders out and to share what they know," and he is concerned that there are few people in the Prince George area who know about plants and medicine. That is why he attends the Métis Elders' Gathering. He sees it as an opportunity to share and learn from others.



Pink Lady's Slipper



# Rose Boyer

## Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

*Sharing knowledge is a form of medicine.*

*Rose Boyer*



Rose Boyer comes from a large Métis family. With 17 children in the family, Rose, the first girl, played an important role in helping to raise her younger siblings. Her father, Colin McKay, was originally from the Red River settlement area in Manitoba. Her mother, Marjorie Plant, came from Ireland and was adopted by a Métis family when she was only five months old.

Rose proudly calls herself a "road allowance half-breed" from the Glen Mary District in Saskatchewan. Glen Mary was a community formed by ousted Métis trying to re-establish homes on land set aside for future road development. "It was a caring and loving home," Rose explained. "We would say our prayers in the morning and at night. Mom and Dad passed on the importance of respect and having morals in the home." Rose lived in what she calls a "shack" on the road allowance until she was 14 years old. At this time, the provincial government decided to relocate families living on road allowances to a Métis colony-farming project at Green Lake, Sask. Rose remembers the terrible disappointment Métis families experienced when the Saskatchewan government said Métis families could have a house, 40 acres and a cow. When they arrived at Green Lake, Rose remembered, "There was no house. People lived in a big box-like building with no windows." It wasn't long before the family moved to Meadow Lake, Sask. Rose lived there for 17 years. "It was hard but it was a good life," remembered Rose.

*It's important to have respect for others; for other cultures and languages.  
It's the Métis way.*

*The medicine I receive to be strong is when I go back to Batoche once a year. It rejuvenates me to see fathers, mothers and children being proud of who we are, and when we honour those who have died for us.*

*Rose Boyer*



Blueberries

Rose enjoys preparing traditional Métis food. She started making bannock when she was eight. Rose now has nine of her own children, 39 grandchildren, and 27 great-grandchildren. She values children, explaining "children are on loan to us for a short time." She is now retired and spends her time crocheting, knitting, and looking after grandchildren.



# Angie Crerar

Grande Prairie, Alberta



Angie Crerar was born in Fort Resolution, N.W.T. Her grandfather Pierre Mercredi was a well-known Hudson's Bay factor. Her parents Rose and Stan Mercredi had four boys and four girls. Angie was taught and lived the Métis way of life and credits most of what she has learned to her mother. After her mother passed away when she was only nine, Angie was taken and placed into residential school where everything she knew from her happy childhood was destroyed. She has vivid memories of those times, which she is only now beginning to be able to share with others.

Together with her husband Doug, she has raised 10 children, 23 grandchildren and now have two great-grandchildren. Living in Grand Prairie since 1966, Angie continues to be an active community member, belongs to 10 organizations and is still going strong.

*Medicine for your soul is love, goodness, kindness and generosity. Because I am a survivor of residential school where we had no love or affection, it made a great impact on my life.*

*Angie Crerar*



Bog Laurel

She is proud of her work as an Elder for organizations such as the Friendship Centre, the Alberta Associations of Friendship Centres, the Métis Regional Council, and the Métis Child and Family Services Authority.

She has been recognized for her contributions to her community and was honoured for her life's work with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003 from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. She also received a Volunteer of the Year Award from the Grand Prairie Friendship Centre in 1986 and another one from Métis Local #1990 in 1995. Angie is still very much involved in the community as a volunteer.



# Lorraine Tordiff

## Fort Smith, Northwest Territories



Lorraine Tordiff was born and raised in Fort Smith, N.W.T., "a small community, marked by trails to the store, the church, and people's houses where kids of all ages played together." Lorraine's mother, a Métis woman originally from Fort Resolution, raised her large family of 10 by herself during the summer months while Lorraine's dad traveled the river system, charting channels and installing all the navigational markers. Lorraine said he would sail all the way from Fort Smith to Aklavik, where the Mackenzie River flows into the Beaufort Sea. His was the first boat out in the spring and the last one back in the fall. "With the help of one deck hand and a cook, he charted the entire water systems that opened the North!"

Lorraine's dad, Gordon Cumming, was born in Kinsley, Kansas. Gordon was a dynamic man of Scottish descent who enjoyed playing the piano at social functions. Her family "had one of the first radios in town," and a movie projector, which Lorraine remembers needed to be cranked to make the pictures move. "Dad showed movies to the community, then brought the projector and films to Fort Fitzgerald, Alta. to show the movies there. It was a 48 km round trip by dog team." Lorraine said. Her father was a World War One veteran who founded the local Legion Branch 239. He was a devout and active legion member up to the time of his passing.

Lorraine's mother Ernestine was a wonderful cook and a fantastic sewer of moccasins, mukluks, and parkas. She was very creative and made everything from clothing to furniture covers, all without a pattern. Ernestine "spoke five languages, some of which she learned at the Mission Convent where, although it was forbidden, the children still managed to communicate in their own languages."



Sundew



"She was fluent in her first language, Chipewyan, spoke excellent French and English and could speak some Cree and Slavey." Lorraine explains that as Métis, they lived a semi-traditional lifestyle. "On one hand Mom crocheted elaborate dollies and on the other, she prepared sinew for stitching moccasins."

Lorraine remembers that there was always something hanging to dry on a line in their kitchen, usually lace fat from caribou or moose, sinew, fish or meat.

"I believe my parents ensured we benefited from both their worlds and we are richer for it. It wasn't easy being a 'half-breed,' but they taught us to be proud of who we are, to take from both cultures and forge our own." Both Lorraine's parents worked hard and passed on their strong work ethic. "My mother taught us how to create something from nothing, she was a master at this and her ingenuity inspires me still."

Lorraine holds a degree in social work from the University of Calgary. She served her community as a front-line social worker for 28 years. Lorraine changed careers in January 2005 when she became the Regional Superintendent of Municipal and Community Affairs for the South Slave Region, an area encompassing eight communities.

*My parents taught us to respect our family, our Elders, the environment, and ourselves. They also taught us to respect differences like those in culture, language, and religion. We, the Métis, are strong, independent individuals whose struggle has always been about rights—this is the respect we seek.*

*My parents also gave us a love of music and the gift of humour; we don't take ourselves too seriously. Métis love to laugh and we enjoy poking fun at ourselves—laughter is good medicine.*

Lorraine Tordiff

Lorraine and her husband Bill will celebrate their 38<sup>th</sup> year of marriage in October of this year. Most important in their lives are their three children and six grandchildren who are all proud to be Métis.



Wintergreen



Yarrow



# Marielee Nault

## Woodridge, Manitoba



Marielee met her husband Elmer Nault in Winnipeg, and together they have four children and 10 grandchildren. She is a proud grandparent and raised their oldest grandchild. Marielee has been a foster parent to several children over the last 14 years through three different foster care agencies. Foster parenting is extremely important to her. "I love children and want to give children stability and opportunities," explained Marielee. She hopes to have a positive effect on the lives of all the children she parents.

Marielee is deeply involved with the Métis Nation and her community. She is a member of the Board of Directors for the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) as well as the chairperson of health for MMF. She is a board member for Nine Circles Community Health Centre, and active with the Canadian Aboriginal Aids Network (CAAN). She has also contributed to the Métis National Council HIV/AIDS Handbook for Métis Communities. She is also an active member of the Métis Women of Manitoba, and the Continuum of Care for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Marielee loves to sing in her family band Backroads Country. The group includes her husband Elmer, and two of their sons. "We play good old Métis music," said Marielee. She has been singing since the age of seven. She wants to contribute all that she can to the Métis community, especially in the areas of home care, palliative care, and seniors housing.

*It's sad but there are so many people who don't know how to be parents. I think it is because of the residential schools. When our children were taken away, who did we have at home? Nobody. Our culture and language was lost because it couldn't be passed down. Before we always had our kids with us...we always took our kids everywhere. Another thing is the love and the affection kids should have got. There are a lot of parents that don't want hugs and kisses because they didn't get it themselves as children and so because children aren't getting it either a lot kids today don't know how to accept it. To this day, kids don't know how to say I love you.*

Marielee Nault

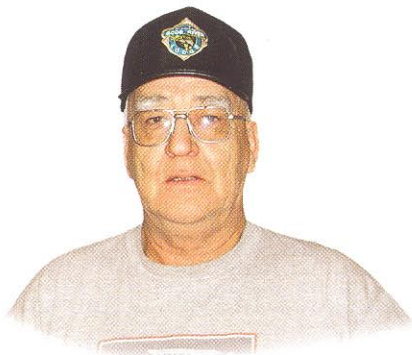


Milkweed



# Jack McIvor

## Wabowden, Manitoba



Jack McIvor, a fluent Cree speaker, quit school when he was 14 years old to go trapping with his uncle. He continued trapping and is proud that he knows how to "survive in the bush." He is very grateful for the traditional knowledge that was handed down to him and believes that it is, "important to have something for the young people," even though it may be hard to get youth interested in the old ways.

Shortly after Jack was born, his family moved from God's Lake to Cross Lake, Man. His parents, Mary (Sinclair) and Malcolm McIvor, had eight boys and four girls. Jack has held a variety of jobs in the north including labourer, heavy equipment operator, miner, fire ranger, driller/blaster, and business owner. Jack took a job as a public works foreman, which he did for 16 years before retiring in 1996.

In 1997 he ran for Vice-President of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) in the Thompson, Manitoba region and held that position until 2001. He has also served for six years on the regional health authority board for Manitoba Health. He enjoys visiting in Métis communities. In winter he travels on the winter road and flies in during summer, as he holds a recreational pilot's license. Jack is a proud family man with two sons, two daughters, 12 grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. Jack believes in traditional medicine. "You must be respectful of who is teaching it and you need to be respectful and careful about how you handle medicine," Jack said. He strongly believes that information about herbs and plants should not be commercialized.

*You need to be respectful and careful about how you handle medicine and you must be respectful of who is teaching you and giving it to you. Anybody that uses it, has to first respect the person that's giving it to you, and if it's intended for other than yourself, then you have to tell that person. You have to believe it and you have to what you're told or it won't work. You can't use it like Tylenol where one size fits all because it can work against you.*

*It all comes down to respect. For the youth, I would tell them, be honest with everything in life. Learn to be honest and respectful of everything you're told and who you're with. It's easier to be honest than to lie and cheat because if you choose to do the latter then you'll spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder and being in trouble or being in and out of jail...if that's the life you choose to live, then those are the consequences you can expect. You have to treat everybody the same.*

Jack McIvor



# Albert and Alma Desjarlais

East Prairie Métis Settlement, Alberta



Albert Desjarlais was born and raised on the Elizabeth Métis Settlement. His parents are James Desjarlais and Louise Trottier. His mother is originally from the Maple Creek, Montana, area. In 1969, he moved to High Prairie, Alta.

Alma Desjarlais (née Cross) was raised in Frog Lake, Alta. Her parents were Marcel Cross and Mary (Horse) Cross. She is proud that her grandfather, John Horse, was Chief of Frog Lake for many years. She and Albert have been together for over 40 years and had eight children together. Sadly, their eldest son died in an accident. They also adopted a girl, Lana Blair, who now at 22 has a son, Kevin, who is loved by everyone. Alma and Albert are busy grandparents with 24 (and counting) grandchildren.



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. He explained that his "grandfather's pipe was passed down" to him. "Pipes and teachings that go with it are passed on to someone within the family. When the pipe holder is getting tired and sick, that is when they passed it on."

*When you are sick, your spirit stays away. Many people who are in jail, they say they leave their spirits in there when they leave. So when you pray for them, you pray for them to leave with their spirits when they leave there.*

*These are not my words. These are what the Elders say...in other words, it's not a new thing. They (the teachings) have been around already for a long time.*

*Albert Desjarlais*



There were four girls and four boys in Alma's immediate family. Alma's grandparents lived by the lake and as she says, "I think that's the best place anyone can live, is by the lake. We all lived back and forth with our parents and grandparents. So we had four great teachers growing up." She says that like most of the Elders who attend the Métis Centre gatherings their livelihood was the same: gathering and preserving, tending a garden, milking cows, and making butter. The women fixed hides and did the sewing, like making moccasins, gloves and clothes.

Albert and his wife Alma work as a team and have dedicated their lives to doctoring people in the traditional way. Albert noted, "Sometimes people want to be cured right away. We were told to doctor for four days and four nights. Over four days, we make sure to do the doctoring that is needed." Albert and Alma generally stay close to home, traveling to doctor older people who cannot travel to them and to share some of their knowledge with others at various conferences and meetings.

Albert explains that his learning philosophy is "learn as you go." He added: "They don't teach you everything. Older people know lots of things; they left us the sweat lodges and we run them every Sunday." Albert stressed that it is "not an easy job and it's good to see people getting better. People come to be doctored and feel better."

Albert enjoys sharing his teachings and runs sweats every two weeks for the inmates at Peace River. He also runs sweats and talks with young offenders in Grand Prairie. He emphasized that "people can't drink and do this kind of work, they need to respect and don't even gamble." He believes that it is "good to share with each other and learn."

After moving to East Prairie Métis Settlement from Elizabeth Settlement in 1969 to settle down for school and farming, Albert did a lot of logging, commercial fishing, farming and raising animals. "We were a rodeo family," Alma explains. "Now we're a hockey family; everybody plays hockey even the girls hockey. But we also teach them the culture; the youngest, they came in the sweat when they were three months old."

*There's only one regret in my family life, that our kids don't speak Cree. They understand some and are trying now. This happened because the four older ones used to get in trouble when they spoke Cree at school, so I didn't keep teaching them.*

*I instruct kids with the Métis dancing and they're a lot of fun to work with. I love young people, but we must show them respect in order for them to return their respect.*

*Alma Desjarlais*



Juniper



# Marion Larkman

Bewdley, Ontario



Raised by her father Stafford (Sandy) Jacobs after her parents separated when she was seven, Marion learned from her dad to be a trapper and hunter. Marion also collected wood, carried water, and learned to tan hides. "I've made many gallons of maple syrup. My dad used to drop me off to go help my grandfather Jimmy McCue and I used to help him keep the fires going day and night until the syrup was ready." Today, she is proud that her father also showed her the uses of indigenous plants. "It was a different life from today," Marion said. "The last thing you did at night was go and get a couple pails of water and at least three armfuls of wood before going to bed."

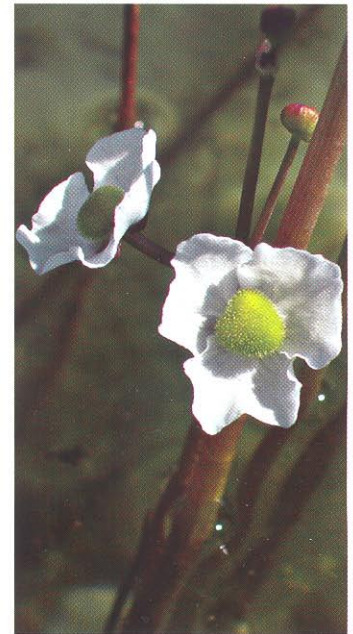
She remembers when her mom Isabelle got indoor plumbing in the 1980s, she didn't like having a bathroom in her house because she didn't like the idea of bathroom being beside the kitchen. Her mom still hauled water up until a few years before she passed away.

*Bear grease is good for aches and pains and helps hair grow. It's good for everything. You just roast the bear meat and collect the grease and after a while it hardens. We used to add lye to it and make soap. To roast the bear, you just do it in an oven or over an open fire, season with a little salt and stick some peppercorns in it. Flip it now and again. You cook it the same length of time as you would roast beef and when its tender you eat it.*

*Red willow was so important to us; it was a working part of our culture. We stretched our hides and muskrats on red willow because it bends so nicely. We used it for medication. It was used for a lot of things. We boil it, and it has a slippery slime under the skin, and we'd put some kind of sweetener in it and drink it as cough syrup.*

*But to be honest I feel bad because I feel as if I'm not leaving this knowledge for future generations. I am always willing to teach kids of the way we had to live, but it's not being recorded. There isn't even a paper trail. The way kids live this day and age is not the way we lived.*

Marion Larkman



Arrowhead



Marion was born on the Curve Lake Indian Reserve and raised in a Métis settlement at Burleigh Falls, Ont. Her family experienced racism for being Métis. "Father was a half-breed and people didn't want half-breeds on the reserves," she said. Marion is no stranger to the traditional lifestyle, and explained "the family lived in a tent until father built a house. There was nothing there, but shortly after, more half-breeds gathered there and it became a small settlement." Marion joined the army at the beginning of the World War Two. She has worked as a cook and telephone operator. Today, she talks to students in secondary school and university about Métis heritage and culture. Marion enjoys looking after Elders and escorts them to doctor appointments. She is actively involved in the Métis community as a Métis Nation of Ontario Senator. Marion loves being an oral historian. "Fifty years from now, the youth may remember an older person telling them a story," she said. "It's not fiction when we tell a story; it is the truth about what happened to us."

## Angus Beaulieu

### Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories



Angus Beaulieu was raised by his grandfather Johnny Angus Beaulieu. His grandfather taught him how to survive on the land, and to observe the behaviour of the animals in order to pick up information. In the winter, Angus and his grandfather would travel by dogsled to check the traplines. In the summer, they would travel by boat on Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories to hunt muskrat and check their fishnets. His grandfather offered to teach Angus the traditional healing ways. Today, he regrets he didn't take his grandfather's offer to learn about traditional healing and medicinal plants.

As a youth, Angus enjoyed listening and watching fiddle dances in his home community of Fort 'Res.' Despite his grandfather's disapproval, when Angus was 12 years old, he began to teach himself how to play the fiddle by watching other fiddle players. "I used to just love those fiddle dances," said Angus. "The music was good and people got together. In those days there was no electricity, just the fiddle and guitar."

Besides playing the fiddle, Angus spent most of his youth out on the land. Although Angus found a job with the Government of the Northwest Territories, he continued to hunt and trap. Although he has retired from his government job, he keeps busy playing in his band, Native Cousins. The group has performed at various venues in the north and south. Angus also plays in fiddling contests and talent shows, and has returned home many times with a first prize.



# Francis Dumais

Bonnyville, Alberta



For Francis Dumais, Cree was the language spoken at home and he did not learn English until he went to school. He is grateful that both of his parents passed on their traditional ways to him. "The traditional life was all there was. That is how they lived," he explained. His mother was a very strong woman and raised all the children after his dad left the family.

Francis was born in Beacon Hill, Sask., to his parents, Frank and Mary (Berlin) Dumais who together had fifteen children. They lived a traditional way of life at a time when there was no money. His father hunted and trapped and his mother knew about traditional medicines.

*You have to pray to the Creator who put those medicines (here). You give thanks to the Creator and ask the plant for permission to use it. Tobacco is the first thing you offer to the Elder, especially if you want to talk about the herbs. It's so sacred. We put tobacco on the ground when we dig the herbs. When you're treating somebody, there is always prayer behind it.*

*A lot of people want to learn and it's good that we want to start somewhere. On the other hand, it's not that easy to get to understand how we use them. You can't just go to an Elder and ask them to give you their medicines. I'm having a dilemma right now because I'm worried about what if it gets ruined if it gets in the wrong hands. The Creator planted them in this earth for us to use, not to abuse. You can ruin them so quickly.*

*And also, sometimes when you have to boil tea, and then after you take them and put them in a clean place to always respect the medicines.*

*Picking medicines, there's a lot of work that goes into it. They grow all over, not just in one place.*

*Francis Dumais*

Francis is highly involved in the community and meets with students to share information about the Métis culture. He was recently asked to share ways that youth can survive in the bush if they are lost. He is pleased to pass on his traditional knowledge to youth. Francis also visits inmates in Fort Saskatchewan and Lac La Biche, Alta. on a monthly basis, and sometimes more depending on the need. He is also an Elder for the Metis Nation of Alberta Zone 2. Following traditional teachings, Francis has great respect for the land, the medicines and ceremonies. He remains the only person in his family to follow that kind of lifestyle. He says that he "goes where he is needed."

Francis also has a registered trapline that some day will pass on to someone in his family. He spends time in the winter at his cabin trapping mink, coyotes, foxes, lynx, muskrats and others. "I'm trying to keep that going. I love it out there" he says, "It's a good life."





*The Métis Centre wishes to extend our thanks to  
Senator Earl Schofield of the Métis Nation of Ontario  
for his contributions to the Métis Elders' Gatherings.*



# *Our Health, Strengthened By Sharing*



For the Métis Centre, traditional knowledge is viewed as foundational to Métis health and wellness. Using traditional medicines and understanding the importance of our connection to the land form the basis of Métis culture, language and traditions. Aboriginal languages and the cultural perspectives revealed through our languages are crucial to our understanding of traditional health knowledge and healing practices.

Our goals are to ensure the knowledge of Métis Elders, seniors and healers is shared, used, and protected for coming generations; to make it easier for Métis to access traditional health knowledge; and to find a balance between protecting and promoting our traditional healing practices with the physical health approaches of modern medicine.

This booklet is the first in a series to be published based upon the proceedings of the Métis Elders' Gatherings. This first booklet features the profiles of the participants who attended the Métis Elders' Gatherings during 2003 and 2004. Additional publications in this series include issues on the importance of water to our health and wellness, traditional medicines and remedies, and the Michif language.

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