

Murray McKenzie, (1927-2007)

By Amanda Rozyk

Murray McKenzie was an accomplished photographer, having his art displayed and published in local, national and international venues. Remarkably, he took more than 5,000 photographs throughout his career.

Murray's love of photography began at the age of seventeen. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was admitted to a sanatorium. During this time, his mother gave him his first camera and he passed the long hours in the hospital by taking pictures of the other patients for twenty-five cents a picture. This sparked a desire in Murray to continue taking pictures of Native people, capturing their spirit, talents and natural dignity.



Murray took a two-year correspondence course from the New York School of Photography; however, he was primarily self-taught. He worked as a regular freelance photographer for the *Winnipeg Free Press* and has more photographs published in that newspaper than any other photographer. He was also the first news photographer to take pictures more than 1,100 kilometres north of Winnipeg. Murray credited his philosophy of photography to his grandmother and her traditional teachings. When taking photographs of Native people, he celebrates their proud and honest manner and portrays the positive side of Native culture.

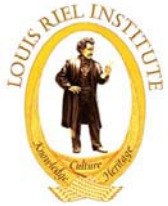
Murray's work has been displayed in prestigious galleries in Thompson, The Pas, North Bay, Whitehorse, Hamilton, London, Toronto, and New York. An invitation to display his art to an international audience occurred in 1994, when he was asked to exhibit his photographs in Munster's Westphalian Museum in Germany. Murray was the first Native photographer to hold a European exhibition. Murray's work has been published in the *Toronto Star*, *Photo Life*, *US Camera* and *Time Magazine*. One of his most famous photographs was also selected as a national poster by the Canadian Cancer Society, and as a selection in the Ford Motor Company's "Faces of Canada Exhibition."

Murray worked in a variety of other fields as well, including trapping, commercial fishing at Reindeer Lake, pulp woodcutting, mill solution operating, caretaker at a camp site, and mining. He was also an instrumental force in producing the first Cree language radio program ever offered in Northern Manitoba, and was the voice behind many radio broadcasts. It should also be noted that Murray played a very important part in the development of the Aboriginal Friendship Centres in The Pas and Thompson, Manitoba. Photography remained Murray's true passion however, and one of his proudest achievements included teaching students throughout the North about the art of photography and inspiring them to capture their surroundings.

Murray McKenzie, of Scots-Métis and Cree descent, was born on March 16, 1927 in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. He moved to Sherridon, Manitoba where he was

raised from the age of three, and later moved to The Pas, Manitoba to live with his grandmother at the age of seven. Murray was father to seven children lived with his wife in Thompson, Manitoba.

Murray's sister was Ethel Deschambault, who worked for many years as a highly respected social justice activist and Probation Officer in the Thompson Region of Manitoba. Ethel was one of the visionary Métis leaders who were instrumental in the establishment of the Louis Riel Institute.



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