

Leah Marie Dorion.¹ (b. 1970)

Leah was born at Nipawin and grew up in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She is the daughter of Louis and Roberta Dorion; a Metis family with roots in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. Leah entered competitive swimming with the Prince Albert Lions Swim Club as a young girl. Between ages 10 and 13 she won numerous provincial championships in the 100 and 800 metre freestyle and the 100-metre breaststroke. Swimming allowed Leah to travel all across Canada and meet other youth.

In 1986, while she was playing volleyball at Carlton Comprehensive High School in Prince Albert, her coaches encouraged her to try out for the Saskatchewan Women's Provincial Team. She made this team and subsequently played for them from 1986 to 1989. In 1989 the Provincial team traveled to Europe for the World Junior Volleyball Championships. The Saskatchewan team won the silver medal, placing second to gold medalist Greece. In the same year the team proudly won the gold medal for Saskatchewan in the Jeux Canada Games.

From 1989 to 1994, Leah Dorion played for the University of Saskatchewan Huskies Women's Volleyball Team. In the 1990-1991 season the team won the silver medal in the CIAU National Volleyball Championships. In 1993, Leah played volleyball in the North American Indigenous Games held at Prince Albert. This team won a gold medal for Saskatchewan. "It felt wonderful to have sports competitions at an international level available for Aboriginal athletes," she says. This team also won gold in the next two North American Indigenous Games. She notes that sport has encouraged her to be the best person she could be in all areas of her life. She again played for the Saskatchewan Senior Women's Volleyball team in the 2002 North American Indigenous Games held at Winnipeg, they were silver medalists, the team then retired from active competition.. She believes that her participation in sport has helped her to lead a positive, healthy lifestyle. In recognition of this she was chosen as one of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Youth Role Models. It has also taught her about goal setting, determination and commitment. Leah is also very connected to the Elders of the Metis community and never misses an opportunity to interact and learn from them.

Leah completed her grade twelve at Carlton High School in 1989 and then attended the University of Saskatchewan where she was awarded a Bachelor of Education Degree in 1994 and a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Native Studies in 1999. More recently she completed her Master of Arts (Integrated Studies) at Athabasca University.²

Leah Dorion was Curriculum and Publishing Coordinator for the Gabriel Dumont Institute. She has taught Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, St. Michael's College (Duck Lake), St. Peter's College (Muenster) and at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. She has also participated as a coach for the University of Saskatchewan Huskies Women's Volleyball Team, and has been a Volleyball Camp program developer in communities such as Sturgeon Lake Reserve and La Loche.

¹ This is an excerpt from L.J. Barkwell (Ed.) *Women of the Metis Nation*. Winnipeg: Louis Riel Institute, 2010, ISBN 978-0-9809912-5-3. Leah provided the cover artwork, for this book: Font cover: "Picking Saskatoons"; back cover: "Vision Quest". From the "Country Wives: Metis Women of this Land" series.

² Her thesis is entitled "Opikinawasowin: The Lifelong Process of Growing Cree and Metis Children" (September 30, 2010).



Leah Dorion and Lawrie Barkwell at Batoche November 2009
Photo by Louison Dorion.

In 1993, Leah worked with Professor Frank Tough to research and write, “*The claims of the Half-breeds have finally been closed*”: A Study of Treaty Ten and Treaty Five Adhesion Scrip, a research report commissioned by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Leah has edited or co-edited several books and contributed articles to other publications. She was co-editor and contributed a chapter to *Resources for Métis Researchers* (1999) and has similarly participated in the book *Metis Legacy*, a Millennium Project of the Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont Institutes. This book won the *Saskatchewan Book Award for Publishing in Education*. Pemmican Publications Inc. published Leah’s children’s book, *The Snow Tunnel Sisters*. Her mother, Roberta, illustrated this book. In 2000, Gabriel Dumont Institute’s interactive CD-ROM *The Metis: Our People Our Story* was released; Leah was one of the three people working on compiling this major educational resource for Metis studies. While working for Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon she has produced several videos on Metis culture and history for example; *John Arcand and His Métis Fiddle* (2001), *The Story of the Crescent Lake Metis: Our Life on the Road Allowance* (2002), and *Richard Lafferty: The Muskeg Fiddler* (2002). She has worked for the National Aboriginal Health Organization and has taught Metis Culture and History at the First Nations University, Saskatoon Campus, before returning to teach at the Gabriel Dumont Institute, SUNTEP program at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She also acted as an editor and photographer for *Metis Legacy, Volume II: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folklore* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007). She also co-authored a number of the chapters. *Metis Legacy II* was short-listed for the *Margaret McWilliams Award* for writing in history. Most recently she has written and illustrated another children’s book *The Giving Tree* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009). This book was nominated for the 2010, Willow Awards.

Leah is an emerging Metis artist; her art is available through the Feather Child Aboriginal Art Gallery in Regina. Her art is featured on three healthy parenting posters for the Wabano

Centre for Aboriginal Health in Ottawa. Through the assistance of the Saskatchewan Arts Board, Indigenous Pathways Initiative, Leah is also developing an art show to honour Grandmother Turtle. As part of this art show Leah will be building a giant turtle rock effigy on her land.

Children's books:

Dorion, Leah (author and illustrator), Norman Fleury translator. *The Giving Tree: A Retelling of a Traditional Metis Story*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009.

This illustrated children's book is in both English and Michif. The story behind "The Giving Tree" was told to Leah by Saskatoon Metis Elder Frank Tomkins. The story contains all the Metis values of giving, family and respect and it teaches a lot of the values and the cultural traditions of being Metis. In the accompanying CD Norman Fleury tells the story in the Michif language.

Dorion, Leah (author and illustrator), Rita Flamand translator *Relatives with Roots: A Story about Métis Women's Connection to the Land. Lii Peraantii avik la Rasin: Eñ Nistwaar Taanishi lii Faam di Michif E'ishi Kisheyitakik li Tayraeñ*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011.

This illustrated children's book has text in English and Michif-Cree. It is accompanied by a compact disc. English narration, read by Leah Dorion; Michif narration, read by Rita Flamand.

Reference

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