

Angie Mercredi Crerar. (b. 1936)

Métis Elder Angelina Mercredi was born at Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake, the daughter of Rose and Stan Mercredi. Her grandfather, Pierre Mercredi¹, was a Hudson's Bay Company clerk and trader between 1879 and 1929. Her family moved to Rocher River when she was three. In 1945, the family relocated to Yellowknife. Her mother died when she was nine-years-old, and she and her two sisters then spent many years in residential school.

Angie Mercredi-Crerar has lived in Grande Prairie Alberta since 1966. She received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal during the Métis Nation of Alberta assembly in Athabasca in August 2012. In 2003, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and in 2008 received the Governor General's Award. For over 35 years, Angie Mercredi-Crerar has volunteered in Grande Prairie, with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, the Alberta Association of Friendship Centres, the Métis Nation Alberta Regional Council, Native Counselling Services of Alberta, Grande Prairie Regional College, and the Children's Services Authority. In total she has been involved with 14 community service groups. One of her most notable endeavours was spearheading the creation of the Elder Caring Shelter. She has also provided her expertise to the "Métis Perspectives and Traditional Health Knowledge Series" of the Métis Centre – National Aboriginal Health Organization.

Grande Prairie's diamond

By Graeme Bruce, *Grande Prairie Daily Herald Tribune*
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Angie Mercredi-Crerar, Grande Prairie Métis elder, was presented with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award for her 35 years of volunteering in the community.

(Photo: Aaron Hinks / Daily Herald-Tribune)

¹ Métis Elder Pierre Mercredi interpreted for the signing of Treaty No. 8 at Fort Chipewyan and Smith's Landing.

At 3 a.m. in a room with about 120 beds lined up in an army-style, Angie Crerar awoke to the sound of a weeping 14-year-old girl.

Walking up to her slowly, she asked the moaning woman what was wrong, realizing her bed was soaked. A nun on hand at the residential school in Fort Resolution whisked the labouring woman away to the local hospital.

The next morning during breakfast, a clap and a bell - a sound Crerar still despises to this day - was followed by a declaration by a nun that the young woman had sinned and the newborn baby would be given away.

When the 14-year-old Crerar began questioning how a girl in a convent full of women with only one male priest could become pregnant, she said she was strapped so hard, she said she couldn't move for two days.

That was the moment which triggered her to question the state of her own rights as a Métis woman.

That moment was in 1954.

This year, 58 years later, the Métis elder has been commemorated for her relentless and constant effort to fight for the rights, freedoms and quality of life of the Métis people in the form of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award.

She received the award during the Métis Nation of Alberta Assembly in Athabasca on Aug. 18. In conversation with people around her, there are common words to describe Crerar: Strong, energetic, determined, tireless.

Moving to Grande Prairie in 1966 after freeing herself from the oppression of an arranged marriage, Crerar has dedicated her life to volunteering in the community, working with so many organizations in the area.

Most notably, she was responsible for the creation of the Elders Caring Shelter in Grande Prairie, and recently the organization has begun a province-wide project in gathering information on the issue of Elder abuse in the aboriginal community and further will be providing training to care workers to recognize and address elder abuse in their communities.

Crerar would never take full credit for the creation of the shelter, but Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta said Crerar was the backbone of that project. "She worked with the city, worked with industry, did whatever she needed to do to have that dream come true, and it was really about living in the community and seeing that there was people who did need a place," Poitras said, who was one of Crerar's nominators for the jubilee award.

Although that accomplishment may be the hallmark so far, the president of the Métis Local 1990 chapter's fingerprints are all over the city. She has been a part of the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre for 33 years, a part of the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, worked with the Grande Prairie Regional College, the City of Grande Prairie, Children's Service Authority, and has forged many industry partnerships along the way for funding.

She never quits until she's forced to. She will give until she drops. And she said she'd driven to make a better life for her 11 children, 23 grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

"She's always made sure her voice is heard, so her sincere care for her activities on behalf of others is first and foremost," said Bonita Nowell, one of Crerar's daughters, living in Yellowknife.

Before moving to Grande Prairie, Crerar's life after residential school left her sheltered, with no skills to meet the outside world. Caught in the middle, the Métis people were shunned by First Nations and white people, which is evident with the words "half-breed" on her birth certificate.

"I was captive. We had no mind, we could make no decisions, we were put down all the time," she said.

But she put the experience behind her, and used it as a driving force to help future generations of the Métis people.

"I wanted to have a better life for my children, and that's what I've clung to all these years, I wanted them to have the opportunities I didn't, I wanted them to know they were loved and cared for."

Crerar remains humble when discussing her accomplishments, and accepted the award on the behalf of all Grande Prairie volunteers.

"To me, it means a lifetime of lifetime of work we have done in our community is all worthwhile, it's an honour bestowed on everyone in Grande Prairie and the people that have touched my life. I will always honour the volunteers in this city, because that is the true foundation of Grande Prairie."

Crerar's community efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 1987, she was named volunteer of the year by the Friendship Centre. In 2003, she received a lifetime achievement award at the Esquao Awards. In 2005, the City of Grande Prairie gave her the Centennial Award, and the city recognizing her again 2009 when she was named Hometown Hero. And in 2008, she received the very prestigious Governor General's Award for her never-ending work.

Crerar thanks the board and staff of the local Métis chapter, not only for their hard work in preserving its heritage, but also for maintaining the programs and services it offers.

"I am Métis, I was born right here in Canada for goodness sakes, we got our heritage, we fought, we brought recognition to the people that we are," she said. "To be able to say, and to really believe in my heart, that yes, I am a person, I am a human being, I have rights, I am Métis. So proud, and I achieved that here."

Sources:

- *Grande Prairie Daily Herald Tribune*
- Personal communication, May 10, 2014.
- "Pierre Mercredi," *The Beaver*, June 1923: 337.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute