



GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

of Native Studies and Applied Research

Interview of Elder Norma Welsh

Conducted by David Morin

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

My name is Norma Elizabeth Welsh. My home community is in Regina. I live in Gabriel Manor, a senior home provided by Gabriel Housing Corp.

2. Where were you born?

I was born in Lebret on Oct. 20, 1934. My grandmother was attending my birth in our own home.

3. Where did you grow up?

My first memory of her was living on top of the hills above where the seminary was. We lived in several different small houses and log shacks in and among the bushes, or on farmers' fields. We, as a family, enjoyed a lot of freedom and space. My father worked on farms when harvest was due. He also worked building roads, dugouts, and wells. There was always food on our table as some farmers paid my dad with meat, milk, and eggs. In 1940, we moved to the Métis farm, as we were no longer able to live on the road allowance. We lived at the farm for eight years. There were ten houses built so other families were able to live there as well. All parents and children worked on the farm, milking cows, gathering eggs, and taking care of the animals. We also helped at harvest time making sheaves and taking care of the community garden. Beef, pork, and chickens were butchered once a year, and it was shared by all the families. In 1948, my father became ill and we were moved off the farm. He was no longer able to work. We moved back to the top of the hill as we had no time to rebuild. By then some of my siblings moved onto their own lives. There were still nine children at home and mother became pregnant again. In September of 1950, my mother died in childbirth, by then giving birth to 15 children. After that, we were moved to Fort Qu'Appelle. After a few months, some of my siblings went to an orphanage in Prince Albert. and the rest of us went our separate ways.

4. Where have you lived most of your life?

I moved to Regina in 1952 and lived with a relative. I got a job at Simpson Sears and met my husband, had a child and then moved to British Columbia. I gave birth to six more children there. After 16 years of living under difficult circumstances, I left BC and moved back to Regina in 1970 where most of my family now lived.

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

My mother's name was Marion Eleanor Amyotte her father was Joseph Daniel Amyotte, who was born on the Turtle Mountain Reserve in North Dakota. My father was Joseph Edmond Welsh born to my grandfather François Xavier Welsh his father was Great Grandfather Norbert Welsh. My Grandmother was Véronique Beaulieu born around Ituna.

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

After moving back from Quesnel BC, I got involved with the Regina Metis Locals. I volunteered my time on different functions such as Basket socials dances and other functions. I worked at Sears for 5 years and also worked for Metis local programs in several different capacities. In 1978 I also took 3 foster children who were with me for 11 years. My last job out in the community was at RCMP depot food services. I returned in 1994 and began to take care of my grand children and great grandchildren. This has been my greatest joy.

7. What do you enjoy about being Métis?

I love being Métis because it made me very humble. I learned a great deal from how we lived. We lived in shacks on farms and in the ones, we built when we lived in the hills and those kinds of places. You know, pitching the horses and going for water and hitching them and doing other thing. I just loved it. I loved my life, and then my mother died. After that, eight of my siblings went to an orphanage and Prince Albert, but Joey will probably talk about that because he was one of them. I was older than nine of my siblings. I had a sister who lived in White Fox, Saskatchewan, and I went and lived with her for awhile. From there I came to Regina because I had relatives there, too and I lived them for awhile. I jobs at Sears and at a restaurant, those kinds of things until I met my husband. We got married, and a year later we moved to BC. I worked for BC TEL for seven years. I worked in the post office for six years. I always had a job with that many children. I had to always be working, and then we came back. I didn't have a chance when we lived in BC. I didn't know of anyone who worked with the Métis Society. Although we lived in Vancouver for the first five years, I was too busy having kids. I never got involved with anything, but now my kids are getting involved in these kinds of things. My youngest son is president of the Regina Local, and he sits on the Gabriel Housing board. I've been teaching him how to manage things. I live in Gabriel Housing. I moved into one of their houses in 1981, and I was the first person to live in a house.

During the years of growing up in the valley, I found Metis people to be very helpful, kind and cheerful. There was always someone to help. Gathering enough wood for winter months, plowing a garden plot for someone who didn't have horses or a plow. Building a stoneboat for hauling heavy items that were difficult to get. They also helped neighbors repair their homes in the summer months as the winters were very harsh on our little homes. We also loved having visitors as there was usually fresh bread or bannock available, Saskatoon or rhubarb pie and even occasionally bologna sandwich. People were very respectful when they came for a visit, they would make sure their shoes were cleaned and men didn't come into your house without taking their hats off. Playing card nights were a hoot. Our parents had so much fun playing cards. The laughter would rub off on the children who enjoyed watching. I missed my life in the valley for a long time. Most of the time. I missed the freedom, the space, and the wonderful friends I had. After my mother died my life ended in Lebret but, I still miss the life I had in my growing up years.