



GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

of Native Studies and Applied Research

Interview of Elder Margaret Harrison

Conducted by Darren Prefontaine

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

I am living in Yorkton, Saskatchewan right now. I am originally from the Qu'Appelle Valley, road allowance, Katepwa Lake on the east side. I was born and raised there.

2. Where have you lived most of your life?

I grew up there to there in the valley, until I was about 10 years old. My father died, and we moved out of the valley, and moved to Estevan. I went to school and lived there until I got married at 16-years-of-age.

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

My mother is a Racette. Her parents were Marguerite Brabant, and her father was Louis Racette Jr. My father was Alfred Pelletier, and his mother was Vitaline Cardinal, and Mooshum's name was Josué Pelletier. They called him Joseph. My grandparents, the Cardinals, came from St. François Xavier and St. Paul. Mooshum and his family came from the Red River and went south but seemed to come back to Lestock and Horseman Lake. They were in the Lestock and Jasmin area and then came down to the Qu'Appelle Valley Mooshum took Métis Scrip in the Qu'Appelle valley, but he later either sold it, or gave it or traded it away. Anyhow, he got a buggy and a beautiful racehorse.

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

I got married really young, at 16 years-of-age. My husband and I ventured to Montreal and stayed for a year to work. I was going to have my first baby and I didn't want to have my child in Montreal because it was such a big place and I wanted to be back in Saskatchewan. We moved back. I had all five of my children right here in Saskatoon. We travelled around. I have one daughter and some granddaughters. My husband was an electrician and a tradesman. We went from job-to-job more or less and went wherever there was work. He worked for the Saskatoon Public School Board for many years as well, and then we moved north to Flin Flon, Manitoba, and then we went to BC. Back again and forth, and we then ended up coming back to the same area. He is now passed away, and our children are all over in different areas. [*When did you start your cultural work, particularly your rug hooking?*] I watched my mother over the

years, rug hooking and doing everything else. We use to cut cloth for her and make the dye, and hang it on the lines. We would watch her accumulate because she would use whatever materials she got from a particular dress, and she would then cut it out and she would keep those pieces. My father passed away, and we moved away from the valley. Our lifestyle was totally different for a few years, and my mother worked for other people to make extra money, and she didn't do any rug hooking at that point. Then we came together one day, and she then decided to teach me how to do this. I wanted to learn because it was a beautiful way of expressing yourself and she wanted me to carry on tradition. This is where she started to teach me to do it properly. I took it on and I've just loved it ever since, because I have always wanted to. This is kind of emotional, but I wanted to do something for my mother and to see her name in print. That's what I wanted to accomplish by growing up and preserving our culture. I wanted to keep it out there for the community and to give back. My mother was very spiritual, and her whole family was brought up to be respectful and to constantly do our very best. She was very encouraging and always brought the best in people.

5. What do you enjoy about being Métis?

Our spirit. It's strengthened in the family because you always go back to it and my mother did, too. She always didn't make a big deal about it. She said, "You are a Métis." Actually, we all said "Michif." Métis was a new name for us as we got older. However, we were the Michif people from the Valley. She told us to, "Always be proud of who you are and to be not afraid to speak out, and to know where you came from." We also learned family strength. I think that's how we kept ourselves together because my father died when I was ten and then mother was sole parent and provider. We had such respect for her.

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

We were quite poor in the Valley, but because of the beautiful area that we lived in, we didn't notice it because you were spiritually loved in the family. You really didn't notice it as much when you went to the city and attended a big Catholic school. I think it was a bit challenging. At times, we were called names. Mother would never make a big deal about it and would not be mad or angry at people for saying those things. She would just say, "You know who you are," and would leave it at that. Through the years, I gained that kind of strength as well; to be proud of whom I am as a Métis person, and to always hold my head up high.

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

It's a fantastic culture. We're the first people. I always stress that when somebody asks me, "Who are these Métis?" I always say we are the first Canadians, and we are very unique people. God gave us this blessing of being special people in this country, and we are part of this country. We have helped make this country. We have the right to be ourselves. I challenge my children to always be the best that they can be; to not hold back, no matter what challenges they face. I am sure the colour of their skin or the way they spoke may have caused problems. To this day, they are proud people and

proud Métis. When you get an Irishman and a Métis together, they have a pretty tough, politically minded group. I think they take from both sides because, being a Métis, you can't help but be political, always challenging yourself to be better and to know that education is important.

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

I needed to continue my education and not be in a hurry to be married. That's what I found even though I've learned a lot over the years. In my era, you got married and raised your family. Having a career was not in our minds at that time. I see it with my own daughters. They're career minded. I would like to say, "Wait and enjoy your teen years and enjoy your time for yourself before you get married." You gain so much strength to keep your marriage together when two people from different cultures marry. It's challenging for both people to have a culturally mixed family. There is so much cultural mixing today that we are thinning out our traditional culture with each generation.