

Nora Cummings, Peter Bishop, and Ron Laliberte:  
Métis Political Activist Interviews (Feb 28, 29, 2004)

Tape 1

**Start Time: 3:06.35.03**

**Peter Bishop:** But I did have someone, a negative experience in education. Because they used to punish us like they did the Indian kids. But the worse the Indian kids were abused, sexually abused, we were physically abused. But we had a home to go to, we'd, we didn't have to live with those teachers all the time. They had their own, quarters. Course we went home.

**Ron Laliberte:** Right.

**(Video Time: 3:07.06.26) Peter Bishop:** And they, they also had a couple of shelters that's for mostly Métis kids from southern Saskatchewan. They were shipped there and they were looked after. By the, the government had set up those houses. In fact, there's one building that's still standing up there. That's the old Alec Bishop Child Care Centre. That's one of the shelters. And they had shipped a bunch of Métis, I think it was the late '40s, early '50s from all over southern Saskatchewan.

**Ron Laliberte:** Those settlements?

**Nora Cummings:** Yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** Yeah. These are the road allowance people that Nora's talking about.

**Ron Laliberte:** Glen Mary and Duck Lake.

**Peter Bishop:** Glen Mary, yes. And Kinistino.

**Ron Laliberte:** Baljennie.

**Peter Bishop:** Baljennie. All those places.

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** That's where these people came from. Okay?

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**(Video Time: 3:08.00.23) Peter Bishop:** And they arrived in the spring and they stored most of their furniture in the church. It was an old church by where we lived. My Dad gave permission. "You leave your furniture here." He helped them out as much as he could, those people. And anyway they lived in tents because right away, soon as they moved to Green Lake they had to walk to the bush and cut logs so they could build their own homes for the winter, before the winter set in. And it was the local people that helped them, because they didn't know how. My Dad was one of them. And what was sad, particularly sad about the children that came with them they'd never gone to school. They weren't allowed. See a lot of those road allowance people lived close to Indian reserves. The Indians wouldn't allow them in their schools so they never went to school.

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** So came fall when school was going to start all those kids were placed in school. I used to feel sorry for them.

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** I did because they'd be maybe from 10 to 14 year olds. Do you know where they were placed? In with the Grade 1 kids.

**Ron Laliberte:** Oh yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** They looked so out of place.

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**Peter Bishop:** And the other kids used to tease them so much. I never did. You know I wasn't raised that way. You can't blame those people. There's about, I don't know, around 300 people that moved there.

**(Video Time: 3:09.41.18) Ron Laliberte:** Yeah. That's a particularly sad part of the history of the southern Métis that moved up. And what happened during that period, from what I understand, is that, maybe Nora could comment on this because she might know this a bit better, but when you look at the road allowance children in southern Saskatchewan, the provincial schools didn't want them and, of course, they weren't federal responsibility and so they weren't paying taxes because they were living on road allowances. So if they're not paying taxes, taxes they don't have the right to go to school and then they kept them out of school because they said they've got lice in their hair and they got all these diseases so we don't want them there or else the regular children won't go. So they kept them out of school like that. I don't know about you, Nora, if you, you know anything about that during your, from your history.

**(Video Time: 3:10.22.23) Nora Cummings:** Well the only school we knew, like I said, was St. Joseph's School and again it was similar as the, it was all run by nuns. And it was sort of like a residential school but it was in the city. And when we, like my parents, my mother went very little and my uncles mostly, mostly my uncles had went. But when we were going to school there, like Peter says, a lot of our kids didn't go past grade 8. They

didn't know what grade 8 was. And the other thing was that it was always mostly you had to learn like, I was in grade one and two, and three of the girls and I had to scrub the floors because they said we'd become good housewives when we got older. That's was the nuns way of, you know, you had to do things.

**Ron Laliberte:** That was home economics class, was it?

**Nora Cummings:** It must have been. 'Cause she would say, "Oh you'd make somebody a good hus-, wife," you know. And they'd make us do these things and they were very cruel to our, our people. Very cruel. Very mean. We had a young boy, like you said, he was very tall and he would come to school and he had problems with kidneys and he'd wet himself and she would stand him up with the big ruler and she'd whip him and sometimes he'd just fall on the floor. If you'd go to pick him up then you'd get this. They were very cruel. She was a very cruel, I've never forgot that, that teacher. In fact, my friend and I when we got older we—I, I, hated school. I hated school. 'Cause I would go home and I would say – I would tell them I got a strapping every day – my friend and I got a strapping for 30 days for what, to this day I don't know. I would go home and tell my parents and my Mom would say, "You guys must be doing something bad." You know how the old people were – you did something bad that's why, so I'd go back. Finally one day I said I'm not going to school. I'm not going to go to school. So they, my Mom took me in and I remember this one nun. She was a very, even the boys were scared of her, she was a wicked tea-, princ-, she was a principal. But I didn't mean to pull her veil. I went to, you know, when they were grabbing me and I

scratch and her veil came off and of course they had the white. She went, "You take her home," she said. From that day on though I never got a strap. But I had to – I guess you get enough fear and enough and you take it maybe.

**End Time: 3:12.37.14**