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DON NIELSON

Don Nielson was one of the original organizers, with Malcolm Norris, of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan in 1964.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early organization of the Association: where and how meetings were held.
- Differences between Metis group in the north and south of the province.
- Norris's fight against government funding.
- Norris: his style, his health, his family, his relations with government and with the church.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Don Nielson - Nielson and Malcolm Norris were the two main figures in the birth of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan - the nothern Metis organization. Norris considered Nielson the most promising prospective leader of the Metis. Nielson talks about the MAS and about Norris - the early days of organizing, Norris the man and leader, anecdotes, etc.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Don Nielson of Regina, formerly of Prince Albert, and who was active in organizing the first northern Metis Association. Don, you were with Malcolm right from the beginning on that. When did it first occur to you and Malcolm to start that organization? What was the motivation to get going on it?

Don: Well, I think it was a political-based thing that Malcolm had been involved with the NDP party/CCF party, for some time. Very shortly after Tommy Douglas came to power in 1944, Malcolm was brought over with Tommy Douglas and I think, like you stated, Morris Shumiatcher. Dr. Shumiatcher had something to do with that in bringing over Malcolm, a knowledgeable Indian person who spoke the language and who was dedicated to the cause and the plight of the Indian people and who, ever since the First World War, had been involved in obtaining the rights of the treaty Indians as well as the halfbreeds and Metis in Alberta. And he helped in forming the Indian Association of Alberta and definitely in the Metis Association of Alberta back in the twenties and thirties when they were organizing. I know he was jailed eleven times for going on Indian reserves and that. Him and Johnny Yellowfly.

Murray: That was in Alberta?

Don: Yeah. And he did a lot and he was involved in the Royal Commission on the Metis lands and that and the Metis claims in Alberta which eventually led up to the formation of the Metis colonies, the ten original Metis colonies in Alberta in 1939. And some years later, as you know, Malcolm himself by profession was a geologist. He wasn't only that. He was quite a politician. He knew his politics well. He grew up with it like every Indian does. And he was a die-hard socialist, fighting for the benefit of all people and not just any one sect of people. And I think this is primarily why the CCF, the socialist government, brought him over here, to help them understand the situation of the native people here which Malcolm knew also. And Malcolm was quick to move into the different regions and areas of the province in many different departments. And as you know, he was given ex-officio powers within the Tommy Douglas cabinet which brought a lot of backlash to Malcolm from a lot of the ministers and that at that time. Even at one case I can remember Malcolm saying, that he had to stand up and call them white racist supremacists right in the cabinet meeting, which was shot down by a lot of cabinet ministers. They really resented Tommy Douglas for that, for giving him the powers. But as time went on, they tried to form some organization back in the forties, not only in the north but in the south. There were meetings with different government departments and with cabinet ministers and that and there was some formation of memberships even in the north back in the forties. And even before then when the people were transferred from the south to the northern communities and that and promised some great land and everything else like that. The land of honey, as Malcolm used

to call it. Here they hit the land of swamp and muskeg and mosquitoes and that. And I don't know, Malcolm had his own way of saying things and because he really understood. I was fortunate in meeting Malcolm over several different periods of time in the fifties and that. I knew of Malcolm quite some time ago but we never really became involved together at any

length of time because he was up in La Ronge and I was over teaching up that way and also living in Prince Albert, going to school in Saskatoon. But eventually we got back to Prince Albert and I was teaching school there and Malcolm was there then at that time.

Murray: What year would that have been?

Don: I would say that would be 1964. And it was in August I guess was actually when we came back to P.A. and we started really forming the Metis Association of Saskatchewan in the north. There was some formation in the south but actually...

Murray: Under Joe Amyotte, eh?

Don: Yes. Under Joe Amyotte I think at that time. There was really no meetings of the north and the south of the Metis and non-status Indian peoples. Even, at that time, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians was not very strong. And well, anyway, in Prince Albert the friendship centre had been going for quite some time. Malcolm Norris was involved in that friendship centre there also. And when I was teaching school in Prince Albert, the native people within the city of Prince Albert - that's treaty Indians, Solomon Sanderson and Danny Keshane, there was many treaty Indians in along with us halfbreeds and Metis and that - we formed together and we took control, entire

control of the Prince Albert Indian/Metis Friendship Centre. It was the first time there was an all-native board of directors. And I was elected president at that time and we had a pretty good board. Malcolm never ran for the board of that. He had his own business with the mineral department of the province of Saskatchewan. And it happened that time, that summer, I believe it was April 22 when Ross Thatcher, in order to cross the house, the floor of the house and he became leader of the opposition, of the Liberal party. It was April 22, 1964 that he became the premier of the province. And also the NDP... and I guess there was a lot of hatcheting going on and that. And to play on the safe side, Ross Thatcher called a meeting of the people of native ancestry and the provincial government of Saskatchewan at that time and they held that big meeting in Saskatoon.

Murray: When was that meeting? Do you remember? Was it in the summer or...?

Don: No, it was in November. I believe it was in November, in the fall. I'm not too sure now, it was 1964. And there was quite a few hundred native peoples from across the province from all the sixty-nine, seventy bands, chiefs and councillors and from many, many different communities. Right now we have about 116 locals in the Metis Society of Metis and non-status Indians but at that time I don't think we had that much representation from all of - but we had many representatives from the far north, central and from the south. And it was those native people, that were involved initially before, that

were in attendance at that meeting. And during those three days or so that we were at the Bessborough, we were able to deliberate over many aspects of our situation. Not necessarily

what the Liberal government or any government... but just our own plight.

Murray: Talking among yourselves?

Don: Talking among ourselves and discussing different issues, education, economic development, local control. And this is actually when the treaty Indians really started thinking about their own local control of schools and doing away with the residential schools and having their own schools on their own reserves. I remember Malcolm speaking for many, many great lengths of time on that. And the chairman of the meeting at that time, and he was the head chairman over the three days, was John F. Cuelenaere and he was the minister of, I believe they called it Natural Resources at that time. There was no DNS or northern Saskatchewan or that; it was just Natural Resources. And I can remember them putting Malcolm out of order many, many times because Malcolm would speak... First of all, he'd give a short talk in English explaining what he was going to say and he'd turn his back on the podium there and the ministers and them up in front and he'd turn and talk to the people whom he was addressing. And he really got them going and instigated them.

Murray: Would he speak in Cree then?

Don: In Cree, yes. He was speaking in Cree in that. And he went on and he was ruled out of order many times and even the people themselves told the chairmen and them to let him continue. And the ovations and the applause and that that he got, it was tremendous and the people were really moved by that. The old chiefs and them, and he went so far as to even

scold some of the old chiefs and that for their lack of leadership and to lead their people on to independence from capitalism and control. And it's happening today, you know. Even today, maybe twelve years later, you can see the effects of that one meeting. At least I can always say that.

Murray: But it was quite an important meeting wasn't it, in the history of native organization?

Don: It was, it was. In the last fifteen years it was probably the greatest. It was the meeting to begin all meetings, I think, and to begin a lot of these things that Ahenakew and the FSI are carrying out and the Metis Society and Jim Sinclair are carrying out. Well, anyway, going back to, you asked about how did we really get going on that. Well, people from the meeting got together at that meeting in Saskatoon and a meeting was called for the non-status, non-treaty Indians - that's Metis and non-status Indians. And it was there and then we formed kind of a standing committee, coordinating committee, and it was from there that we went

ahead and organized locals throughout the north. The locals were being formed in the south but actually there was no direct relationship. There was some reason in Malcolm's mind and in the mind of a lot of peoples in the north why there was no union as yet. It seemed too far and too distant between the north and the south. Although the problems basically were the same, the situation and the communications and that were a little harder in the north, although we travelled much and we formed many locals. We had nineteen locals formed in the north within the first short while and there was another thirty-seven being formed, I can remember. And we held our first annual

assembly in Prince Albert at the Hotel, Central Hotel, the Avenue Hotel in Prince Albert. And I believe there were fourteen of the nineteen locals. I believe there were fourteen that were formed and there was an executive formed. Malcolm was elected the president. There was one vice-president, Montgrande, I believe. And another vice-president, I believe it was Beaulieau from up around Canoe, and I was elected the secretary-treasurer, the first secretary-treasurer of the Metis Association. We registered it as the Metis Association of Saskatchewan, similar to that of the Alberta Metis Association. And that was in the summer of 1965 and that summer I had left....

Murray: That's when this meeting took place, eh?

Don: Yeah, it was in the summer. Pardon me, it wasn't in the summer, it was in the spring. I'm sorry, it was in the spring of 1965 and in the summer we had our second annual assembly actually and I was not there to attend but they reelected and at that time Rod Bishop had come home and he was involved in there. And from what I know right now and from what I see, that time sometime later that year, Dr. Howard Adams came home, back on the same, wherever he came from. No one even knew he existed at that time.

Murray: He was influenced by Malcolm too, I think.

Don: Yeah, very much so. Him being a socialist also. But he was more socialist than he was native, as it turned out to be. And Malcolm was a true Indian socialist. I don't care what you say or anyone says, that's the way I look at him and that's the way I've always seen him. He was a socialist but his people

came first. And although with Howard, I think his party lines came first, his NDP party lines came first, rather than his native people. He went even so far as to instigate trouble and that among our own organization and leadership and our own objectives and that. But this was his political goal.

Murray: His ideology came before his commitment to the native people.

Don: Yes, his political ideology. And Malcolm had always stated to Rod and them never to join. That was his last statement that I remember him making, never to join to become

more powerful first in the north, unify strongly in the north because if we have it on a wider basis, it's going to be a little harder to keep together, at least in the beginning, in the initial stages. And eventually Malcolm proved true because once they did join, I think the Indian principles went down the drain a lot of them, when Howard became president and that. It was more publicity seeking or what have you. I don't even really know whether it was along the lines that Malcolm had hoped, you know. Complete economic independence for the native people and control of the natural resources in the north mainly is what he was thinking of.

Murray: And Howard was less interested in that did it seem when he was...?

Don: Well, he was more interested probably in working together in the north and the south. He could see the unity coming. Malcolm could see it too, long before him. I think he taught Howard probably everything he knew about the native people in Saskatchewan. Even though Howard came from Saskatchewan,

Howard was never here. And the life he did grow up in, it was really never part of the native people, although he states it was. But over the years it proved out to be true what Malcolm said. Without complete control and the native people getting control of the natural resources and the economy in the north, if they don't do that first, there is no point in unifying with the south. Because the south have to work on their own too, because it was two different systems altogether. One was a farming land base in the south and in the north it was mainly natural resources, timber, mines, fishing, water, that sort of thing. It was actually two different things. There wasn't much farmland in the north where most of the native people live. The land would have to be cleared and everything else. But this was the timber rights and that Malcolm was thinking of, the mineral rights and everything else.

Murray: So these were the reasons that Malcolm was hesitating to join with the south?

Don: Yes.

Murray: There were two different kinds of situations.

Don: There was two different ideologies, political ideologies involved there too. Again Malcolm says the Liberals and the NDP were splitting the native people. Because a lot of the people in the south too were Liberals or whatever. They weren't socialist anyway. And a lot of them went along with the co-op farms, and yet in the background they were still holding hands with other political parties rather than with their own native people. And at many meetings, Malcolm would bring this up about holding hands in the background with other

people and parties and all that rather than being unified as native people. And this was basically what his stand was.

Murray: He didn't have anything to do with political parties or governments?

Don: No, and he died doing this. I can remember it was shortly after our meeting with Thatcher and them and Malcolm had five more months to go before his retirement with the civil service and he was cut, chopped automatically. His pension was cut off completely. And I mean, that was Thatcher and Cuelenaere and them that did it. And the day that Cuelenaere had his heart attack and died, I never felt a bit sorry. The same as Thatcher.

Murray: They had their eye on Malcolm long before that meeting too probably, eh?

Don: They were deadly afraid of him, you know. Because Thatcher knew Malcolm and because Thatcher used to be with the NDP party and he disliked Malcolm even then because Malcolm was outspoken. Thatcher and them thought, "Well, you know, Malcolm, you're a halfbreed, you're an Indian, you should stay in your place. We don't give a shit what Tommy Douglas, what powers they gave you. You're still not in the government." And this really bugged their ass and you could feel it. Malcolm's got it written down in his books, in his diaries and this is why I am saying you should really try and get ahold of them because there is a lot of stuff in there. And letters, because every letter that Malcolm ever wrote, he kept carbon copies. And he's got them all. They are filed and everything

else. I don't know what much more I can tell you. Other than he was a true friend. He'd help you out any way he could.

Murray: One of the things that Howard Adams mentioned was that Malcolm was dead against the Metis organization taking any money from government. Could you talk about that a bit?

Don: Well, this is exactly it. This was one of the reasons why Malcolm said no, no way. I can remember when we first formed, we never accepted any monies from anyone. I remember when we organized, we never asked no money from anyone. We either, you know, brought it out of our own pockets or when we had meetings, they passed around the hat and that. We had lunch and as long as we had gas money to get back... or if we didn't have gas or a car and that, we hitch-hiked. And that's about the way it was because it's true. Even today you see all the political parties, I mean political parties or political institutions among the native organizations and that. As soon as the government holds back money there is an upheaval. It's almost a crisis it seems, a psychological crisis within even the board of directors of the organizations. "Jeez, there is no money. What the hell are we going to do?"

Murray: And that's exactly what Malcolm foresaw was it?

Don: Exactly what Malcolm said. You know, if you have to kiss the ass to them for your own organization, there is no point in

it. Because once you start accepting funds and continuously to be dependent on government, they are going to control you. And this is what's happened.

Murray: But people didn't see that then did they, or not very many?

Don: Well, I don't know whether they didn't see it or not. I think it's more that, the old way that well, you know, if we don't accept money and if we don't get money from governments then we're going to have to do our own goddamn groundwork. And I think there are a lot of people, you know, they are very concerned, even today. I have met over the last fifteen, twenty years, I have met hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of guys coming into the organizations. They have made it up there, they have gotten up there, and as long as there is bucks involved, they are there. As soon as there is no bucks in there, I don't know what the hell they are going to do because the simple fact is that they can't seem to operate without a backing of funds. Now this was Malcolm's theory and it's true. He says, "If there is no funds," he says, "what the hell are you going to do?" you know. "We are going to have to depend on ourselves and we are going to have to start right now." And this is why he would not accept any funds from anywhere. Unless private donations, eh, from individuals.

Murray: Right.

Don: Because he said there are so many people that are so damned concerned about our own people and there are so many white people that are concerned about issues but they are never committed because they do not fully understand. And if you don't understand, you cannot be committed. There are so many

people involved in our movement that are concerned. They are involved to beat all hell, but bang, the money is gone, they are gone, because they are not committed because they don't understand it.

Murray: They don't have the depth of understanding that Malcolm had.

Don: Well, it's not only depths of understanding. I think it's the commitment that comes with understanding, I think, and working and dedication. And once that hits you, you can't do anything about it. Now, whether there is money there or not, you're still around and whether you're working with the organization or not, you're always doing work on the side somewhere or something for someone, or some organizations or that. And you don't stop because you are not there. Malcolm never did.

Murray: Why do you think that it took so long for Malcolm to initiate that, or for yourself or Malcolm or any of the people who were first involved? He was here from 1947 right till 1964, and it seemed that 1964 was really the first serious effort that was made. Can you explain why it took so long?

Don: Yeah, I think it was the time and era, like he said, you know. He said, "The time is right now." Because I think everyone we really believed in, we were kind of in an old rut. Got nothing against the NDP party, the old CCF party, but the people themselves, and the socialists were depending a lot on the government to do things for them and everything else. And things were changing. Baby bonuses came in and a whole bunch of other things came in in terms of social assistance. And

people were really in a state where they were accepting and not really doing anything on their own.

Murray: Do you think that Malcolm had put, did he think in 1964 that perhaps he had put too much faith in the NDP? And had decided that the government was not the answer?

Don: Yeah, because Malcolm stated that the socialists in that time, in 1964, were not the same socialists in 1944. And they became social capitalists, which probably a lot of them are today. I don't know. The old time CCFers were a hell of a lot different today than what they, you know, even in 1968 when he died. He died in 1968, eh? It was eight years ago this month he died. I believe it was. And even then he said, you know. That was his fifth heart attack. I was with him on his first heart attack that he had. I remember it was in North Battleford. Jeez, I couldn't believe it. We got there late, we danced all night after the meeting and that, we went up to the hotel room. They payed our hotel room, by the way. We stayed over late, overnight. We stayed at the Beaver I remember.

Murray: Who payed the hotel bill?

Don: The people.

Murray: Oh really.

Don: Yeah. They made up a collection and that and we used this car to come down. And it was too late Friday night to come back so we thought we'd sleep over. And we were going to go sleep across over town but the house was full. They said

they already got a hotel room for us. I guess they had already planned it, I don't know. They invited us down there to the friendship centre. Gladys Johnson was president of the friendship centre then. That's my cousin.

Murray: That's North Battleford, eh?

Don: Yeah. She was a treaty Indian. Gladys, she was a Dreaver, her mother is. I was president in P.A., she was president over there and they had invited us down for the halfbreeds, like the halfbreeds wanted us to come over there and...

Murray: Was that to do with the Metis Association?

Don: Yes. Yeah.

Murray: Had you organized a local there yet?

Don: Yeah, we organized the local. We had been there once before but this was a big meeting. It was quite good. All the priests and nuns were there and Malcolm was speaking French to them and giving them shit and all for controlling the native people, you know, and jeez, it was quite a meeting. The priests were mad and blushing and...

Murray: Did they talk at all, the priests?

Don: Oh yeah, yeah. Malcolm cut them up pretty bad all the time though.

Murray: What did the native people think of that? Did that make them a little nervous?

Don: Not really. They understood. But they can't do much about it, eh. Either that or you're excommunicated or something like that. That was a great fear that the church always held over the people. Even today in a lot of centres, eh, the priests and them are still the law.

Murray: How many people were at that meeting and what happened at the meeting?

Don: There were quite a few people there. It went over pretty good. There was quite a few memberships taken and they formed their own local, their own executive and that. And as you know, there is a good movement over there today among the Metis people in North Battleford and it was originally because of Malcolm and the formation of the Metis Association then.

Murray: Who were some of the people who were first involved in North Battleford?

Don: Oh, Landry and oh, there were a lot of other people that I can remember.

Murray: Can you think of some names of people that I might be able to talk to?

Don: Oh, Bert Landry. Oh jeez, I can't remember all of them because I've been over there several times.

Murray: But Bert Landry would be one, eh?

Don: Oh yeah. Just go over and ask. Stop at the friendship centre there and stop at the Metis Society offices over there and you'll get them all.

Murray: You mentioned that at that time Malcolm had a heart attack. Can you describe that?

Don: Yeah, we were going, after the meeting, we drove over. He was pretty tired and pretty pale and we were going upstairs and I says, "I'll carry your suitcase and briefcase." "No, no, I'll carry it myself." You know, he was pretty tired; he was getting pretty old. Malcolm was 65 then, you know; he was coming 66, five more months till retirement. He said, "I can carry my own stuff up." You know, he didn't know he was getting hatcheted at the time. I think the papers were already going through. Cuelenaere and Thatcher and them dirty bastards. But anyway, we got upstairs and he put it down and he hit the bed. And he couldn't breath anymore and tried to undo his... he was too weak, he couldn't even undo his collar. I knew, you know, he had troubles because he had nitroglycerin pills anyway. And jeez, I ripped his coat open for him and I felt his pulse and it would just go prrt brrrr, and then just real slow, and it kept going like that. He couldn't breath. So I started hitting him and heart massage and that, eh, really hard. Kept going like that and he was trying to tell me his pills in his briefcase there and I didn't know what the hell he was talking about and I knew he was having a heart attack. I got on the phone and I phoned and I just told them to get a doctor over here and an ambulance right away. I just phoned the desk and they did. But in the meantime, he was able to come back a little bit and I finally got pills... never took one. I took two of them and put them underneath his tongue

and he just jolted like that, you know. And the doc came in and gave him a shot. And it was an Indian doctor from India. And Malcolm really had a lot of fun with him. He said, "Yeah," he says, "you're not as strong as us Indians over here," he says. "Columbus made a mistake too, you know," and all this and that. Fifteen minutes later he was up walking around that bed, talking politics with this Indian doctor. And he should have been in the goddamn hospital. He wouldn't give up. He wouldn't go in the hospital.

Murray: He depended on himself.

Don: Yeah, and that's the way he died. He wouldn't quit.

Murray: Did you drive back right away or did you wait till the morning?

Don: No, he slept. The doctor gave him some more medications and that. I stayed up with him. He had a good sleep and that. He got up and had breakfast and I drove back.

Murray: Was that his first heart attack?

Don: No, he had a slight one before then.

Murray: How many did he have all together?

Don: I think his fifth one was the one that killed him in Calgary when he was in a wheelchair because it was later on that he was paralyzed.

Murray: The stroke paralyzed him.

Don: Yeah, this is what I heard from phoning back and talking and that with Mary and that. I didn't even know he was in Calgary. In 1968, I was up in the Territories teaching school when he died. I was at Fort Simpson. Yeah. Didn't even know. He never said anything about anything.

Murray: I'm wondering about, I want to go back to that 1964 meeting for just a minute. Do you remember, was there any hostility between the treaties and the non-treaties?

Don: There was no hostility at all, whatsoever. Because they really never had a spokesman. Malcolm was their spokesman for them.

Murray: For everyone.

Don: For everyone. Because they'd come to Malcolm, they'd get him to talk about this and talk about that and really ask questions. And Malcolm and my room upstairs, it was full all the time with different delegations and chiefs and that from all over. Malcolm knew them all.

Murray: Was John Tootoosis at that meeting?

Don: Oh, John was there but John was on the side of Thatcher and them I think because he was doing all the recordings up there. And he wouldn't let anyone have the tapes after or copies of that. Well, you know old John Tootoosis is kind of an old-time politician himself and him and Malcolm didn't

see eye to eye and simply because, I guess, Malcolm called a lot of people a lot of sellouts. Old Indian sellouts and that. Which is true in any case.

Murray: But maybe he said it in situations where he shouldn't have.

Don: Yeah, but Malcolm was honest to the point of being honest openly and truthfully. He never did anything to any Indians behind their back or anywhere. He said what he had to say and what he believed. He said, "I may be wrong," he says, "but this is the way I see it. I think you're an Indian sellout to the Liberal government." And this is what he said...

Murray: Did he say this to Tootoosis?

Don: No, I'm not saying necessarily to him, but I'm saying he said this to different people. He was a very outspoken person but when he spoke, you know, he never spoke offhandedly.

Murray: He always spoke from knowledge when he spoke.

Don: He spoke of what he knew, yes. And what he learned.

Murray: What may have been some of the other things that he and Tootoosis disagreed on; because Tootoosis became fairly important in the Indian movement too, didn't he?

Don: Yeah. I don't know. I think a lot of the Indian peoples or a lot of the leaders, they learned a lot from Malcolm in how to go about it. I think Malcolm helped them initially in

organizing themselves too. I know old uncle Joe Drever and Malcolm used to get along together. And old (inaudible) and my uncle, my mom's halfbrother William Joseph, he was chief at Whitefish for 27 years. Uncle Joe Dreaver, that's Gladys's dad; he is 91 or 92 now. He was chief at Mistawasis for 41 years. Malcolm knew them quite a few years.

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Don: ... a lot of the Indians went along with and they really believed in the power of the white man electing their own government and therefore they were in control.

Murray: Did he attribute that just to ignorance on the part of the people?

Don: Not only ignorance and that but...

Murray: Opportunism too.

Don: Yeah. The Indians knew that whoever was in control had the power and the say and they could do what they want to do and it was really a political threat over their head at all times. And the only way they could do away with that is by unifying. Malcolm told them time and time again but none of them would listen because they didn't have faith in their own unity. They were concerned but they were never committed because they didn't understand he said.

Murray: They always wanted to look out for number one.

Don: Right on.

Murray: To make sure for....

Don: If I do this then I won't get my welfare cheque or I won't get money for this, I won't get money for this, and you know. Well, can you blame them in that sense.

Murray: Sure, when they've been down that long.

Don: "And the only way," he said, "we're going to do it is by unifying, forming, organizing and action." And it's coming.

Murray: Right, right.

Don: It takes a long time, you know, to educate people and he

says, "Everytime you sit down, you've got to educate them."

Murray: So you got to be talking all the time.

Don: All the time.

Murray: And he did that himself.

Don: Yeah. Whenever he had the chance. It didn't matter where or when. It could be in a cafe or at meetings or, it doesn't matter where it was, he was always - I remember sitting down with him and people used to come in and sit down and have coffee and away he'd go.

Murray: Never let up.

Don: He never let up. And they used to listen too.

Murray: He was a man who was respected by everyone he talked with?

Don: Very much so. He was a man of very great principles and...

Murray: People recognized that.

Don: I don't think there was a point you could run Malcolm against except he was a little forceful.

Murray: That put people off a bit sometimes, eh?

Don: Because he believed and he understood so well. And he was committed, you know, to the Indian cause whether it was treaty or non-treaty.

Murray: Did he ever talk about what the Social Credit did to the movement in Alberta?

Don: Well, they controlled it, eh. You know, with the native people and that. I forget what government was in power when they first started out in 1932...

Murray: It was the United Farmers, I think, at first and then it changed to Social Credit.

Don: Yeah. Well they formed the Metis Association of Alberta in December of 1932. And they petitioned for a Royal Commission in 1933 and the Social Credit didn't come in power

until 1935 or 1936 and so it used to be the old Conservative party I think, was it?

Murray: It was the United Farmers party.

Don: Prior to the Social Credit that held power?

Murray: Yeah.

Don: Well, whatever it was anyway...

Murray: It changed then, yeah. Social Credit came into power later.

Don: And it was under that government, the Social Credit government, that the Royal Commission was set up. And therefore the people really believed in the Social Credit party in the province.

Murray: Because they were the ones who implemented the thing.

Don: That's right. And they brought along some of the great wishes, land base.

Murray: So do you recall him saying when it was that the movement got co-opted by the Social Credit? Was it in the late thirties?

Don: It was during the thirties, yeah. It was during the whole process. It shouldn't have taken from 1933 to 1939 for land implementation of those colonies but...

Murray: Right, but that's how long it did take.

Don: But the politicians worked it that way.

Murray: Was he pretty disillusioned when he went back after he was in the air force? Did he talk about that at all?

Don: No. No, he never talked too much about... The only thing he ever mentioned really in his involvement in military is that he was a member of the last contingent of the old Northwest Canada(?). He was supposed to leave Vancouver in 1918 for Siberia and the end of the war came and so they chopped it off. They stopped at Victoria. He was a member of the last contingent that was going overseas to Siberia.

Murray: They were going to fight the Russians weren't they?

Don: Yeah, they were going to land in Siberia and go across. He was a member of that expedition.

Murray: I heard a story that his mother had found out that they were going to send him to Siberia and his mother told the NWMP that he was too young and they kicked him out.

Don: No. They never kicked him out, no.

Murray: He just was lucky.

Don: No, he was 18.

Murray: Did he talk much about being a member of that

organization?

Don: No, not too much but he'd mention it every now and then.

Murray: He thought it was funny, did he?

Don: Oh yeah, you know, thinking back when he was young and stupid, he said. (chuckles) Young and in his prime.

Murray: So he was in Vancouver when he was a member of that?

Don: I think in Victoria is when they were disbanded, yeah.

Murray: And he was in the Northwest Territories at sometime too, I think, wasn't he?

Don: Yeah, he trapped. I taught school there last year where he was. The people, some of the older people there, knew him very well. Some of the Powders and that.

Murray: Where was this?

Don: At Camsell Portage. About 24 miles from Uranium City. He had his trapline up there. He was quite a trapper. When he was young he trapped all the way...

Murray: So when he was young he was around Camsell Portage?

Don: Oh, he was all over politicizing. He knew well, you know. He travelled, learn the land and the people, he said. You know. The Yukon, the Territories, Alberta, B.C., he knew the west good. He knew his people and he knew the white people and the structure of governments and how they operated.

Murray: Did he ever talk about how he became a socialist and who influenced him in that direction?

Don: Not really, not really. I guess it was, you know, going way back. I guess it was during the time when the Communist Bolshevik revolution was, when he was young.

Murray: And there was a lot of talk about that in those days.

Don: Yeah. Oh, you want to believe it. When the peasant people kicked out the Czars and the capitalists...

Murray: That was something.

Don: The landholders and that. And this is what he brought in and instituted in Alberta.

Murray: (Inaudible)

Don: For the Royal Commission of the Metis people, for those that didn't have land.

Murray: Did he talk about land a lot? Did he see land as being important for native people?

Don: Definitely, the basis, eh. And that's the same as in the north. This is why he fought so hard for control. He said anything coming out of the north should be part and parcel of the... a certain percentage of it should remain in the north among the people. And doesn't go in the provincial coffer, the provincial treasury.

Murray: Right. What were some of the other principles that he saw the Metis Association promoting? Land was obviously a crucial one. Were there others?

Don: Well, I can always remember him saying that he knew that we'd never have the strength and the power and the military power to overthrow the government in Canada. He said we're just too small and no matter what we did, he said, there would always be thousands more coming just like it was before. He said, but economic independence and eventually our own members of parliament to ensure our rights.

Murray: Separate members of parliament. Native people, seats that would always be native people.

Don: And if the case could ever come to it, an independent nation among ourselves within our own land.

Murray: Did he see that as the north more than including all of Canada?

Don: No, he saw it all across, unification. And today we see the Native Brotherhood and the Native Council of Canada and, you know...

Murray: How did he see that in practical terms? I mean, the native people are so spread out all over Canada. How did he see the nation idea?

Don: Well, the political unity among native people. And there was another thing which he stated not too long before he died too. He said, "Within twenty years we'll have a socialist government in Canada." He says, "Whether they want it or not." "We'll have a social democratic government in Canada." He says, "We'll have two parties, a right wing and a left wing, the Conservatives and the Liberals and whoever is those capitalist pigs," as he used to call them, "will unite against the left wing." And it's coming. We see in Quebec and we're going to see it all over. We're going to see the west. Yeah.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit more about the efforts made over those two years that Malcolm was still strong enough to be active that the Metis Society was organizing? Where did Malcolm go to organize and what areas did he travel?

Don: Mainly throughout the whole north, about forty

communities, I guess. I don't think there is a community he was never in. And how many times I don't know.

Murray: He went up the west side did he? Beauval and all those places?

Don: Oh the west side, yes. We had meetings all the way up through there. Meetings in pool rooms, we had meetings in church halls, we had meetings anywhere we could.

Murray: And people responded pretty quickly to that, did they?

Don: Pretty fast. We had pretty big meetings right off the bat. Because they knew Malcolm. Malcolm had been in those communities before, you know, as a government official, as a geologist but just going along as a social - whatever he was doing for Tommy Douglas, taking a look at the people and you know, the situation and what could be done. Malcolm really believed in Tommy and I think Tommy had a lot of things, as Malcolm used to say, you know, social programs for native people. Which Malcolm had a lot of ideas himself and it's come a long ways but there is a lot more to be done.

Murray: Which were the most successful towns in terms of the organization on the west side?

Don: Towns? Gee, I don't know really.

Murray: Where were the most successful meetings held? Green Lake and Ile-a-la-Crosse...?

Don: I suppose Meadow Lake, Green Lake, Beauval we used to have good meetings. Ile-a-la-Crosse, we used to have good meetings there too. We used to have good meetings in Buffalo.

Murray: Was Buffalo harder to organize do you think than other places on the west side?

Don: No, it wasn't then in those days, you know, because all the towns did pretty well. But you know, Buffalo today, in the last couple of years, is becoming kind of a bureaucratic centre of the west side there. And with the involvement of certain local people who are actually not native but maybe married, like Freddie Thompson and that, you know. And the people respect his wife and the Hanson family and a lot of other people. It's pretty hard to....

Murray: Live there.

Don: Yeah, right. And like I say, again it's ignorance, eh. And not complete understanding of the whole social and economic thing.

Murray: Did Malcolm get up as far as Turner Lake and La Loche as well?

Don: Oh yes, he's been all over.

Murray: Michel Village and all those places?

Don: Yeah. Oh yes, I've been all the way through there too.

Murray: Did you travel with him sometimes?

Don: Yeah. I don't think there is a community I haven't been in. Oh, Cree Lake maybe, was one I haven't been in. But I know Malcolm has been in there. I was never in there.

Murray: Could you describe some of the meetings? I want to get an idea of the atmosphere of the meetings and how people felt and how Malcolm talked to people.

Don: I don't know. Usually he talked about the organization, what it stood for and what situation they were in. And he talked about something of what they understood. You know, he put in words...

Murray: What conditions they were in and...

Don: Yeah, he put their condition into words and made a picture that they understood. And then they asked, "Well, what the hell can we do?" And he said, "Well, you yourselves as one community can't do very much," but you know, "Together," the old philosophy of unity again, eh, all the time unity, he says, "We can be quite a force."

Murray: Do you think this was a new idea to people to some extent?

Don: It was, because the communities were very split. Not only that, but within each community, you had many different - even today you have your political splits and your religious splits and everything else. And there were so many things to disunite the people, mainly political parties, mainly religious. And in other situations, it was mainly ethnic. Like in Buffalo, it's definite division between the Cree and the Chip.

Murray: What role did the church play in that whole situation? Were they actively opposing you or were they pretty quiet?

Don: They were actively opposing Malcolm because Malcolm spoke out against the church. And as property landowners, it was controllers, the social controllers within the community and telling the people how to vote and when to vote and everything else. Well, you know the whole situation. It's even there today.

Murray: I remember that when Jim Sinclair went up, he seemed to make a mistake, according to some people, by attacking the church and they reacted against that. But the people didn't

seem to react against it when Malcolm did it, is that true?

Don: Yeah, that's true.

Murray: I wonder what would explain that.

Don: I don't know. Malcolm spoke in Cree to them mainly, and I think they knew him as...

Murray: Someone they trusted...

Don: And he was an older person too, you know, and a lot of the older people knew him. Therefore a lot of the older people respected and knew Malcolm. Therefore all the younger people, you know, they didn't understand their dads and that...

Murray: So he was a figure that carried authority with him.

Don: Yeah, and even the priests and nuns, Malcolm used to be very polite to them and that too, you know. Although he spoke what he had to speak.

Murray: He always treated people decently.

Don: Right. He was always a gentleman, Malcolm. And he always told them, "I say this not to hurt anybody or anything but this is the way I see it." And then he'd lay the son of a bitch on to them, you know. And then he'd always tell them at the end, "Remember, what I said here is not to hurt anyone but it's just the way I see it and the way I see the way you're living here."

Murray: He didn't attack religion as such but the political roles of the church.

Don: The institution, yeah. You know, as a controlling body.

Murray: So people didn't see him as speaking against God or against religion but against certain things about it.

Don: No, he always spoke of Manitou, don't worry. He was a wise man. He knew what he was talking about and he knew how to talk. He never missed anything.

Murray: What were the meetings like? Were people pretty cautious when they first came in and curious? Or were they pretty excited? Can you remember?

Don: No, they were the way we always are you know. Like, they themselves sit back and listen. No expression, no nothing.

Murray: You couldn't tell a thing from looking at them, could you?

Don: No. But it's when they start speaking, when you get them involved in a conversation and then the fireworks started.

Murray: Well, he would talk for a while and then the people asked him questions, is that the way it would go?

Don: That's right, right. Had it all outlined.

Murray: And he didn't mind if the priests showed up to the meetings, eh?

Don: No, no. And usually what I spoke about was local control and education and, you know, their controlling hiring teachers and all this and that. I was president of the Northern Teachers Areas Association and, you know, the two years before I came to Prince Albert I had been to every community in the north talking about this. And this is the reason...

Murray: Just informally sort of.

Don: Well, you know, every school I go to, I'll ask the principal and teachers to call the parents in and I'd talk to them.

Murray: About local control of education.

Don: "I'm a halfbreed," and you know, and all this and that. And we formed local school committees. The first time it was ever done was over at Sandy Bay when I was there and they spread it out all over. Allan Guy and those buggers, they didn't like it in La Ronge and that when I used to go over

there. I used to take time off from school. I didn't give a damn. My wife was teaching, I didn't need the money. They'd get a substitute teacher in. I had an old Lincoln I used to drive around in. I used to drive all over. I remember Jimmy Durocher used to bug my ass to come in there with a big Lincoln like that, eh. But it was an old wreck, you know. It was an old '53, a customized job.

Murray: Puffing away.

Don: Yeah, right. And oh, I used to travel all over.

Murray: So you organized these school committees. What year would that have been?

Don: This was in 1962, 1963. Well actually it started in Wollaston Lake in 1960.

Murray: And these committees were, you were hoping that they would eventually go into school boards and take control of the schools.

Don: The school boards. And oh yeah, this was a beginning of our northern school boards. We fought for this a long time ago. But yet, people like Hensby and Waugh and old Harry Waugh and Hensby... well we got him run out of the country. Even

though I used the Liberal party and the priests to do it, we got him run out of there. The day that the Liberals came in power, they sent him a letter he was finished. I think he got his on April 23. I made sure Father Dar(?) saw that. I went over and saw the Bishop in The Pas. You know, you use all different kinds of things. Malcolm said, "Use anything you can

use, you know," he said, "but do it diplomatically." He was smart. He did a lot of coaching to me. I learned a lot from that man, you know, over the years. Oh God.

Murray: Can you think of other present native leaders that have learned a lot from Malcolm too?

Don: Oh man, well you ask most of them? Ask Peter Dubois. Ask, I don't care who you do, Walter Gordon, Walter Deiter. Ask the chiefs in the north if they know Malcolm. They used to call him Old Lawyer. Oh yeah.

Murray: Old what?

Don: Lawyer. Because Malcolm knew his law and that. Oh hell, he wasn't only a geologist eh, and a politician, he was...

Murray: He was knowledgable in all kinds of fields.

Don: Oh God, everything. You want to see the library he had. He said, "I must have read these books ten times." It was a room about three times, four times as big as this, I guess. All three walls were covered. I mean, that's a couple of thousand books that he's read over his years. And he was always reading, always writing, always on the phone, always writing letters. He used to type with two fingers but he could really type. He said, "I never learned that, the fancy way." He had this great big old typewriter he had for about thirty years. And he got a new one and didn't know how to operate it.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about the efforts to amalgamate the two, the southern and the northern organizations. They finally did amalgamate, over Malcolm's objections. Could you give me a bit of the history of that?

Don: Well, the way I know, and I know we talked about it before, and we knew there was organizations down south. And Malcolm always said, before we organize we must become strong in the north first, eh. Prince Albert and north and all the locals that we had formed. Because they, down there, didn't have nothing to do with the north. And he felt a lot of them were more politically inclined, you know, to go along with political parties rather than with the people's issues. This is what he wanted to do first is make a strong standhold in the north because that's where the wealth is.

Murray: Right. And that's where native people were poorest as well.

Don: Well that's why they're ripping it off right now. But I don't know if they were any poorer up there than they were down here in a lot of places. And everyone disagreed with accepting funds and that from provincial or federal governments and this was some of the policies of them down south.

Murray: What was his opinion of, and your opinion of, Joe Amyotte at that time?

Don: I don't know. He really never talked too much of Joe. He just said he was in the south and, you know, southern halfbreed, he called him. And he really never talked too much about the south.

Murray: Do you think he respected Joe or do you think he thought maybe he was tied too much to government?

Don: Well, like I said, a lot of them in the south... He never named them specifically, he always said to find out yourself. You know, he never really made that many commitments about individuals in his life. He was never like that.

Murray: He wouldn't talk about people behind their backs, sort of.

Don: But he used to warn you, you know. "Watch this group," or something like that. "Pick out the ones you think are good people, are dedicated or are they just here for a laugh," he used to say. You know, for their own pockets or that.

Murray: So he was always teaching you about how to be a leader?

Don: All the time, all the time. He was always instigating about being observant, and about other people and their reasons why they are doing things. Well, you can always sense a person out. I remember talking to Rod Bishop about that, you know, and Malcolm told Rod time and time again, "Don't go ahead." And Rod went ahead, joined forces with Howard Adams and it came out the way Malcolm said it would.

Murray: So Rod was influenced by Adams at that time then?

Don: Yeah.

Murray: More than by Malcolm?

Don: Well, I think Rod had his own little thing too, eh. The same as Malcolm said a lot of native people do, eh?

Murray: Got their own visions of grandeur.

Don: Yeah, yeah. And they forget the dedication and they go along and they perceive something of themselves in the future and what they'd never attain and they lose everything or they lose a good part of what they had in the beginning. It's that dedication; they screwed it all up.

Murray: Did Malcolm see that dedication coming from a greater depth of understanding of what the issues were, and politics, and that sort of thing?

Don: Definitely, this is what he said. He said, "A lot of them are concerned but they'll never be committed because they'll never understand. They'll go to the first person with the biggest money bag." And this is true.

Murray: In 1964/65/66, were there locals up on the east side as well? Cumberland and Creighton and places like that? Or did he get up in that area?

Don: No. Probably he went out east of P.A.

Murray: To all the towns around there, eh?

Don: Yeah. Tweedsmuir and up that way, up to La Ronge, that way, talked with people up there. Oh, they knew him in Sandy

Bay also. We had a local in Sandy Bay. I don't know if we had a local in Southend at that time or not. We had a definitely good local in Sandy Bay.

Murray: Did you have one in Molanosa or...?

Don: Molanosa, I don't know. I can't remember if we had any representatives from Molanosa.

Murray: Jim Brady organized one in La Ronge, is that right?

Don: Yeah, James and Malcolm did, yeah. Yeah, they organized in La Ronge. I mean, there was a caucus in there.

Murray: Was Jim very active in organizing or...?

Don: Not that much in those latter days. He was more involved in his prospecting and other things, you know. Really, it was Malcolm that was really the...

Murray: The push.

Don: Yeah.

Murray: You knew Jim too, did you?

Don: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that Jim was an unhappy person in those last few years? Was that partly why he didn't organize?

Don: I think so. I don't know. He seemed to be more within himself, I guess, of what I knew him. Because I only met him, you know, in those last years.

Murray: In the late years.

Don: No, I don't know too much about Jim, you know, personally. What I heard from Malcolm...

Murray: But Malcolm talked about him quite a bit, eh?

Don: Right.

Murray: I wonder would there be any records left of that original Metis Society up north?

Don: Oh, Malcolm's got them all.

Murray: They would all be with Malcolm's papers?

Don: Malcolm had copies, you know. We had all copies and Malcolm had all of them. I think he's got them all in his trunks and that, everything. Everything that was sent out, everything that was received. Oh, we got a lot of backlash from Allan Guy. They said they were going to cut off the funds of the friendship centre and all this stuff.

Murray: They forced Malcolm out?

Don: Oh, well after they hatcheted him, you see, we hired him as the exective director of the friendship centre. He made

more money with the friendship centre than he did with the provincial government. (chuckles)

Murray: Is that right?

Don: Yeah, we give him a bigger salary. That really pissed off Thatcher and Cuelenaere and Allan Guy.

Murray: So that's really the reason they wanted to get rid of him because you had pissed them off by going around behind them?

Don: Yeah, well, this was after he was hatcheted, we hired him.

Murray: When was that? Was it quite soon after he got fired?

Don: It was in May. No, it was before May. He was supposed to retire on May 5 or something like that. It was in January I think he was hatcheted. Five months before he was supposed to be retired.

Murray: So he was organizing before he got fired?

Don: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Was that one of the reasons do you think they canned him from his job?

Don: Oh, it was because of his political involvement with the

native people against the Liberal party is what they thought, because they knew he was a die-hard socialist. Because he used to call them right in public, capitalists. It didn't matter to him.

Murray: Right. How was he able to organize? He was still working then when he was going up the west side and things was he? Was he still with the government?

Don: Oh yeah.

Murray: Did he do that on government time or his own time or...?

Don: No, on his own.

Murray: His own, on weekends?

Don: We used to go out weekends, holidays, evenings. Yeah, we used to do a lot of travelling. Never home, never home. That's what screwed up my life after. My wife and I broke up that year.

Murray: There was a lot of pressure on Malcolm's family too, then, wasn't there?

Don: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Did he talk about that at all?

Don: Yeah, we did. Yeah.

Murray: How did you try and resolve that? I mean, you obviously knew it was a problem but it must have been difficult to deal with.

Don: We couldn't do very much about it.

Murray: How did Malcolm's wife feel about his political activities?

Don: I don't know. Malcolm and Mary and Betty and I used to be together quite a bit. And then we used to leave them and go organizing and they used to be so pissed off. Even the age difference, you know, we used to get along so good.

Murray: The four of you.

Don: Yeah. He was more like a father to me than anything I suppose, Malcolm was. I still can see him.

Murray: Quite a striking man too, I mean to look at.

Don: Yeah, he was, very. He was okay.

Murray: Did the organization grow in numbers right up to the point where Malcolm became too sick to organize?

Don: Yeah, I think it was growing and that, and it even grew later on. I think it went down there quite a bit and I don't know what tactics - I wasn't here then and - what tactics Howard used.

Murray: I've heard people on the west side say that after Malcolm disappeared, the numbers seemed to decrease and there weren't hardly any meetings.

Don: Yeah, well, this is what I say. I don't know what tactics Howard used after to bring back the membership and

that. I really don't know. It just took time again, I guess. Because once he left, there just seemed to be a cut off I guess, you know, communications - the old type of communications there always was.

Murray: One other thing you mentioned was that there were some tapes of that meeting in 1964. Tootoosis had those or...?

Don: Yeah, he's probably still got them or, probably they're with the FSI. The FSI has probably got them.

Murray: Right. Who else was at that meeting among the ministers? Was Allan Guy at that meeting too, in 1964?

Don: Oh yeah.

Murray: And Cuelenaere.

Don: And Cuelenaere.

Murray: And Steuart was there for one day.

Don: Steuart was there and, well, Thatcher came in for about twenty minutes. He had to catch a plane or something. We booed him right out of there. That's what pissed them off, too. Really gave him shit. Malcolm got up and really gave him shit. He said, "You mean to tell me you're the new premier and you've only got twenty minutes for these people whom you called the convention for for three days?"

Murray: What did Thatcher say?

Don: Nothing. He couldn't. Old Cuelenaere, "You're out of order, Mr. Norris." Everyone booed.

Murray: Everybody was on the side of Norris.

Don: Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, oh yeah. I can remember this - quite thrilled.

(End of Side B)

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DON NIELSON

Don Nielson was one of the original organizers, with Malcolm Norris, of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan in 1964.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Problems within native organizations between north and south, status and non-status Liberal and CCF.
- Details of the meetings conducted in northern communities by Malcolm Norris when he was organizing the Metis Association of Saskatchewan.

Murray: I am talking to Don Nielson of Regina. Don, I'm wondering if you recall anything about Malcolm's involvement in other native organizations besides the Metis Association? I'm thinking for example of the National Indian Council. Do you

recall that organization?

Don: I somehow recall, going back to say that time of about 1964. I can't really remember whether Malcolm ever mentioned any of the other organizations, you know, on a national level. We were more concerned with them I think, on a provincial level and in regards to the treaty Indians. He had a lot of contacts with the treaty Indians in the province and elsewhere. The National Indian Council was being formed at that time but as it turned out you know, not too many people were really involved in it. It wasn't a grass roots project.

Murray: It was a top-down sort of thing.

Don: A select few people had gotten together and...

Murray: Do you remember who initiated that? Did you ever hear?

Don: Wuttunee, I believe.

Murray: Frank Wuttunee?

Don: No, but what's his name from Calgary, eh. He's from Red Pheasant Reserve actually.

Murray: And so it was basically just leaders gathered from around the country. They weren't elected positions or anything like that?

Don: Self-appointed type of thing and well, they were on the go. They had to do something. I think it was a good move.

Murray: As a preliminary sort of thing, I suppose.

Don: Got a lot of Indians off their ass. You know, really.

Murray: That's exactly the kind of thing Malcolm wanted to do too.

Don: A catalyst, yeah. He said it was good, anything to good the conscience of the people. Not necessarily government, but the people at home.

Murray: Right. That was his main emphasis, wasn't it, to get the people themselves going?

Don: Himself, yeah. His own aim in life I think was mainly that, eh. All the way through, it was to good and to get the people involved in their own affairs.

Murray: Get them thinking and...

Don: Organized, eh, politically first of all.

Murray: I know that Malcolm was involved initially in the Union of Saskatchewan Indians to some extent. Did he ever talk about that at all?

Don: Well, I think his involvement was probably - no one knows really but as he talked about it - he had a lot of influence behind the doors, behind the scene. And that was because of his contact with Premier Douglas at that time, and, of course, Shumiatcher who chaired the first meeting in 1946 with the treaty Indians. He also chaired the first meeting of the Metis down here in Regina in 1946. I don't know if you've got a copy of that.

Murray: Yeah, I do. I found it finally.

Don: You did. You don't have it with you?

Murray: No, it's in the archives so I don't actually have a copy.

Don: We had a copy at the Metis Society office. I don't know who in the hell has got it.

Murray: I was going to have the whole thing xeroxed but it was too expensive so I xeroxed some pages. I can lend it to you if you wanted to copy it. But it cost 15 a page so I don't have that much money but it's really interesting. You'd really like reading it.

Don: Yeah, I've read it. Right.

Murray: I'd like to talk a bit about that, the general split between Indians and Metis. I know we've talked about this before. But did Malcolm sort of feel that by 1964 when you were both organizing the first association there, did he feel that it was sort of inevitable that the split wasn't going to be mended and that the two groups would have to go their own ways? How did he feel about that?

Don: I don't really know.

Murray: Did he still have some hope?

Don: I think he said he always felt politically we would always end up supporting each other. You know, it would be a long process of getting rid of the opportunists as he always said. We have so many opportunists in our group, as all movements do. And more so I think in our native group because people are reaching out for security and whichever way they can get security, recognition, or what have you, they'll sell out.

Murray: Looking out for number one.

Don: Even if they are leaders of their own band, so to speak, they'll still sell out the troop, you know, for the benefit of themselves. And he called them sellouts and it's true and he

pin-pointed them and he knew it. And he said eventually and gradually we would seek and we would seek and we would really, you know, get rid of the sellout people.

Murray: So he was confident of that.

Don: Yes. And it's coming to that.

Murray: But did he see that taking a fairly lengthy period of time?

Don: Yes, he did.

Murray: A sort of necessary stage in the movement then was it?

Don: Yes, and he, like his philosophy or his belief was because that we were a sellout to political parties rather than to the cause. And Malcolm even, in his own way, he was a die-hard socialist, you know. And I can see his concept of sharing, you know, and it's very much of an Indian concept, to share what we have. And I think it's coming to that throughout the bands, cooperative bands right across the country, whether they are Liberals, Conservatives, or whatever.

Murray: You think there is a gradual movement away from political parties then, is there?

Don: Well, no. There is individuals in that. Like even, you see Gerry Hammersmith, and then you see your select group of people. Dave Ahenakew didn't go to that meeting up there, the rally for Gerry. And Sol Sanderson didn't because, of course, he didn't belong to the NDP party. But they played politics. Ahenakew didn't go. You know, we still are committed to our religion, so to speak, the Christian religions, Anglican or Catholic, Liberal or Conservative, along that line.

Murray: But the native politics is something that's, is it becoming more together do you think?

Don: I really don't know if it's becoming more together. We see the Indian leaders like Harold Cardinal, for example, go on to administration. But I think he's got a longer goal set ahead of him, eh. I think his is going to the Conservatives and running on the Conservative ticket in the next federal and becoming the minister. I think this is what he has in...

Murray: That's his idea is it?

Don: I think so. In fact, I know it.

Murray: He thinks he can do something within the system that way.

Don: Well, not something in the system. I think he has the thought of getting complete control and I don't know if he'll ever be able to do it. Only with the total unity of all native

people will this be able to be done. Where the treaty Indians have the backing of the Metis organizations and non-status, the Native Council of Canada, all the way down in supporting each other on the political front for the enforcement and for the betterment of the treaty Indians to see that their treaties are upheld. And likewise for those things that the non-status Indians are hoping to present. And their aboriginal rights and legal claims.

Murray: Right. Did Malcolm see a significant difference between the Metis and the Indian in the sense that, sometimes I

get the impression that the treaty Indians were more tied to the traditional political parties, to some extent, than the Metis were.

Don: Well, they were in that sense too, that they were more controlled geographically. They were controlled also by the churches on the reserves and whichever way the priest or the minister voted, they went along with it, according from band to band and according from reserve to reserve, whoever got there first. They either followed the King James version of politics or the other version, the Roman version. If you were Roman you voted Liberal and if you were James, well, you voted Conservative and this was it (or Presbyterian eh, whatever). And that's about the way it still is in a lot of areas.

Murray: Did the Metis people manage to avoid some of that because they weren't in that sort of captured situation?

Don: In a way I think the non-status Indians and those that weren't really controlled but were out living among the non-Indian segment, so to speak, themselves being not only mixed blood but being out and living with...

Murray: Within the society.

Don: Yeah, within the system. I think they had more of a choice, eh. And I think it came this way for them a little easier and consequently they were able to become a little bit more, I think, politically aware earlier. And this is why you see that the halfbreeds had really become involved in their

own treaty Indians' or brothers' affairs and helped them organize in the earlier days like Malcolm did in Alberta and here.

Murray: Right. Work for the organizations, yeah.

Don: Right. Malcolm worked with both helping them form in Alberta and both the treaty and non, and the Metis Association of Alberta, the Indian Association of Alberta. He did that also here in Saskatchewan. This is why he's one of the few unique individuals in the last 75 years that - or in the 68 years that he lived - that worked in the field totally.

Murray: Right. Did he ever talk about those differences,

about how the treaty Indians seemed to be not as far ahead politically as the Metis?

Don: Well he could see that they were controlled by the RCMP, by the churches, by the governments and this was his whole fight since he was young.

Murray: Against that kind of authoritarianism.

Don: Yeah. He was thrown in jail I think about eleven times for fighting, trying to help the Indians organize, eh.

Murray: Trespassing on reserves.

Don: Yeah, on his own relative's reserves, type of thing, and him not having a treaty number.

Murray: And yet the organizations didn't resent him at all, obviously, because he was on the executive of the Indian Association of Alberta.

Don: Yeah. He was a catalyst among all of them. And he educated many. And those that he didn't have to educate, he goaded their conscience until they got off their ass and organized and worked and that.

Murray: Did that kind of activity continue right till the end, as far as you know, talking to people and pressuring them and moving and...?

Don: This was his whole life, you know. He couldn't go to meetings, he couldn't go anywhere without speaking Indian, for the cause.

Murray: Right. Did he have quite a few contacts? Was there quite a bit of communication between him, do you think, and people like Walter Deiter and Ahenakew and all these people? I mean in the last few years.

Don: I don't think he really communicated that much with them.

Murray: But they had meetings and stuff.

Don: They knew of Malcolm and in their own ways, I suppose, they went to see him. They went to see him and many people used to go and see Malcolm for advice and how they should tackle this or that. Whenever he went to a community or that, many people would come pounding at his hotel door or wherever he was staying. He was greatly sought after. He was well

liked and respected by most of the Indian people that I knew. The older chiefs like old Two Bear from Round Plain Reserve out of Prince Albert there, one of the older chiefs. He died back in the sixties. He was ninety some years old, one of the old original chiefs. Even the old chiefs knew what he was talking about. They understood.

Murray: He could talk to everyone.

Don: Yes. The young people too. He'd fire them up and really get them going.

Murray: A rabble-rouser sort of, eh?

Don: He was, very much, in that sense of getting going. I know he stimulated me while I was with him.

Murray: You were conscious at the time but you needed that extra push.

Don: Oh yes, to get going and to help me see that there was hope, you know. And so many of our people always felt, and I think they still do, that there is really no hope. Today, they are only beginning to see what Malcolm saw years ago.

Murray: Right. That's one of the things I wanted to talk about again. Malcolm left Saskatchewan during his last year. I'm sure he must've known he was going to die soon. Did he realize that he hadn't convinced people like Rod Bishop and

Howard Adams about the government grant thing and all those things? He must've realized that he had failed to convince them. What did he predict would happen because of that?

Don: Well, his only statements that he used to make about people, he said they have to learn themselves. Some of them have to go through a lot of punishment, torture, they have to go through a lot of bull shit until they really understand.

Murray: Learn from experience.

Don: Learn from experience, he says, and that's the only thing you can do is just let them go and bang their heads against the wall. "If they don't want to listen now, they'll see that I was right," he used to say. And I can say he said it in a nice way and a good way, you know. He said, "If they'd only listen. They think I'm an old man and I don't know what I'm talking about but they forget that I've dedicated my whole life for my people."

Murray: Right.

Don: That's true.

Murray: So he saw it in a sort of historical way. He knew that people would have to go through that phase before they saw the light sort of thing.

Don: And about seeing the light, Malcolm used to have complete pity for a lot of the treaty Indians who used to try to separate

themselves from the non-status Indians, the halfbreeds, because a lot of them basically - and it's true statistically that the greater, what is it, 97% - and I wish you'd put this in your

book for an understanding and the white people don't know, even the teachers of schools - that 97% of the native people in Canada today are breeds.

Murray: Sure, right.

Don: And this is why Ahenakew and them don't want nothing to do with them because they are giving away the name of the game. They are not Indians, they are Metis, they're breeds with a treaty number. And you tell Ahenakew that.

Murray: (Inaudible)

Don: Yeah, right, but they don't want to.

Murray: They hold that out, that there is a difference.

Don: Yeah, right. And they don't want to ever suggest that they have, you know, 85% white blood in their veins really.

Murray: Was this one of the things that made Malcolm most bitter that time?

Don: Yes, yes, bitter because of race and that and phoniness and people not really accepting who they were and what they were.

Murray: Did he see it in a way as sort of racism on the part of the treaty Indians themselves?

Don: Well, on the treaty Indians and having their treaty as a, you know, as a backup and getting lost in that whole rigamarole type of thing and not only that but they felt hopeless and yet they...

(break in tape)

Don: ...they said to put up their hand and shake hands and say, "Let's work together and help each other here, buddy." Or, "I need your help." Many of them in public wouldn't ask him but in...

Murray: Privately they'd....

Don: In the twilight of the early morning hours, they'd come banging at his door.

Murray: Ask for it on the sly.

Don: Yeah. Oh yes.

Murray: What accounted for that? Do you think it's partly because of the white man's paternalism saying, "Oh, the wonderful Indian"? That sort of thing?

Don: That was one thing. The other thing is that the image of

the Indian was instilled within the Indian and they wanted no part of being part of the white people either because the white people were really hated among the Indians and if you even

suggested that I was part white, you know, I'd be looked down upon. I'd be looked down upon among my own people. And yet if we could all live in that perpetual lie that we weren't part white then we could live with each other. And this was the whole thing Malcolm knew about the Indians.

Murray: Did Malcolm try and put that across to the Indians at all?

Don: He didn't have to. We never talked about it. It was never talked about. And when you did talk about it, there would be no more talk. Everyone would get up and walk out.

Murray: They didn't want to hear it.

Don: No way. No way.

Murray: So there was no point in bringing it up.

Don: No, no. Today you can talk about it and this is why Ahenakew and so many of the treaty Indians, like Sol Sanderson... I can remember sometime at a meeting or something, he said something at the friendship centre in P.A. and old Chief Two Bear was there, I think. We were talking about... we formed the first Indian hockey league in the province here, eh. We had seven teams, and this friendship centre in Prince Albert, we had one team. I played on it with Dan Keshane and Solomon Sanderson and that. And Solomon brought out the fact that, "I don't know if we should have halfbreeds playing for the team," not really fully realizing what the hell he was saying. Him being on the board of this Indian/Metis Friendship Centre. And I turned, I think I said to him, "Well, Solomon

with you're curly hair and you're blue eyes, you know, I don't know what the hell you're talking about." And old Chief Two Bear looked way the hell and gone over and his big long ear with the hole in it was hanging over and, you know, so he was really looking at... it really never dawned on him about his blue eyes, you know.

Murray: He was looking at Solomon?

Don: Solomon's blue eyes and his curly hair.

Murray: He didn't get that from an Indian.

Don: Yeah, right.

Murray: What did Sol say then?

Don: Nothing. You know, I just kind of made it a comment and just one time.

Murray: Let it die?

Don: Yeah, that was a few years back.

Murray: That would be typical of the reaction.

Don: That's basically the whole crux of the point of the matter between the treaty and the non-treaty is that point right there. Is the admission of the treaty Indians that there is not hardly one of you that is a true Indian, so to speak or a Nee-Tee-Ow, that you are Caucasian blood and don't call us Metis or halfbreeds because you're all that yourself with a treaty number.

Murray: So it isn't so much that they actually have some benefits and treaty rights, it's this whole thing about being pure and having nothing to do with white blood.

Don: And trying to get on with their treaties, you know, and saying that they're - well they are, they have every right to get on with their treaties.

Murray: But it doesn't mean that you have to be divided.

Don: Yeah. And like Malcolm used to juice them every now and then. He used to say, "But I don't have a number stamped to my ass like the hogs going to market." (chuckles) But the government stamped them. It really used to get them pissed off but he used to say it jokingly, you know.

Murray: What would they say to that?

Don: Nothing, they just laughed. Some of them would fume but the ones that knew Malcolm would laugh with him because they knew he was right and they'd laugh at ourselves like, eh.

Murray: So he could get away with that?

Don: Oh hell, yeah. He used to tell more stories and that. But he was educating them all the time.

Murray: Right.

Don: This was his whole point. He says, "I might joke with them but,..."

Murray: But everything has a point.

Don: Everything that he did...

Murray: Was meant to educate or to prod.

Don: Yes, that was his life. I never met a man like that.

Murray: He never said anything that was just small talk?

Don: No. He was always deadly serious and he died seriously.

Murray: Yeah.

Don: You know, in that sense. No, I don't think there was a breath that he took without being sincere. Committed. Like he said so many of our people, I think I mentioned that before, he said about committment and concern. "We're all concerned," he said, "but when the committment comes you can't do anything about it." Like, everyone always yells and screams. Like Bruce Vermont and all these guys and rabble-rousers, shit-disturbers. They don't realize that they're not concerned anymore. They are committed to the cause. You know.

Murray: Big difference.

Don: And all this money bull shit that Malcolm talked about, it's so true. I've seen so many hundreds of good guys come in, but the money was gone and they were gone. Whereas if there was no money involved in the first place, maybe a lot of them would've - it would've developed into committment. And they would have stayed.

Murray: Money corrupts.

Don: Money corrupts the values and they got used to living in a good style if they were getting paid good and as soon as they lost it, well shit, they had to go back welding or whatever good job they could get ahold of. And whether it was with selling themselves out to government agencies - that's why we have so many Indians that used to be in our organizations that are in every...

(break in tape)

Don: ...of parliament across the country. You know, and it's the good, the people that were really dedicated and they weren't committed yet, eh. They were on that line and that's when the government jumps in and gets them, or whoever, gets them off track.

Murray: And Malcolm predicted that?

Don: Oh definitely. He says, "We'll have them falling off that fence all on one side in a big pile of shit." You know.

Murray: With one or two, maybe, standing on the other.

Don: And some taking off flying and staying, you know. Some hovering and not knowing what to do.

Murray: All right, to get off that for just a minute, I've come across some things that indicate that Malcolm, when he took over as director of the friendship centre in Prince Albert, saw quite a different role for it than Pete Tomkins

and some of the people who had been working on it before. He

saw it perhaps in a more political way, not simply a place for people to stay overnight or... Could you describe that a bit, how he saw that?

Don: Well, I think the way we used to talk about that as a place to drop in for coffee and that, but actually to him it was a place to meet, a place to discuss the issues of the day, he used to say. You know, and if there is coffee involved, okay. If we don't have any, okay, we'll still discuss the issues of the day.

Murray: But the primary thing was the issues of the day?

Don: Right. And this was his whole thing of friendship centres. He says, "I don't know how long we have to remain friends with these people you know. They build these places to meet and that for friendship," he says, "I don't know, maybe this is a way to get rid of us too." And this is true, eh. And he saw our organizations or groups of native action is to politicize them. And he says we have to politicize our own, first of all. We can't politicize our own because we don't have control of the board, so let's get an all native board, which we did. And then he went about politicizing us. I was one of his disciples.

Murray: So he was thoroughly critical of the way the Metis friendship centre had operated before?

Don: Oh shit, yeah. It was just a tease.

Murray: A beginners sort of organization, eh.

Don: Right, yeah. Like some of the other organizations were in those days, but we even see the churches and that starting to turn a little bit and form, and this is good. The stance that the two major churches in Canada have taken. Two of the major churches.

Murray: Nationally.

Don: Yeah. The Anglican church and the Roman Catholic church. Have you gotten copies of their statements? Policy statements?

Murray: Not recently no, but I should get that.

Don: You can get one from Saskatoon from Bishop Mahoney. Tell him Don Nielson, his old student, sent you to him.

Murray: Right.

Don: He's got a lot of material.

Murray: Yeah, I want to do a whole study of the church and its role in the north too.

Don: Oh boy. You should have sat down with Malcolm for about ten years. He would have given you the whole low-down.

Murray: I'm sure he could've.

Don: Oh, deadly. That's it, Murray, without all his papers and his letters that I've had the opportunity... I can't remember them but reading them and the connections that he knew and had put together and, you know... that's in the south, his volumes, eh.

Murray: Yeah.

Don: To write on.

Murray: Well, I hope to get into his papers.

Don: I haven't written to Mary and I did it for a reason. I'd like to see her personally before I even write to her.

Murray: That would be a good idea.

Don: But it would be done and...

Murray: I won't be going there for a while anyway so it's not urgent. I may write her again as well and just keep her in touch with what I'm doing so that she knows who I am.

Another aspect of Malcolm and the Metis Association we talked about last time that I wanted to get a bit more on was that there were divisions in the communities that you were organizing, sort of ethnic and family and there was all kinds of little things happening. Did Malcolm try and deal with that in communities or did he just not speak about it and hope that it would be overcome?

Don: Yeah, in Malcolm's own way... he was never... he knew of it, he felt it, he never got involved in the divisions. He never... I cannot remember him saying in a meeting, "I know there is this group here, this group there, that group." He went in there as an overall preacher to all people in that community.

Murray: He spoke assuming there were no divisions. I mean, that was his...

Don: Yeah, he spoke like that. And whether there were priests there and they didn't want us in the community or whether there were Anglicans there together, he spoke to the native people and he wasn't actually speaking to the non-native people in any of the communities. He said, "I'm going there to speak to our people. If the other ones are there and they can become educated also," he says, "so much the better. Maybe those are the first ones we should educate."

Murray: So his strategy was just to try and politicize people and hope that that would overcome the divisions?

Don: Yeah, right. In unity, yeah, right. And most communities

and a lot of them I see, it does do it. You know, the cause comes above all else.

Murray: Right. A popular sort of feel among socialists in organizing people is that the poor people are always the most difficult to organize because they are basically insecure. Did he talk about that at all in talking about why it was hard to organize people or did he mention that very much?

Don: Well, the only thing he ever mentioned is that we didn't have faith in ourselves because we were poor and we felt that

there was no hope. And he always told them that there is always hope and we know that. "That's why we are at this meeting tonight or else you wouldn't be here," is what he'd say. You know, I often heard him say that. And he said, "The mere fact that you're here tonight is that you have faith in yourself and faith in a movement and fighting for your cause." And he always mentioned their children, of course. And that's something so dear, and that's true more so I think the native people, is their kids are their only possessions. They don't have all these worldly goods and that. And it's the most human basic instinct and it was so strong is the survival of their family, their kids and their grandchildren and their children's children.

Murray: Make a better world, if not for them, which might be hopeless in their eyes...

Don: And whether they are going to use this or not, I don't think he used it as a political gimmick. He used it out of love but it became, or it was, political, eh.

Murray: It wasn't manipulation on his part.

Don: No, it was love that he - and he had a lot of resentments and a lot of hatreds underneath, of the system and that. And I'd almost believe that he really deadly hated the white people. Even his father for being white. Like I have felt about my father who is dead. I shouldn't be talking like that but it's the truth.

Murray: Well, I think that's true of almost all native people. It would be hard not to, you know.

Don: Yeah, for letting the system do what it did to our people.

Murray: The individual white people may not be responsible but as a race they are. So that Malcolm would feel that even of his political associates who are white. There was always an undertone of resentment and...

Don: I think I told you that I believe that one time - and I don't know if it was a cabinet meeting but I think it was or thereabouts, I think. Mr. Douglas would clue you in on that date and time and where he stood up and called them a bunch of white supremacists. And he was the only Indian there. And he wasn't

challenged, I don't think, at that time from what I remember him telling me.

Murray: It's not the kind of thing they would be likely to challenge.

Don: No, no.

Murray: He was a pretty strong individual. I wanted to get back a bit at that 1964 meeting, that important meeting that we've talked about a couple of times. Do you recall if Joe Amyotte was at that meeting? Do you remember that or not?

Don: In Saskatoon?

Murray: In 1964. The one that the Liberals called.

Don: I don't know if he was there or not. But all of the people we met with, like we had our own meeting of the non-status Indians, eh, the Metis, or call us what you want, as the saying was going then. Because we didn't have a political name, eh. Like treaty Indian. The treaty being given to us and the Indian...

Murray: You or everybody else.

Don: Yeah, right.

Murray: The treaty Indians and everyone else.

Don: Yeah. But we were 'people of Indian ancestry not being treaty.' That's the way it was termed. And I don't know if he was there or not but....

Murray: 'Cause his organization was going at the time, very slightly in a couple of places, maybe. Do you remember if the southern organization, were you aware that it existed at that time?

Don: Yes, we were aware of involvement. That's why people were represented at that meeting from the south.

Murray: People from Lebret and Qu'Appelle and Regina and...

Don: Yes, but like Malcolm and all of us knew... And at that time it was Liberals; well Malcolm had nothing to do with the Liberals and he saw a lot of the native people being involved in the politics of the Liberal party and...

Murray: And the government and...

Don: And he really didn't have that much to do with them.

Murray: That's one of his major reasons for avoiding them.

Don: That's right. That was one of the major reasons. And this was why I'm saying again, the political party system among the Indians, it helped divide us again. There was a purpose there of the government's, eh. And I think there still is today. If the two or three political parties get together every now and then and say, "How can we get the Indians, keep them divided?" Well, they are doing a good job with Dave Ahenakew and Jim Sinclair and Harold Cardinal and Dave Ahenakew and the other Conservative boys and Jim Sinclair, you know. They keep us all separated by political parties and the time we smarten up like Malcolm says and unify... And the only reason why he didn't do is because I think he was more correct in following the NDP party, being that it was more tuned to the native, to the majority of the...

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Don: ...was kind of a balance of Malcolm, you know.

Murray: Right.

Don: I remember this one old guy said, "Your son is kind of a balance." He thought we were father and son. He'd always see us together, you know. That's quite a compliment. It was

really good. I was really close to Malcolm in that sense. Geez, I loved that man.

Murray: So many people must have seen him as being just so thorny that it was impossible to get close to him, but once you got to know him he was....

Don: He was really human, oh yeah. His jokes and all his humor and in his own way... Jeez, I miss him so much when I think of him. Never meet another man like him again.

Murray: Do you recall if there was anyone among the treaty Indians who was comparable to Malcolm or who was anywhere close to Malcolm's equal as far as political understanding and leadership?

Don: Oh I think probably there is three that together maybe they could come close. Maybe Bill Wuttunee, I'd think Howard Adams, Ahenakew and Cardinal together would maybe make up 75% of what Malcolm... you know, I mean being honest. I'm not belittling Howard and all his years of study for his doctorates or William and his law and that. But Malcolm knew as much law if not more. And this army experience that Ahenakew had, and just being an Indian like Harold did, and Malcolm had all of that plus everything else.

Murray: Right. Well, you consider Wuttunee to be a pretty competent leader, eh?

Don: I think basically in his training in being an Indian he

was thorough and I think he knew what he was talking about. Even though, in his own way, he was for William, as we know today. He's kind of lost in the woodwork or whatever he's doing.

Murray: Did Malcolm ever state any opinion of him or did he think he was a...?

Don: I don't know. He probably called him what he usually called a lot of people. (chuckles) White brown men or sellouts to the system or, you know, opportunists. That's what he called them, opportunists. And the worst ones were our own Indians and we had to get rid of them. That was his theme - politicalization of the people. First of all, get rid of your own sellouts. And if you don't get rid of them, they eventually get rid of themselves if the heat is hot and fast and strong enough.

Murray: Then they have to make decisions, yeah.

Don: And he died never being an opportunist.

Murray: Never, no, not for a minute.

Don: No, never. Him and James Brady. We'll never see a pair like that again. They themselves, they worked together many years and I don't know how much they got along that much, you know.

Murray: They were pretty close, I think.

Don: They were close underneath, yeah.

Murray: They were such different men that they wouldn't be close like some would because Brady was very introspective, you know, inward looking.

Don: Malcolm was forward and outgoing and really ran the show when he had to.

Murray: I think they really loved each other because they knew so much together, they accomplished so much together.

Don: They really complemented each other.

Murray: I think I asked you this before but I want to ask you again because it's sort of important to me. Malcolm really only got started in the summer, August of 1964, as you mentioned before. I'm wondering why. Did he feel that there was no point before that? Did he think the time was right? I'm trying to get a feeling for why he waited so long to start that?

Don: I really don't know. Maybe that he felt the time wasn't right and the opportunity for one thing wasn't right.

Murray: But he knew, must've known too, that in 1964 he was getting older.

Don: Yeah, the end of his term as a government civil servant was coming up and he no longer feared that security. I think he had to think basically, primarily first of his family.

Murray: Right. That was a major concern.

Don: Yeah, and this he always taught to everyone. And he was a living example of it, I feel.

Murray: That he (inaudible) first.

Don: Yeah, he had to support his family even before and above the cause and the cause of his people. Because in not doing that, he would show the Indian people that the family structure did not matter. I remember him talking about that. And he said, "My family comes first."

Murray: That was an important part of his politics. It wasn't just an outside decision.

Don: No, it was his life, eh. Because his politics was his life, his committment was his life. But first of all, priorities come first. And as a human being, he said, "My family comes first." But he says, "I've always been able to somehow," he says, "you know, I've had two families. I've always been able to somehow fit both together." He said, "Sure my family suffered a lot," which I imagine they did. I really don't know that much about his first family and his second family that much either. But I imagine they did suffer a lot and I think Mary would be able to tell you a lot more about it, about his own personal life. After all, being such a vibrant person and that, and I knew his family must have been very much affected by his....

Murray: Under his shadow a lot.

Don: Yeah, right. You know, affected by his lifestyle and that.

Murray: Did he feel any contradictions? Like, if you talk to a lot of white people in Prince Albert, it's pretty interesting because they will say, and they don't mean to be racist because you know they're into it, and they'll say, "Well you know, I never even thought of Malcolm's children as being Indian." But I'm sure they were thinking in comparison with other native children who probably seemed much more shy and reserved and frightened.

Don: His kids were just, they were very active and very strong. They were the leaders in the high school there. His daughters and sons and whether they really identified themselves as being the native people, you know, Indians, I don't think so.

Murray: That's what I'm wondering about. Maybe Malcolm talked about that.

Don: No. They really felt being number one in competitions and everything else, maybe this was the underlying thing that drove them, you know.

Murray: To overcome their handicap sort of...

Don: Whatever it was.

Murray: I'm trying to get a feeling for whether Malcolm felt that maybe he hadn't instilled the importance of saying that you're a native person in them. Did he feel that at all or did you ever get that?

Don: Maybe. I know what you mean because...

Murray: They lived a white lifestyle to a large extent.

Don: I don't think he felt he had to. You know.

Murray: He didn't feel there was a contradiction at all there, right?

Don: No. Because this was his second marriage and his kids and that...

Murray: He wanted his kids to have the best advantage possible. That was his goal.

Don: Yeah, right. And that's the way he went about it.

Murray: But he did talk to them about being proud to be native too, I'm sure.

Don: Oh, definitely.

Murray: Because I think you mentioned he used to call one of his sons Black somebody...

Don: Or something or other, yeah.

Murray: I forget his son's name but he was very dark skinned and he used to call him Black David or something like that.

Don: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that Malcolm was surprised at all at being fired by the Liberal government from his civil service job?

Don: No, no, he was expecting it. Like, after the meeting and all...

Murray: Especially after that 1964 meeting.

Don: Oh yeah. He says, "Well, shit, I'll be lucky to last," and he didn't last, eh.

Murray: January 1st. He got dumped.

Don: Yeah, I remember the night he told me. He had just gotten his message...

Murray: I came across a letter. He wrote a letter to Brady talking about it.

Don: Yeah, I think we were down at the friendship centre when he was writing that letter if I remember correct that night. I don't know if it was a Monday night. You take a check on the letter, the date. I forget, or Sunday or Monday. I forget. We were in the office alone and he was banging out the letter on the old typewriter.

Murray: Did you spend a lot of time with him there working at the typewriter?

Don: Oh, lots of hours, yeah.

Murray: Describe an evening like that. I'm trying to get an impression of what it was like.

Don: Everything. Politics. He'd reminisce, eh, and talk about people that he knew over the last, since he come to Saskatchewan, people that we'd be meeting. And "If you ever go to this community or that community,...."

Murray: Look for this guy or that guy.

Don: See, he laid the groundwork in all the years that he was with the government. Wherever he went to, he was always politicizing the people. Whether the other civil servants liked it or not.

Murray: And he'd recognized the people in the various communities who were more progressive or...

Don: And he knew who to contact, who to see, and everything else. And he made friends throughout the north long before getting fired from government and politically organizing, actively organizing. Well, he was actively organizing long before he got fired.

Murray: All the time.

Don: Yeah.

Murray: That's why when he went up the west side with you, people were ready to listen to him already.

Don: Oh yes, they knew Malcolm. They called him, you know,

"lawyer" or whatever they called him.

Murray: Do you think it was partly that he didn't organize the association earlier was security? That he didn't want to have pressure put on from the government?

Don: He didn't have the time, I don't think. Nor the health, I don't think. But now when he knew that he didn't have long to live - and I know he really knew that - he had to give it everything he could.

Murray: So it was a last drive?

Don: Because he said it himself, eh. He said, "You know, I'm going to die anyway soon or I might be lucky to last ten years but," he says, "I know I'm not going to." I remember him stating that. We were sitting there in the front room. Even at his house, he mentioned that.

Murray: Because he'd had, by this time, a couple of heart attacks already, I suppose. And he knew that he was unhealthy.

Don: Yes, that was his second one. Yeah, I was with him on his second one.

Murray: Right. Yeah, you told me about that. Did he ever talk to you about the strategy of the north, of sort of having the government take aside a certain amount of the natural resources and for the benefit of native people? Was that part of his...?

Don: No, his goal was for the native...(break in tape)... pounded into their heads, "Don't ever buy land and don't ever set up your communities," and that's what they're doing now, eh. (break in tape) I told Bishop and all of them, "What the hell are you guys doing, you're LCA's and, ah jeez, local community authorities and..."

Murray: So he saw it as the legal basis for owning the resources was the main base for native rehabilitation.

Don: Yeah, right. He said, "Prepare, do your homework." He'd always say that, "Do your homework, do your homework, you guys, and get your stuff down."

Murray: He knew then that somewhere, if you researched it well enough, that the Metis people had land claims as well as the treaty Indians.

Don: Right. And he said, "All of this is going down the river," and it will too. "It might be the Churchill or wherever," he says, "but it will all end up on the state somewhere too." I remember Martin Smith saying that at one interview, it was really good. He kind of understood. I often wondered, when I was thinking of that interview Bill Daniels and him did with the CBC reporter, I often thought, I think he

got that from Malcolm when Malcolm got ahold of those fishermen and trappers and often used to talk to them at their conventions.

Murray: And put a bee in their bonnet.

Don: Oh boy. He politicized a lot of people in the north.

Murray: So he didn't see much of a role for government other than forcing government to recognize the land claims as far as economic development and that sort of thing.

Don: Right. And he was really thinking in terms, on the same basis as what he did with the Metis Claims Commission in Alberta, eh. This is what he foresaw, not only in the north, but

he knew it was easier in the north. But he saw it on a provincial basis, having not laid claim to anything yet in this province.

Murray: Right. So that was the major thing.

Don: It's still his major thing I think. I'd just like to get into all of his diaries and a lot of his stuff that he left in his last years that he wrote.

Murray: He wrote every day did he or almost?

Don: Oh, every day.

Murray: These are the leather bound ones you mentioned.

Don: Yeah, I bet there was not a day went by that he didn't bang out some letters to somebody about the goddamn Indian situation there.

Murray: Did he keep copies of his letters that he sent?

Don: Oh, everything, everything. You wouldn't believe it. I thought law offices were meticulous in that sense.

Murray: He kept a record of all his stuff?

Don: He did. That's why I say...

Murray: I hope it's there. I hope it hasn't been lost somewhere.

Don: And his printing and writing, oh, my God. That's why I say those couple of trunks and all those stuff, letters that he has there and notes and papers and fabulous documents and letters from this person and that person, he kept them all filed and...

Murray: In talking to you about what was the proper way to organize people, did he talk much about how to deal with the

church and what to say to the people about the church?

Don: The issues of the day were the things that would sway the people.

Murray: Right. And the church would either support him or not support him and he didn't care.

Don: He was a realist and he... always that old quote, he used it many times, "There is no goddamn pie in the sky for us," you know, he would say.

Murray: That's how he dealt with the church.

Don: Yeah, and everything else. But I mean, there is no pie in the sky in regards to politicians either.

Murray: Do it yourself or it won't get done.

Don: Yeah. "Deal with the issues," he always said. "Be a realist, put it before the people. They are realists," he said. They have just been swayed somewhat by the churches and political parties and that.

Murray: Just got to bring them back to the track.

Don: And get rid of our people who are influencing our people to continue to do this. These are the sellouts and the..

Murray: Right. So he didn't feel a necessity at all of attacking the church or...

Don: He didn't have to.

Murray: So as long as you put the issue strongly enough, they should never have to...

Don: The church will have to deal with it themselves, yeah. "They either have to shit or get off the pot," he'd say. And that's true.

Murray: So he wouldn't have done what Sinclair did and go into a community and attack the church and say the church has exploited you. He wouldn't bother.

Don: He didn't have to.

Murray: Because if he talked about what the issues were, the people would know.

Don: "You're just building up forces against yourself," he'd say.

Murray: Right. That would be an adventure.

Don: Go in there and have tea with the priest, yeah. He'd go in there and have tea with them and coffee and....

Murray: He must have thought that was quite funny sometimes, eh?

Don: Oh yes, it was humorous. And all the people respected him for it, for respecting his people.

Murray: Because they'd all see, I mean it wouldn't take two minutes for it to get around town that he'd gone to see the priest.

Don: Oh they all knew, they knew. And they respected him for that too, you know, because he did respect people as human beings. Even though he didn't believe in what they were doing.

Murray: Right. He wasn't going to spit on them or anything.

Don: No, no, he wasn't like that. He was very much human. He really was.

Murray: Right.

Don: I don't know, he was a contrast to so many things, you know, it seems. And yet he was human.

Murray: He was a fascinating individual for sure. Did he talk much about the RCMP? Was he...?

Don: Oh yeah. He was once an RCMP, eh.

Murray: That's right, I remember that.

Don: He was in the last contingent that went overseas, that was supposed to go overseas in the First World War.

Murray: To fight the communists.

Don: Well, the Czars, yeah, right. And the Bolsheviks, yeah. And here he turned out to be one.

Murray: Did he think that was pretty funny?

Don: Yeah, oh yeah. He used to comment about it, you know.

Murray: Did he talk much about his days in the RCMP and what it was like?

Don: No, he really never...

Murray: He just mentioned that incident as being amusing.

Don: Yeah, right, and they disbanded when he was in Victoria, I believe.

Murray: How long was he in the police?

Don: I'm not sure. He'd be fairly young, eh, eighteen, nineteen.

Murray: He was seventeen, I think, because he was underage, I think, at the time.

Don: Maybe when he first joined them but he was about eighteen or nineteen when he got out of it, I think.

Murray: Right. So maybe a couple of years.

Don: Yeah. But he lived all over, you know. And he politicized, like I said, up in Camsell Portage. Two years ago while I was there, there are some guys in their seventies, they remember Malcolm good when he used to trap up there, up in the...

Murray: That's right, you mentioned Camsell Portage, right.

Don: Yeah, Uranium City area. He used to have a trapline way up in the tundra in the barrens up there.

Murray: That's where....

Don: And he used to politicize them at campfires in those days then even, too.

Murray: Everywhere.

Don: Oh yeah. Wherever he met a human being or a soul, he used to say, if they needed education, by jeez, our discussion, he said. And that's where I learned it all is basically from talking with other people. And that's true.

Murray: I want to get an impression from you. I think I've asked you this before. What I'd like is to get as many details as you can remember of a sort of typical meeting and just exactly how he would start a meeting off and whether the people would sit at the back of the hall or the front of the hall and whether they were nervous or, you know, that I just want to get a feel for the meetings he used to have. The ones that you were at up the west side.

Don: I don't know. All the meetings I went to, Malcolm was very quiet when he came into a room. He was himself. He knew he could feel the people and he was always sensing. I think he was very much with his mind in contact with people and groups of people. Like, at a meeting, he could sense their feeling and he'd never speak or that until the time was right.

Murray: He'd let people sit and talk and get loosened up or...?

Don: Yes, and he'd get them going in some sense and if any time where he felt the Indian way of humor and that, eh, he was a great humorist you know, really.

Murray: He'd always make people laugh.

Don: He could make people laugh at themselves or the church or the politics or the people right there. And they would too, you know. He'd make humor of white people at the meeting, them not knowing it, you know, and...

Murray: But he'd speak in Cree.

Don: Yeah, he'd speak in Cree but he'd do it in such a way that everyone would laugh like hell and then he'd turn and tell the person something what the story was about. And sometimes it wasn't the right one because he didn't want to hurt the person. To them it would hurt them but to the Indian people it was a good joke, eh.

Murray: Right. And that was all it was.

Don: Yeah, right. It wasn't something facetious. And this was the way he'd do it. But then he'd wait for the issues.

Murray: How would he start? What would he talk about when he first stood up and started talking.

Don: He'd tell them who he was if they didn't know and some people usually introduced him.

Murray: He'd have someone in the community introduce him would he?

Don: He wouldn't have them, they'd automatically do it. He'd ask them who their committee was and who was their spokesman usually and they usually talked among themselves even right during the meeting. They weren't organized; they didn't organize. And then they'd get going on it. And then they'd give him the floor and they'd ask him issues.

Murray: That's what he'd get people to talk about.

Don: Right away, that's how it would start usually. "What's your problems here? Do you have any?" You know, right away, boom! Well it was started, eh. That was it.

Murray: Would people usually bring up things that affected them directly, welfare, they couldn't get a job, or the kids couldn't go to school?

Don: Personally, yeah, personally. Government people, politicians, anything and everything. RCMP, Indian Affairs, it didn't matter what it was.

Murray: So this is the kind of problems he would get when he asked for them, in answer to that question?

Don: Yeah.

Murray: What would he say to them then about that?

Don: He'd give them the truth, what he thought of it. No punches pulled either because he was a civil servant, and they knew that. They respected him for it.

Murray: How would he deal with it? You know, a problem that was obviously a small one in a way...?

Don: He'd take their name down.

Murray: He would, eh?

Don: He'd take the issue down, he'd take the people, he'd write those people a letter. He'd send them a copy, etcetera. He never let things go undone.

Murray: He wouldn't make a promise and then let it go down.

Don: Yeah, if he said he'll do this, he'll do it. Oh, that's why he was always on the typewriter. I don't know how many letters he wrote for people, you know, of that issue and follow it through. He must have had files and files he kept in order and that.

Murray: So every little individual complaint, he would try and...

Don: Deal with it himself, yeah. And he'd try to get them to do it themselves. That's why he said, "That's why you should have committees. You see, if you have any trouble you just write a letter here and let us know about it, all the time."

Murray: So that he would always help them if they were having problems.

Don: Either in Prince Albert or in Regina, he said, where the (Cree) always are. (Cree) The white chiefs down there, you know. And they all knew he knew them and they all knew that those white people knew Malcolm too. He was well known in that way.

Murray: They knew that he was respected by everybody.

Don: Right.

Murray: How would meetings go on then? Would it be a give and take all the time? Like Malcolm wouldn't just sit and give a speech?

Don: Oh sometimes he'd rant and rave for half an hour and really give them shit. I can remember in, oh Jesus... If there were any white people in the room in the communities, he'd get them going too.

Murray: Get their ears burning.

Don: And a lot of the people that they were related to those white people, they'd side with their own white people there; and Malcolm would get them going so mad that they'd have to get

involved. Quite often they eventually came back and worked with the group because a lot of the white people worked with the native peoples. But they were afraid to act and move too in the communities because they knew the score.

Murray: What would happen after one of these ranting sessions? What would happen after that? Would he just sit back and let people question him then or how...?

Don: Yeah, usually people would react to him either in a silent way - they'd think about it and the next time he came back into the community, they'd really go at him too, eh.

Murray: And that's what he wanted. He wanted it that way.

Don: Yeah, he wanted reaction. But you know, he'd get them going in the right direction though. He says, "The people you should really be giving shit to are these guys sitting up here with me," and then they'd turn on them. And they'd get things done that way and they knew and they saw their own living experience of getting together. By unity, he always told them, eh. He always used to use that symbol of one stick in a bundle of sticks. Arrows he used to call them.

Murray: Couldn't break them if they were in a bundle.

Don: If you had a bundle of spears or arrows, you can't break them.

Murray: He was always talking about arrows as a symbol...

Don: Yeah, he always did, yeah. Arrows and arrows and arrows. He always used to say, you have to have lots of arrows.

Murray: He used that symbol of a bundle being strong.

Don: Yeah. "When you go to meetings, always have a quiver full of arrows," he'd always say. Oh yeah, he was always warfare, mental warfare and do your homework.

Murray: Did he talk a lot about encouraging the local people to put pressure on their own leaders too? Is that part of what he said?

Don: Yeah. Organize and live up to your responsibilities. Oh, he was very much like that to the individual. He'd tell them you know. "You have responsibilities as the president of this local. And if not, maybe you should get the others to get another leader." Then, "No, no, no, I'm the leader here." "Well, live up to your goddamn responsibilities then."

Murray: He never let up on them.

Don: No, he would never. He never let up on me either. You know, he was so strong like that.

Murray: Did he ever have criticisms of you? What kind of things did he say to you, and where would he try and push you?

Don: Me? Of being there on time and doing the things. We have to go here and that's it.

Murray: And not being slack.

Don: Yeah, that's right. You can't afford...

Murray: If you say you're going to be there, you have to be there.

Don: You've got to be there, or get out. Plain and simple.

Murray: And there is no way you can argue against that because you knew it was true.

Don: No, yeah right. And that's how I learned from him, he taught. He was quite a teacher. Mostly by action he taught but he also had the answers and the words and that.

Murray: He was always trying to teach you. I mean, speaking of yourself individually.

Don: Things to read. Things to do. Mostly do. Mostly do and then read and see how you can better it.

Murray: Right.

Don: That's what he always said. "I'd suggest you read this here," he says, "but to heck with it. Go and do it and then read it later and then see how you can improve that person's spot. That way you'll know."

Murray: So it was always a combination of experience. That's where most of your learning was going to come from. I'm just wondering a technical sort of thing. Were there more young people or old people or men or women at these meetings?

Don: In the beginning there was mostly older people, mostly older people that knew him over the years.

Murray: That's why they came, because they knew Malcolm.

Don: Yeah, about the previous twenty years, eh, something like that. The previous fifteen years or whatever it was, eh. Fifteen, twenty. Oh yeah, fifteen, twenty years. Malcolm was throughout the north all those years.

Murray: But gradually younger people started coming too.

Don: Yes. Those parents' children.

Murray: Was that because the older people talked to their children?

Don: Yeah, right. And they felt the need of...

Murray: Were there quite a few women come to the meetings too?

Don: Oh yes, yeah.

Murray: I'm wondering, in white society, women have been almost second class citizens, like native people have been in many ways in the white society. What about in the native society? Did women speak up much or were they back in the background a bit?

Don: Not before. They were more or less in the background I think but as them becoming involved in the school activities and church activities and that and they eventually became involved in the locals.

Murray: So that changed gradually.

Don: Yeah, right.

Murray: Because some of the women were pretty slow.

Don: And the reason why they really formed... They never formed first of all so much in the actual local, local number 92 or whatever it was in the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. They were involved in, say, the school issue committee or this or that committee and then they'd come back and get personally involved and run for office in their own locals. And many of them become the treasurer or secretary or the president. Holy smokes, away we'd go. And it was accepted. They were, and they still are, respected as much as any man right there. There is a great equality today among the leadership and it's always the self-respect of, you know...

Murray: Of each other.

Don: Yeah, right. Like if you're a leader, you're a leader. It doesn't matter on the sex...

Murray: Or anything else, as long as you're doing your job.

Don: Yeah. I feel, it is felt out here, "Ah shit, she's only a woman." Among the native, no way. Among the native, if she's

elected president by the people, she's the voice of those people. You don't think of her as a separate sex, eh.

Murray: A mother or a woman or whatever.

Don: She's their spokesman, that's it. She's chief there and I don't give a shit who you are, you'll respect that woman when you go to that community. And no one had to tell you to do

that; it was automatic.

Murray: I was wondering, we're nearing the end of our tape here. I'm wondering if there were more Chipewyan people or less in terms of their response to Malcolm? Did the Chipewyan people respond pretty much the same as the Cree? I'm wondering if there was any difference in the response.

Don: No, the Chipewyans, even to this day, they still kind of shy from the Cree, eh. They still do.

Murray: And they would see Malcolm as a Cree and perhaps not respond to him as well.

Don: Yeah, but I think Malcolm got to a lot of them up there too.

Murray: Even in La Loche then, the people would come out to...?

Don: Yeah, I think a lot of them did, yeah. If I remember correctly. I forget what priest was there when we were up in there.

Murray: Well....

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

PROPER NAME INDEX

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