



GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

of Native Studies and Applied Research

Interview of Elder Michel Maurice

Conducted by David Morin

1. Could you please tell me your name and your home community?

I was born and raised in Green Lake, Saskatchewan, but my grandparents were from Île-à-la-Crosse. All my relatives are from over there. I didn't realize that myself when I was growing up, but people would come to the house and would come and camp. I wondered, "Well then we must have a lot of friends!" Same thing happened when we moved to Meadow Lake and Green Lake. I didn't realize they were relatives of ours. A long time ago when a man travelled, he always came with his wife and family. I don't see that too much now. Often, I see lots of people come to different areas. A man might come with a wife most of the time. Now, he comes with friends and that's a little different.

2. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Green Lake. I got my education over there. I went to school when I was about 7 years old and started to just about I was 14 and partially completed Grade 8. At age 15, you were finished school. That was your education. They said, "Go to work!" "Where? There is no work." That was the deal. We moved to Meadow Lake area. I had my 15th birthday there that spring. I couldn't even go into the pool hall because they had a rule of 16 over, so I did a lot of babysitting for my aunt Millie. She had kids of her own. I just basically hung around and stayed home, and I got to know a bunch of people from the reserve; people that were my own age. That's where I found out about residential school. I didn't know what it was about. We had nothing like that in Green Lake, which had a day school. But here, you wouldn't see these guys for half a year or so. There's the Bear family. I got good friends there on the reserve.

3. Where have you lived most of your life?

I moved to Saskatoon in 1965. I have lived here ever since. I raised my family here. I have a daughter and a son. My daughter has two children, and my son has four children. I also have two great-grandboys from one side and my son has two grandchildren, too. So, they're grandparents also. I was married twice. My first wife

and I am divorced. She lives in BC now. I then married Faye (née Trochie) Pritchard. Her dad, Clarence was instrumental in everything Métis-related that happened in Saskatoon. We get along well. She has two grandchildren. So, they are my grandchildren also. When we came to Saskatoon, we had absolutely nothing. As a family, we had no home and we had hardly any clothes. We had maybe two pairs of jeans in a year. When they got washed, what do you do? Stay home while they got dried. There was no such thing as a washer or a dryer or anything like that.

4. Who were/are your parents and grandparents? Where were they from?

My grandmother's name was Marie Kipling. They called her **Kaskachumalii**? That was the name that they gave her because nobody could handle her. She was feisty and small, but she had a mind of her own, and she thought her way of thinking was right. That's what she'd fight for. My Mooshum was Harry Maurice from Île-à-la-Crosse, and he was a trapper and a hunter. I was his buddy. I was maybe five years old and he took me all over the north country and the bush. We slept under pine trees in the wintertime when it was -30 or 40 below out and made a little bed. That's where we camped. We were fortunate that had a team of horses because my Mooshum and my Kohkum and the whole family worked for a farmer all summer and that was our pay, a team of horses, a wagon and a sleigh. It helped out a lot because the community of Green Lake itself maybe had five or six teams of horses. There were maybe 200-300 people there. So, it helped a lot of people out. My Mooshum and Kohkom actually raised me. My mom was a young mom, and they took over my upbringing. They were very nice and kind people. And they said, "I was the boss when I walked in there and when I grew up." I have aunts that laugh about that. They said, "When you came, we were lost. We were put aside." (laughs). I believe it! It was good. It was nice. I try to tell the kids that we never had any candy of any kind. When I grew up, I didn't know what pop was. I didn't know what ice cream was. Then, when we moved to Meadow Lake, I realized what there was out there. There was nothing like that in Green Lake. We had a restaurant, but we were too poor. We had just the necessities. That's all it was. Just for living because there were lots in the family who had to eat. There was no work. I had bigger uncles that were men already, and they had little families of their own, too. I had one brother and one sister. My brother lives in Edmonton and my sister just passed away, about two weeks ago. That's what we're dealing with right now and it's hard.

5. How did you spend your life as an adult regarding work, family, or in any other ways you'd like to share?

After I turned 16, there was a pool hall there. I worked in it for quite a few years off and on, and when I wasn't working there, I worked on a farm for Ukrainian people. There were farmers all over, and I knew them all by name because I worked for them. I worked for a man name John LaPlante. He used to take small contracts, and we would go to work for ten-hour days for five bucks each. One winter, I worked there for this other guy. John wasn't working; we never worked in the wintertime with him. Once I went to work for \$3.00 dollars a day for a 10-hour day in an area with very high snow. Do you believe it? That was in the St. Cyr Hills. We were there for about two weeks. He had cut timber there already. We had to haul that out, me and another guy. He was a neighbour of mine; actually, my mom's neighbour. He lived two blocks away. I used to play pool with him a little bit. By the way, I used to beat everybody in pool. After awhile, I got really good, but I spent a lot of time there. That's what happens when you're working at something: you can practice, and practice and practice. Just recently here, when I was 60 years old, I started going to Las Vegas. They had pool tournaments going on. I spent nine seasons going back. We always had an Aboriginal team with First Nations and Métis members that I put together. We stuck together for nine years and we went every year. We always made it because we won the top prize, and the trip was paid for. I always remember that, but all the friends that I had, they all have very good jobs now. You have to be committed to something, and that's exactly what they brought to the work force. We only lost one person who passed away on us. The rest of us are still alive and are older. I still play every winter. They have a league going, but not like it used to be. The competition is not there, but it's good for me because I can't play like I used to. I can't see that well. You don't have to see well to play on a 6-foot-long table. You know how to play; all the strategies and that. You got to have something to do besides work. You have to have an interest in something else. When I got to Saskatoon in 1965, I worked a lot in construction to start. Then, when my daughter was born, I realized I needed a year-round income. So, I started working at Bumper Exchange. I worked for this company for awhile and then they closed up, but they bought an outfit in Winnipeg, so the boss asked me to go over there and I went for about a year. I came back here, and I found out there was another shop that just started up. I was off for about two weeks and then I went to work there, and I was there for 23 years. I worked every day, most Saturdays too. Those are the things that you have to do. And that's when I stopped thinking about myself. I haven't drunk or smoked since I was 40 years old. I changed my whole lifestyle. I had to because of my little girl. She's 42-years-old now. She works at Revenue Canada for close to 20 years now. She's done well for herself, and she's family-orientated, just like I am. You don't realize the influence you have on your children growing up, eh? That's why a lot of the kids I see in schools see that their parents are not working or are doing

nothing. However, a lot of them don't have any choice because they don't have any education. They just come from their reserves and they're new to the city. I've talked to quite a few of them and that's their situation. They realize they want something good for their kids too, but they try their best. But the main part is education. It's number one.

6. What do you enjoy about being Métis?

Everything! I enjoy Life. The thing I enjoy really is kids. That's what I look for. They come to me and I go to them; just as simple as that. In our community, it breaks my heart when people don't get along. I am a Senator for this region you know that? When I go to meetings and I see people squabbling, I just walk away. What is the use of telling then anything? They know it all, but they should know that you need to get along to accomplish anything. Listening and learning from one another is better. I worked with First Nations people for a long time, its being going on 15 years, and they listen to each other. They might have an argument, but they will go out and eat together. They don't hold a grudge. They don't call each other down, although they have their bad feelings, too.

7. What has been the most challenging thing about being Métis?

I enjoy life. The main challenge is with our little ones, our kids. We have to get them into education. I see a young man like you sitting there and I enjoy that. I thank you for being here for us. I always tell young people, "You are not only doing this for yourself. You're doing it for the community and you're doing it for the children you are going to have." I have met a lot of very young First Nations and Métis people, and I tell them, "You can make things happen for yourself and for the people that you care for. Never, ever think that you're better than anybody else. You should be equal to everybody. If somebody is lacking, try to help them out. Have patience with people." That's the key right there. When we're young, we don't have any patience. I know that we want things to happen right away (laughs). I have a great-grandchild who is four years old. I have spent a lot of time with that young man. My granddaughter was going to put in school through holidays. I don't work that much in the summer, so I take care of him whenever I can. I had him for about four days a week while she was working. He camps with me. I always make sure that he knows where his mother is; where the boss is. I don't want him to think that I am number one. I tell him, "Your mom is number one," and he realizes that.

8. What is the most important thing that you want others to know about the Métis?

We're the same as anybody else. We want the same thing as anybody else. We want our kids to be successful. We want them to have a good education. We want them to be proud of who they are and where they come from. Never say, "Métis are no good." We are all human beings, and we should take care of each other. It doesn't matter if you're white, black, grey, whatever colour. Be kind to each other all the time. Maybe you disagree a lot with a person's ideas or what they talk about. That's fine. That's their opinion. I go to a lot of sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies, and the main thing we all stress is if you are invited some place else don't tell them, "Look at what you're doing. You can't do it that way. This is the way you got to do it." You don't say that. You're just thankful that you're there. Everybody does things differently, spiritually. I'm a very strong Catholic. That's one thing I stress when I started working for the First Nations. I told them right away. We had a big gathering at White Buffalo Youth Lodge, about 200 people had come there. I told them, "I don't feel good about this." I told them, "I am a strong Catholic and I am working for you guys. I guess I should just leave." One person came up to me, and said, "Oh no. No. We do the same thing where we come from. We have our religion. A lot of us are Roman Catholics and Anglicans, but we believe in our ways too." He says, "That's what we practice. We practice both, and it makes a whole person out of you. It makes you more caring." I believe him.

9. If you were advising yourself as a Métis youth, knowing what you know now, what would you tell yourself in a sentence or two?

Be patient, definitely for sure. Don't think you are better than anybody else. That's very hard for a young person. You think you're number one all of the time. That comes with living as you realize that you're not number one and you're not that important after all. You can be gone and life will go on.