

Road Allowance Interview, Wilfred Burton, 2014

Conducted by Kori Taylor

My name is Wilfred Harland Eril Burton, originally from the Glaslyn and Midnight Lake area. I went to school in Glaslyn for 12 years. We lived on a farm north of Glaslyn. The Stuarts now own it. Prior to me coming into the picture my family lived on their homestead, near John Woods' place. That is where mom and dad homesteaded after they were married. My sisters were all born there, in a log house. Then they purchased the Kellogg homestead, and that is where I lived, north of Glaslyn and south of Midnight Lake. We moved houses once. We moved into a house called the grain elevator because it was really tall and stuck out like a sore thumb. It was one big room on the main floor, and my mom and dad had a little room in the corner. It is still standing where Stuart's live now.

I have an interesting story about my names. My sisters named me because they were so much older than me and my mom was sick when she had me. She was too sick to do the things moms do when they have babies so she said the girls could just name me. They didn't want to name me Fred because that was my dad's name, so they chose Wilfred because that has Fred in it. Then my middle name Harland came because that was my sister Jeanette's boyfriend at the time, but I always tell people I was named after KFC because that's Colonel Sanders first name. Eril came from my sister's not knowing how to spell Earl. We were Catholic so we always have four names, but they didn't realize it was supposed to be after Saints, so they just gave me a random conglomeration of names.

My parents were Georgina Nolin and Fred Burton. My mom was from Midnight Lake. Her dad was Gabriel Nolin, and he took his scrip money and bought a homestead on the Midnight Lake Road past Hobbs. My Grandpa was quite savvy, because when he and my grandmother, who was a Delorme, got their money, \$240 and bought animals with the homestead, and lived their whole lives there. My grandma and grandpa died there and then they gave the homestead to their son George and his wife Annie. When George died, they sold it and moved to Saskatoon. The land was purchased by Hobbs. That is where my mom grew up though. My grandpa looked for land with good hay flats, and it was actually very beautiful with a creek running through. The lakes were close to go fishing. My dad was born in Kindersley, and we don't much about his family because when he married my mom, they disowned him. We grew up mostly in the Nolin side of the family. They were Métis.

My mom spoke Michif and didn't learn English until she went to school. Historically, my mom's story is different than lots of other Métis people. My mom's family mostly did go to school because my grandpa was a taxpayer, so they were allowed to go. My mom went until my grandma got sick and my mom quit to help take care of the kids. She quit in Grade 7, even though she really liked school. She loved reading and writing. She recorded things meticulously, like when dad went to town, when people visited, when calves were born.

My mom's sisters all married locally. They married Dewans and Jacobsons. The Jacobsons moved to the States and then moved back to Midnight Lake and worked at a sawmill. They have many children all around Midnight Lake, and then they moved back to the States again. My Uncle Ray was a bachelor and a trapper and hunter, in Edson and Hinton Alberta. My Aunt Vicky homesteaded north of Helene Lake Road, her husband's sister married my Aunt Vicky's brother, too so they all moved to Alberta together when Saskatchewan wasn't doing so good. My dad's family was all from Kindersley.

My Grandpa Nolin, his father was Charles Nolin, who is mentioned in a lot of writing about the Resistance because he was involved in it. Unfortunately, he testified against Riel at his trial but there's all kinds of reasons for that. Historically, all books say he was a cousin of Louis Riel, but he wasn't a cousin. His first wife was a cousin to Riel, and we came from his second wife who was a Lepine. He had litters of children with each wife. It was literally a litter of children, there was thirteen or fifteen with his first wife, she was a Harrison and died in childbirth. My mom didn't know the genealogy, but she would always say Louis Riel is maybe related to us. So, we never knew him as the bad guy like they taught in school. It was funny because I took history with a Mr. Chorney and he would say Riel was anti-Canadian. So, I was a really shy kid, but I said I don't think Louis Riel is all bad. Next thing Mr. Chorney goes "well that's what the history book says."

I have five sisters, all older than me and they all married locally. My sister Phyllis married a Willumeit, my sister Jeanette married a Wildman, my sister Elizabeth married an Evans, my sister Gloria married a Blanchette, and my sister Joyce married a Pilat. They all married non-Indigenous men. My mom was the first in her generation to marry a non-Métis man. It was all marriage to Métis or First Nations people until that. It would be something to research the division of the Métis people in Midnight Lake area. There were three groups: Nolins, Delormes, and Naults who all travelled and lived together, and they never had much to do with Jack Pine people or the Midnight Lake Road Allowance People. I am not sure why, perhaps because one group was primarily French and Catholic. The other groups were Half-Breeds with more of an English background, and even Swedish and Hungarian backgrounds, and they worked for farmers and fished.

The childhood community was a very small community because by the time I came around there was almost no kids there anymore. The school community was very divided between town kids and rural kids. The town kids just knew everything about everyone. For instance, today my cousin who lived in town but was in my grade, will tell me things about people that I had no idea about. I had no clue back then, I got on the bus, went to school, and came home. It was a weird thing. I think there's more kids graduating from there this year, than there was my year. My dad took me to school for the first day of school, and my teacher told me go find your name and sit at your desk. I only ever spelled my name with capital letters, so I couldn't recognize it anywhere and my teacher had to come help me. When I started school there was 39 of us, but by the time I was in Grade 6 there was only 20, and all the kids who moved were Métis kids. So, its because by the mid-1960s the

government asked all the Métis people who were living on the Midnight Lake Road Allowance to move. These families were Carons, Perrins, Trochies, Lalibertes, Morins ... a whole whack of families that lived there and sent their kids to school here, but they got booted off. Most of them moved away. The Morins stayed around.

By the time I was born, the Midnight Lake School closed and we used it as a hall after. Moses Ducharme and his sons had a band, and they would come play and we would have dances. I can still picture it like yesterday. People would make tea on the stove, and people would bring sandwiches and baking. There was a little stage where the teacher would have been. I was very little. Harrisons bought the land and knocked it down and used it for a field. Then when I was a little older, 11 or 12, we had dances at the L'Heureux's down Marlin Road. The boys would clear the floor, and we learned to square dance there actually. We had really good Métis musicians from Cochin and they would come play. You could always tell the Métis couples because when they did the polka they did a double jig step as the Polka'D. My sisters weren't there because they were all older and married. I was practically an only child there.

Some of the things we would do when my grandparents were still alive; they were the glue that held everyone together. We would all go to their house on the farm. The big event was New Year's. My grandma would always have a pot of boulets and some bangs. It was the first thing to eat when we got there. The kids would go play and there would be a big meal. All the family was there for a big party. There was a lot of alcohol involved at that time. Once the tipping point came it became more of a fight than a celebration. Celebrations were always held there, and everyone would come visit and celebrate there. Christmas wasn't as big for us, but New Years was the big thing. Early in the morning my mom would bundle us up and we would go there right away when it was still dark out.

Boulets and bangs were only eaten at New Years. It was not eaten throughout the year. It was very special. I think because we had to grind burger by hand which was a lot of work. It irritates me now that every Métis event you go to there are boulets and bangs, and it is meant to be special. It really wasn't the Métis way to have them so often. Even corporate events will make them because they are the Métis food, but they weren't a regular thing. We lived off only wild meat. My father was hunter. Even though there was restrictions my family would poach to survive.

People didn't walk around saying, "I am Métis." Back then everyone just lived the way they wanted and were who they were. Even in the Glaslyn area people started coming out as Métis and I had no idea they had Métis in them. It was because they kept it hidden sometimes. No one had to identify or anything like that. There is politically changing terminology all the time. Even my mom differentiated between Michif and Halfbreeds. My mom would make "galette" not bannock, and she would time it so it would be warm when I got off the bus.

I like everything about my culture because I celebrate it everyday just by living it. Personally, I love the music and the dance. That is my favourite part. After I retired, I took

fiddle lessons from John Arcand, and I admire him a lot. He has almost singlehandedly put our music on the map. It's one of the things where as soon as I hear I know its mine. I am attracted to it, and I tried to promote it on social media. Every opportunity there is to highlight it I take it. Saskatchewan is slowly losing our dances, the art of calling and the square dances now, too. We see mostly First Nations groups carrying on the dance traditions, but not Métis groups, which is very unfortunate. The First Nations groups are wonderful but there just isn't as many Métis specific groups. Scott Duffy is a wonderful dancer. I also love our artwork. Christi Belcourt I absolutely love, of course. Lisa Shepherd is also a great beader and they are revitalizing a lot of this stuff. As for heritage, I am very addicted to genealogy. I love seeing how we are all connected. I find it interesting. A few years ago, every Métis person, I would look into how they connect and how I know people. And you can carry on a conversation with a complete stranger about our families and geography.

I am a person who doesn't look back on things. I like to look forward. I have no regrets. I guess I would tell myself pay more attention to your parents and older people, because what they are telling you, you will want to know someday. Pay closer attention to the stories that are told to you by the old people, because you don't know how much time you have with them, and you don't even know what you will miss from them someday.