

The Métis in the 21st Century Conference

June 18-20, 2003

Saskatoon

Day 1 – Tape 2

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Norman Fleury: I was very honoured and greatly proud to have been given the opportunity to be before you today to express myself and who I am and, and what I always was: a Michif person. The Michif language goes back many, many, many years ago. And when I grew up that's all I knew, was Michif. I never knew anything else. I didn't even know that many other languages existed. And even in my mother's womb I, I could hear the language, I could hear the, the stories and the legends and the history and the folklore of the Métis people, of the Michif people. And as we well know, we are very diverse in languages, and that was because of our survival and our existence as people. And we were very adaptable, especially in languages because, first and foremost, our languages were family languages. They were also commercial languages and they were also ceremonial languages. We all did those things as part of our life.

And as I spoke the Michif language, I was curious, and I asked my grandmother, because the women in our society were the keepers of our language and our culture and our history. And my grandmother was one person that was very, very influential in my life, and she was what you would call a person that was illiterate in academics, but as far as a person that was a survivor, she would have had her PhD and many more experiences in life which carried her on to her ninety-fifth year on this earth, on this planet. And there is longevity in my family, and, and I might be able to see those years, as my mother will celebrate her 101st birthday on the 22nd of June. She was also very, very inspirational in my life, for a person that maybe went to school long enough to, to write her name. Because in my family, I've seen people use the X. My uncles and my aunties never went to school because it

was never important to go to school because they were survivors, they were seasonal survivors.

So I asked my grandmother, I says, "Grandma," I said, "Nohkom **[speaks Michif]**." I said, "Why do we speak this language? **[speaks Michif]** Where is this language from?" And she said to me, she said, "**[speaks Michif]**." She said, "**[speaks Michif]**." "I'll tell you something," she said. She says, "**[speaks Michif]**." She says, "**[speaks Michif]**. The God put us here on this planet, on this earth, and he gave the Frenchmen **[speaks Michif]**, gave them a language. **[speaks Michif]**. The English people, they speak English. Les Sauteaux, les Cree, les Sioux, **[speaks Michif]**. We were given a language. And that's Michif. When God created us here, he gave us a language so that we can understand each other." And she said, "This is a God-given language, it's a spiritual language, and that's what ... **[Brief cut in audio]** ... it is a God-given, it was given to us, we were placed here on this planet, on this earth."

So my grandmother was, for a person that, a person that lived off the land and she thought about these things. And she told me that's what it was all about. So our language was also oral, was, our history was very powerful because it was passed on from one generation to the other. And it was oral history. You didn't have to use a computer, or you didn't have to use the internet, and you didn't have to use all these, today, that we have to use now so we can share a language. That was done because it was a family language. It was in the family; you were born with it.

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