



*gee meeyo
pimawtshinawn*

(It Was a Good Life)



SASKATCHEWAN MÉTIS ROAD ALLOWANCE MEMORIES
a living heritage project



GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE



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This book is dedicated to *toot lii vyeu pi lii vyay Michif* (The Michif Old Ones) who managed to visit, dance, sing, raise families, tell stories, build community, and resist assimilation while living in coulees and other marginalized pieces of land across this province.

Contents

- ii** Preface
- iii** Map of Michif Road Allowance Communities
- 1** Introduction
- 4** It Was a Good Life
- 7** Always Something to be Done
- 9** Traditions in my Heart
- 11** Anti-Anti-I-Over
- 13** My Favourite Day
- 15** Jim Sinclair: Road Allowance Hero
- 17** Lii mimwayr Michif
- 19** The Corner
- 22** Where I Come From
- 25** We Taught Ourselves These Languages
- 28** We Had the Whole World
- 30** When Cousins Came to Visit
- 32** We Always Tried to Keep our Sense of Community
- 34** Never Forget Where You Come From
- 37** Acknowledgements
- 38** Lii mimwayr Michif Photo Captions

About the Project Partners



GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (GDI) is the educational and training arm of the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, and is the largest Métis-specific educational institution in Canada. Its mission is to promote the renewal and development of Métis culture through: research; materials development, collection, and distribution; and the design, development, and delivery of Métis-specific educational programs and services. The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) is a GDI program and offers a four-year bachelor of education degree program in partnership with the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.



Heritage Saskatchewan is a non-profit organization. Its mission is to “give voice to living heritage in Saskatchewan,” which it achieves through leadership, research, and community building. Living heritage is our cultural inheritance. It is place-based and is passed down to us through story, lifeways, worldviews, language, material culture, built heritage, and sense of identity. Heritage Saskatchewan collaborates with diverse partners throughout the province to offer a variety of programs, including Heritage Fairs, the Lieutenant-Governor Heritage Awards, and community-based living heritage projects.

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Preface

Kristin Catherwood, Heritage Saskatchewan

The seeds of this project were planted during Saskatchewan's Heritage Week in February, 2017 at the event, "Finding Home in Story: Métis Concepts of Home and Kinship" at the Regina Public Library Central Branch. The event featured a presentation from Russell Fayant, a faculty member at the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP). He spoke with eloquence and passion about Métis cultural heritage as reflected in the art of Dr. Sherry Farrell-Racette.

I remember that I waited around afterwards to shake his hand and thank him for his inspiring presentation. I remember a young man, also waiting to speak with him, saying, "I didn't know any of this." I, too, was challenged that evening by my ignorance of the multiplicity of Métis experiences in this province. I wanted to learn more and to share this learning, so I invited Russell to be part of a video series which Heritage Saskatchewan produced to recognize Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation.

The video, "Road Allowance People," was released on July 1, 2017 on YouTube. The afternoon I spent shooting the video with Russell in the Qu'Appelle Valley was special for me, both personally and professionally. His good humour, compassion, deep understanding of history, and intimate knowledge of Métis cultural heritage opened my eyes to the richness and diversity of the experiences of Michif people in the prairies. Russell has a rare ability to deftly bridge the academic sphere, where history is written, and the lived experiences of Métis people who practise their cultural traditions in everyday life.

In the fall of 2017, Russell invited me to present about documenting living heritage to his Indigenous Studies 221 (Métis History) class. Inspired by the students' interest in the process, we conceived the idea for this living heritage documentation project. Brenna Pacholko, instructor in Arts Education at SUNTEP, joined us, and we launched the project in September, 2018. Working with Russell and Brenna has been a pleasure and an honour. I am grateful to both of them for their passion, their professionalism, and their dedication to the work of expressing, sharing, and safeguarding the living heritage of Métis culture. I have learned much from them along the way, and the results of this project speak for themselves in sharing the noble and enduring living heritage of Michif road allowance people.

We at Heritage Saskatchewan are very proud to partner on this project with the Gabriel Dumont Institute to publish this work. The stories and art within it contain courage, humour, and resilience. Their experiences tell us much about Michif living heritage on the prairies. With much gratitude to *lii vyeu Michif*, who shared their stories, to the students who interpreted them through word and art, and especially to Russell and Brenna, who guided this journey.

Michif Road Allowance Communities

Park Valley

Prince Albert

North
Battleford

Round Prairie

Saskatoon

Little Chicago

Lestock

Crescent
Lake

Katepwa

Dog
Town

Regina

The Hamlet

iii

Ste. Madeleine

The Corner

Winnipeg

Rooster
Town

Dog
Patch

Introduction

Russell Fayant, Faculty at SUNTEP Regina

This project began with an invitation. Year Two students of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) were engaged in a project which required them to research their Métis family histories. The students invited folklorist Kristin Catherwood from Heritage Saskatchewan into their classroom to give them some tips on interviewing family members. From there, SUNTEP students were invited to participate in a living heritage documentation project with Heritage Saskatchewan that would uncover, explore, and re-tell the memories and stories of Michif/Métis Old Ones who had experienced life living on a “road allowance.”

The Métis are sometimes called, “the Road Allowance People.” A road allowance, in the strictest sense, is a piece of crown-owned property that is used to build or extend roads, railways, or bridges. Sometimes a road allowance is a flat field. Sometimes it is literally a ditch. Generally, they are narrow pieces of land that are ignored until they are needed.

Traditionally, the Métis Nation was semi-nomadic. Métis buffalo hunters and freighters were accustomed to travelling vast distances across the North American continent in canoes, Red River carts and York boats. They founded some of the earliest permanent communities in the Northwest, made some of the earliest maps of canoe and cart routes, and kept the northern fur trade forts well provisioned with pemmican and trade goods. When not on the hunt, many Métis would return to Red River to practice sustenance farming on narrow plots of land called river lots. In generations prior to the creation of the Dominion of Canada, Métis were known as “The Lords of the Plains.” They often did not have “title” to the land they occupied, but through their explorations and maintenance of strong kinship ties to the Nakoda (Assiniboine), the Anishnaabe (Saulteaux), the Dene, and the Nehiyewak (Cree), they considered their homeland to be a huge swath of land that stretched from Winnipeg in the east, to the Northwest Territories in the north, to the Rocky Mountains in the west, and extending to the Great Northern Plains of the United States including Montana, North and South Dakota and parts of Minnesota. In this territory, they felt free to practice their culture, speak their languages, trade and intermarry with First Nations, and hunt the bison that was the source of their influence and wealth.

In 1870, Louis Riel and the Métis citizens of Red River negotiated Manitoba’s entrance into confederation. They maintained peaceful governance of the settlement for over ten months and managed to get guarantees of land and language rights. Subsequent to a formal agreement, Canada quickly sent in

troops under Field Marshal Garnet Wolseley to assert Canadian sovereignty. Facing violence from Wolseley's troops, discrimination from the incoming Canadian settlers, and an overly complicated process of land allocation for the Métis that was fraught with speculation and fraud, many Métis chose to leave the Red River Settlement in search of lands and communities where they would be free to practice their culture and ways of life. This began a period of westward migration known as the "Métis Diaspora."

Some Métis returned to long known *bivernant* (winter camps) which they developed into permanent settlements. Others chose to settle on out-of-the-way pieces of land where they could access work as labourers and/or freighters but continue to live a Michif way of life which included hunting, foraging, and small plot farming. They chose to build homes and communities on the road allowances because they were often unwelcome in towns and settlements and were prohibited from entering First Nations communities.

Education and health services were largely denied to Métis living on road allowances because they did not pay land taxes. Communities survived by taking care of one another. Sharing food, medicines, and resources was an expectation, and hoarding was unheard of. What people couldn't grow, harvest or forage, they paid for by earning money as trappers, farm labourers, midwives, and construction workers.

Road allowance communities no longer exist in tangible form. However, they cast long shadows. Some road allowance communities such as Katepwa and Dogtown slowly shrank and disappeared as younger generations left for schooling and better work opportunities. Others like the Lestock road allowance, or Park Valley, were literally destroyed by governments to make way for farms, town expansions, or resorts. Some physical reminders, such as sunken cellars or humble Red River style constructed homes made from recycled lumber and mud chinking, still remain on the landscape. The best reminders, however, are the stories that are told by those who survived the era. Remarkably, despite the crushing poverty, back-breaking labour, and humble living conditions, many of the Old Ones who we interviewed have very fond memories of road allowance communities. They talk about songs and dances and feasts. They reminisce about made-up games, and wide open spaces. They reflect on the freedom to speak one's language (Michif), and to practice one's customs without fear of discrimination or derision. The stories speak of contentment, resilience, adaptability, and community. For *līi vyeu pi līi vyay Michif* (the Old Ones), they are proof to the younger generations that the road allowance life truly "was a good life."

Road allowance history can be hard to find. Like road allowance communities themselves, the history has been largely ignored by mainstream historians and

academics. For the Michif/Métis however, these stories have been passed down through the generations in an oral manner and in informal settings. They are stories for around the kitchen table or camp fire. In that tradition of oral remembrances, we did not ask the tellers (Michif Old Ones) to write their own stories. Instead, SUNTEP students worked to build a relationship with the Old Ones. They took time to visit, to listen, and to learn. When they felt confident, and when the Old Ones had given their permission, the stories were written by SUNTEP students from the perspective of the Old One. All of the Michif Old Ones retain ownership of their stories, but have given explicit permission for their stories to be re-told and printed for the purpose of this publication. Some of the Old Ones have chosen to rename people/ places or have remained anonymous so as to avoid any possible offence to persons or communities featured in the stories.

A note to the reader regarding the usage of the terms, “Métis/Michif.” Although “Métis” is the more prominent usage in mainstream society, we recognize it is an increasingly contested term which non-Métis people use to describe anyone of mixed heritage. The majority of those community members who belong to the historic, western Métis Nation wholeheartedly reject the notion of “mixed-ness,” as it undermines the distinctness and rootedness of our language, culture, and history. “Michif” as a term may be used to describe the unique language of the Métis Nation, but has also historically been used by Métis buffalo hunters and road allowance communities to identify and define themselves. We choose to use both terms in this collection to be inclusive of all of the ways the Old Ones self-identify.

On my family’s road allowance in the Qu’Appelle Valley, there is not much left. But if one looks hard, they will find clues as to the life people led in that coulee. An old, dented bucket, half buried in dirt recalls the hauling of river water and the chores necessary in keeping a family of 20 healthy and secure. A rusted car hood at the foot of a hill reignites memories of sliding down a hill in the dead of winter and all of the fun to be had in between the periods of work. It is our hope that this publication will also act as a reminder of this important and little known aspect of Saskatchewan’s history in ways that will be as satisfying as a day’s work and as thrilling as a speedy descent down a snow covered hill. *Miyabta!* (Enjoy!).

It Was a Good Life

MAKING A LIVING ON AND OFF THE ROAD ALLOWANCE

Told by Jeanette (Fayant) Grams and written by Deanna Aubichon

My grandparents, they raised 18 kids and three grandchildren. Three of us were all the same age. We were all raised in the valley in the same house. In those days, we had a living room and a kitchen. We had an upstairs and it was wide open, no rooms. We had about five beds up there and that's where the kids would sleep. There was a big black wood stove in the kitchen and a potbelly stove in the living room. The chimney went right through the upstairs floor so we always had heat upstairs.

We had to help out around the house because we weren't in school. We had three horses, some pigs, and my grandmother had a great big garden. We would help the boys cut and haul wood and load in the trunk of an old car. We would go to the river with the wagon in the summer and haul water, and in the wintertime we had a sleigh and the boys would cut the ice so we could haul water out of the frozen river.

“

I was raised on wild meat – a lot of fish and a lot of wild meat.

”

We were never on welfare and my grandfather worked for farmers in the area. Sometimes we would travel 30 miles to a farm and go and help pick stones or make bales. The older kids worked for other farms and we would always get milk, eggs, and cream. We never felt like we were poor. We were all skinny because we worked hard and ate well. My uncles would go down the road and kill a deer. I was raised on wild meat – a lot of fish and a lot of wild meat. We

would go down the river and just grab fish right out. My grandfather would line them up on a pan and cook them in the oven. My grandfather showed us how to snare rabbits, too.

We moved to the town of Abernethy in 1964. We were all older and my grandparents figured there was more of a living there. Well my grandpa said if I didn't want to go to school, I would help them with the furs. My grandfather was a trapper. He would hunt rabbits, mink, beavers, and muskrats. My grandmother would put the hides on a stretcher, a big round thing. She had a razor; she would cut off all the fat. The guy in Regina who bought fur, it used to be on Winnipeg Street, he would say that he never saw a fur so clean. She would cut off everything with her little razor. She made them so soft, just like silk. My grandfather would tell me I would have to take the furs to the fur shop in Regina. Well, my aunt worked at STC* garage and her boyfriend was the bus driver, and he would drive through Abernethy. So, I hopped on the bus, and before we got to the garage, I would go and hide in the bathroom because people would be wondering why I stayed on the bus. My aunt was the bus cleaner, so I would wait around on the bus in the garage and around one o'clock I would haul the furs down to the shop. My grandfather would mark down a little list of prices: \$7 for this, \$3 for muskrats. I couldn't read good, but he would lecture me before I went so I knew exactly what to say and what costs what. He would give me the money and my aunt would take me down to the Army and Navy store to get the things my grandmother needed, whether it be some new material, or maybe Grandpa needed some new pants. I'd go back to the bus and wait until it pulled back out and headed back to Abernethy. My English was never good because we always spoke Michif at home, but taking the furs to the city or reading catalogues was how I taught myself to read English.

Living down there in the valley and in Abernethy, it was a good life. We never had welfare or the food bank. We never thought we were poor. We always made it. Things are different today. Winter came, summer came. We just did the same each year. Summer was nice because we didn't have to haul much wood. Even though we didn't go to school, we were never bored. We would go sledding in the winter after hauling wood and made fun out of our work. It was a good life.

**STC – Saskatchewan Transportation Company*



Artwork by Brandon Cardinal

Always Something to be Done

A STORY OF ROAD ALLOWANCE WORK

Told by a Michif Aunty and written by Alyssa Prudat



There were 18 of us kids who lived in that house in the valley. There was always something to be doing, to be done. Back then, in those days, anyone with a few chickens and a cow could call themselves a farmer. Nobody bothered our gardens. We canned the food we grew. We ate the meat of the game that my dad hunted. We helped cook and we helped roll up balls of fruit and fat (*lii grenn**) which we used to supplement our food when the frost would come. People could have bothered our gardens, I suppose. We could put out vegetables to grow a mile away from the house in the valley and no one would ever bother it. In those days, anyone with a garden and some chickens could call themselves a farmer.

The farmers knew my dad well enough. He was a hard worker. The farmers knew if you called my dad for some help on the land, then there were at least four or five or more of us kids who would come with him. A job that would've taken that farmer a week to finish took us a day or two.

Sometimes he would get paid in money. Other times, he would get paid in other stuff. One time a farmer gave him a sheep; “Baa” we called it. We didn't use it for nothing and sold it. Farmers were always giving what they could: butter, some chickens, some tools for the yard or gardens, canned food – one time, a cow. The farmers all the way from ‘round the valley to the border knew that my dad was a good, right man.

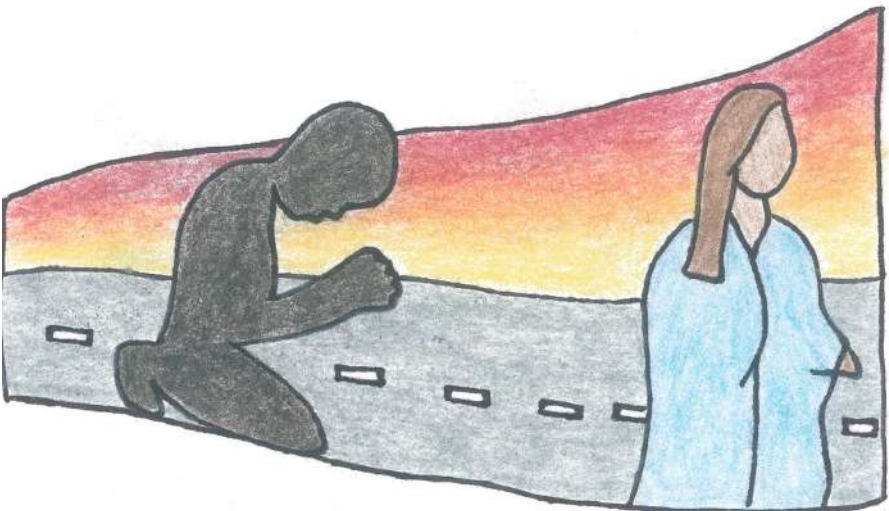
When me and Rose, my sister, were about 15 or 16, we decided that we weren't going to go to school anymore. Nah, we were done with that. So we stopped going and decided that we would make more money if we didn't spend all day there. One day me and Rose wanted to go see a picture show. I asked my mom if we could go and she said yes, as long as me and Rose had our money to go. So we asked dad. He said, “Well, if you decided you aren't going to school anymore, then you'd better start finding work if you want to go have some fun.” So I did. I picked up jobs for families and made sure

**lii grenn – balls or pucks made of berries (usually chokecherry or saskatoons) and fat which are placed on top of the roof to dry in the fall and are then used to flavour stock or other dishes and desserts in the winter months*

those farmers' houses were nice and kept together. This one farmer's wife had the hair of a fire engine and a temper just as quick but she was good to me. Didn't have the first clue of how to keep up her land, tend chickens or gardens or keep the house in order. Her kids were also a bit, ya' know, spoiled. But they paid well for the work I did. That was, until the wife got pregnant. Ha. She looked spooked. How was she supposed to manage two more mouths when she was struggling with what she already had?

So I looked after myself. I got the heck out of there. One day, I looked to the oldest boy while he's watching his television and say, "I'm quitting." "Oh?" he says. "I'm not working here anymore." "Oh?" he says. I ask him to take me to town and he does and I never tell his dad so that his son doesn't get in any trouble. I maybe would never have seen them again if I didn't visit the hospital a little while later. I catch the farmer in the hallway on the day his wife was giving birth. And I do feel bad, I suppose, leaving them like that, but I knew that if I didn't do anything then, I'd be there forever. I'll always remember this. This man got on his knees right in front of me, held his hands together as though he was ready to say a prayer and he begged me to come back. He needed me with the kids. I said that they'd do just fine without me, and not to worry. They'd do just fine.

After that, I worked at the restaurant. My dad still made a good name with the farmers and us kids still helped whenever help needed doing. All of us eventually left the valley to go to work, to the towns, into the city. By the time my dad had gotten too old to work as hard as he used to, he and my mom were the last ones to leave the valley.



Artwork by Kayla Ward

Traditions in My Heart

ROAD ALLOWANCE RESILIENCE

Told by a Métis Grandmother and written by Tana Terry

Living with my brothers and sisters was great. We always played together every chance we got. We lived just outside of Calgary at the time and it was silent and peaceful. Our family then moved to Battleford, Saskatchewan as one of our relatives had a little piece of land just outside of town. We were very poor. It was hard most days, and we struggled to eat every day. We lived in poverty with other Métis people. We were like a small community. It made me feel safe.

I felt like I could never be my true self or my culture when we moved. I went to school with mixed cultures. I was always looked down upon. I was made fun of and called “savage” many times. The white kids were the worst. They always made my school day the worst. I was bullied, but back then it wasn’t called bullying. Those white kids got away with a lot of nasty things they did to us. I wasn’t the only one, but I felt like I was. I had to take care of myself.

My home and small community was what got me through the bad times. We would always get together and play music and just dance the night away. The fiddles were the best part about dancing because the music stepped with your feet and I felt like me. No one really knows what I mean when I say that, but I could just dance and feel free. It was a lot of fun. I loved being with my people and just dancing the night away with them. When we played outside we always played hopscotch, but our own version of it, and we always helped out with the garden and hanging and drying of clothes.

Cooking was another great way to celebrate traditions with my people. Every time we all got together the food and the baking was amazing. I know that my mother worked very hard each day to bake the most amazing food you will ever taste. My mother was most famous for her bannock and butter tarts. Oh, those butter tarts were good! She also made lots of buns. But her bannock would always go first! We never went home with leftovers. My mother taught me how to make buns and butter tarts, but most importantly, her bannock.

I loved spending time with my mother. I spent all the time I could get with her. We bonded over baking and sewing, and sometimes she would teach me some Cree words. They weren’t just ordinary Cree words, but the swear words in Cree. I’ll never forget those times. My mother always said when the white kids picked on me, I can mutter the Cree word to myself and give a laugh. Those white kids don’t know what I am saying. We laughed together

and smiled, and I felt safe, as I always did when I was with my mother.

With all these good times with my family, there were lots of bad times outside my small Métis community. I knew our community couldn't protect me forever. But I knew as long as I had my family, my people, and my traditions in my heart, they would always get me through bad times no matter what. Even when tough times happen today, my family, my people, and my traditions in my heart get me through them. Growing up was hard, but I'm also thankful for the way I grew up, as it would make me a strong, independent grandmother I am today.



Artwork by Sentilla Bubb



Anti-Anti-I-Over

ROAD ALLOWANCE GAMES

Told by Joe Welsh and written by Tristan Frei

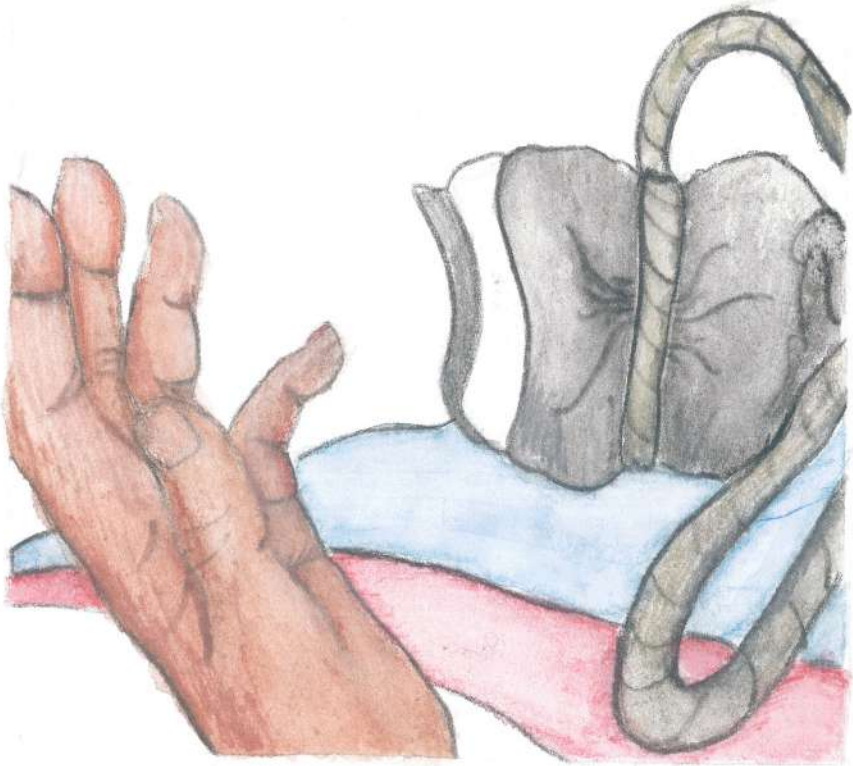
Some of my fondest childhood memories on the road allowance were the games that we played. Being a young child and not going to school, my siblings and I played outside every single day. I come from a family of fifteen. Having lots of siblings meant I always had someone to play with. My day started when the sun came up, as time didn't really mean anything to me as a child. For breakfast, my older sister put a slice of bread on top of the stove to toast it because we did not have a toaster. After my siblings and I ate our breakfast and did our chores, the remainder of the day was ours to play. I loved to play outside. My siblings and I ran around looking at *lii frimiye** piles, looking for snakes, frogs, grasshoppers, and other aspects of nature that amazed us. The land and environment was our playground.

Living on a road allowance, us children had to make our own fun. My most favourite game that we played around our house was called, "Anti-Anti-I-Over." To play the game we needed a ball. My family couldn't afford a ball, so we rolled up an old pair of socks and used a string to tie it together. The socks worked just as good. To start the game, two teams lined up on each side of the house. Once both teams were ready, the team with the rolled up socks would yell: "Anti-Anti-I-Over!" and then throw the socks over the roof to the other side of the house. Someone on the other side of the house would catch the socks and run around the house to throw it at someone. If you hit someone on the other team with the sock ball that you caught on your side, then that person would come to your side of the house and join your team. Getting hit with the sock was fun, but trying to dodge the sock was also fun. When we played in the winter the sock froze and it was really hard. I remember getting hit, but I don't ever remember crying. The sock was a lot harder and easier to throw in the winter compared to the summer. No one ever tried deliberately to hurt somebody else with the frozen sock; it was just part of the game. We were tougher than a lot of the other kids.

I can remember playing "Anti-Anti-I-Over" for hours and I remember

**lii frimiye – ants*

seeing the enjoyment on my siblings' faces. The game was fun, but also tiring. The point of the game was just to have fun; however, most of the games that we played outside kept us active, which was important because our diets involved greases and fats. People called us poor, but I didn't know what poor was. I didn't ever feel poor. My siblings and I did not need a bunch of fancy toys to keep us entertained. All we truly needed was our imagination, the land, and each other's company.



Artwork by Courtney Brown

My Favourite Day

ROAD ALLOWANCE RESOURCEFULNESS AND CREATIVITY

Told by Darlene LaRose and written by Paige LaRose

My most spectacular day was a day I got to go to the city dump with my dad. The reason this was such a treat for me was because my family and I lived about an hour away from the dump and couldn't go very often. I say this was my most spectacular day because when I would go to the dump, I would find such amazing things I could use to make art out of.

I was around seven years old when my father took me to the city dump. It was very rare for my father to take me to the dump, but when he did I would always look for catalogues, cardboard boxes, and old paper. In my spare time I would use the catalogues I found at the dump to teach myself how to draw. I would also take the cardboard and the paper and make myself dolls, because on the road allowance we didn't have stores where you could buy yourself a doll if you wanted to.

That was my playtime: drawing and making dolls. Once I found myself getting good at making dolls, I started to make dolls for the rest of the kids in the area because I knew how little we all had. I would make the dolls out of cardboard and paper that I found at the dump, and use potato sacks for the clothes so that it didn't cost my family any money to make them. I taught myself how to be resourceful with what I had around me and what I could find at the dump.

From that one day at the dump, it created my love for art. So much so, that at nineteen, I had the opportunity to draw for Charles Schultz. He wanted me to carry on his legacy by drawing for *Peanuts*. But I was a mother of two by then and the father of my children wouldn't allow me to take two young children to the States. Even though I wasn't able to continue my drawing as a career, I still to this day draw, do beading, and teach my grandchildren what I taught myself so many years ago. I'm still drawing and bringing my people together with my love and passion of art.



Artwork by Logan Boyer

Jim Sinclair

ROAD ALLOWANCE HERO

Told by Roger Butterfield and written by Nolan Robertson

Well, I became aware of Métis people on road allowances through a friend of mine and former boss, a fellow by the name of Jim Sinclair. Jim was brought up on the road allowance. He was born on a road allowance. He lived in the community of Lestock, or near Lestock, and at an early age his father passed away and left the family with just his mother and siblings. Jim had to look after the family affairs. Well, Jim as a young man learned how to hunt and do the things he had to do to support the family. Jim told me about his family and how they, you know, subsisted during that period, and once his father passed away the family moved to the city.



Artwork by Logan Boyer

Jim, I think, had a Grade Eight education, and when they moved to the city all of the problems that plagued cities and people who occupied those cities had to be dealt with by his family. Jim, he lived on the streets. He had battles

with alcoholism, you know? When I knew him and met him, he quit drinking and said he was an alcoholic and he was sober for ten years when I first met him, and I think that was something he was pretty proud of. He was a street person – a very dynamic individual; a very smart person. He had a photographic memory. I worked for the Métis Society for Jim and I truly respect the man for his ability and how he treated people and his humour.

When I met him, he was a politician and he was the head of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan. Many times he had difficulty with his own people because he was always under a microscope. I think growing up on a road allowance allowed him the ability to fend for himself and know how to handle people. He was always respectful no matter the person. His ability was probably fostered by his mother, who I met, and she was a very strong individual. Sometimes it really doesn't matter where you come from, it is what you do with your life later on. He was one of these individuals. I can remember when we went to Ottawa. We made many trips to Ottawa to lobby for the Métis people, so they could get an education and a better economic base. To be able to have some self-government, that sort of thing, and that is what he worked on. To get some recognition for the Métis people from the federal government as a group of people with Aboriginal ancestry, and he always had that in the back of his mind. When we go to Ottawa and have a meeting, prior to that, Jim would say to us, "You always respect the individual. You may not agree with his politics but we don't have to be nasty or criticize them for what they believe in. We respect them as an individual, just like how you would like him to respect us as individuals."

One thing that Jim had in his favour, he was the only Native leader in Canada who could go to Ottawa, phone up the minister and get a meeting immediately. There was no protocol through the Ottawa channels of bureaucracy with Jim. I think that is something to be said. He was well respected by the politicians, and he used to go golfing with them. He was a very good golfer and they enjoyed going golfing with him. The respect they had for him as a leader - he did a lot of things that put the government on the spot, and I think that is something; I learned a great deal from Jim in that area.

When you think about it, here is a man who grew up on a road allowance, who had nothing, the poorest of the poor and worked his way up with limited education and became a leader. His legacy with programs like the Gabriel Dumont Institute – the birth of this program was during the time Jim Sinclair was president of the organization, and he surrounded himself with people. He had an uncanny ability to get things done. It is truly a success story. Jim passed away a few years ago but I hope that is something Jim is known for. At least I hope he is.

Lii mimwayr Michif

For photo details, visit page 38





The Corner

GROWING UP BROWN AND TWO-SPIRITED

Told by Alex Pelletier and written by Micheal Langan

My name is Alex Pelletier and I'm a visibly Métis person. I couldn't get away with being a light-skinned Métis. I'm also a proud two-spirited* individual. It took around three or four phases in my life to accept the person who I am today.

I grew up in a Métis community called "The Corner." My family was forced to settle there after Ste. Madeleine was destroyed. Ste. Madeleine was burnt to the ground because farmers wanted the land for farming. When Ste. Madeleine was gone, my parents had to move to "The Corner." It's all gone now, and just a field, but we still buried our people at Ste. Madeleine. Even to this day, we go there every year and visit them in the farmer's field. The farmer lets us go on the land.

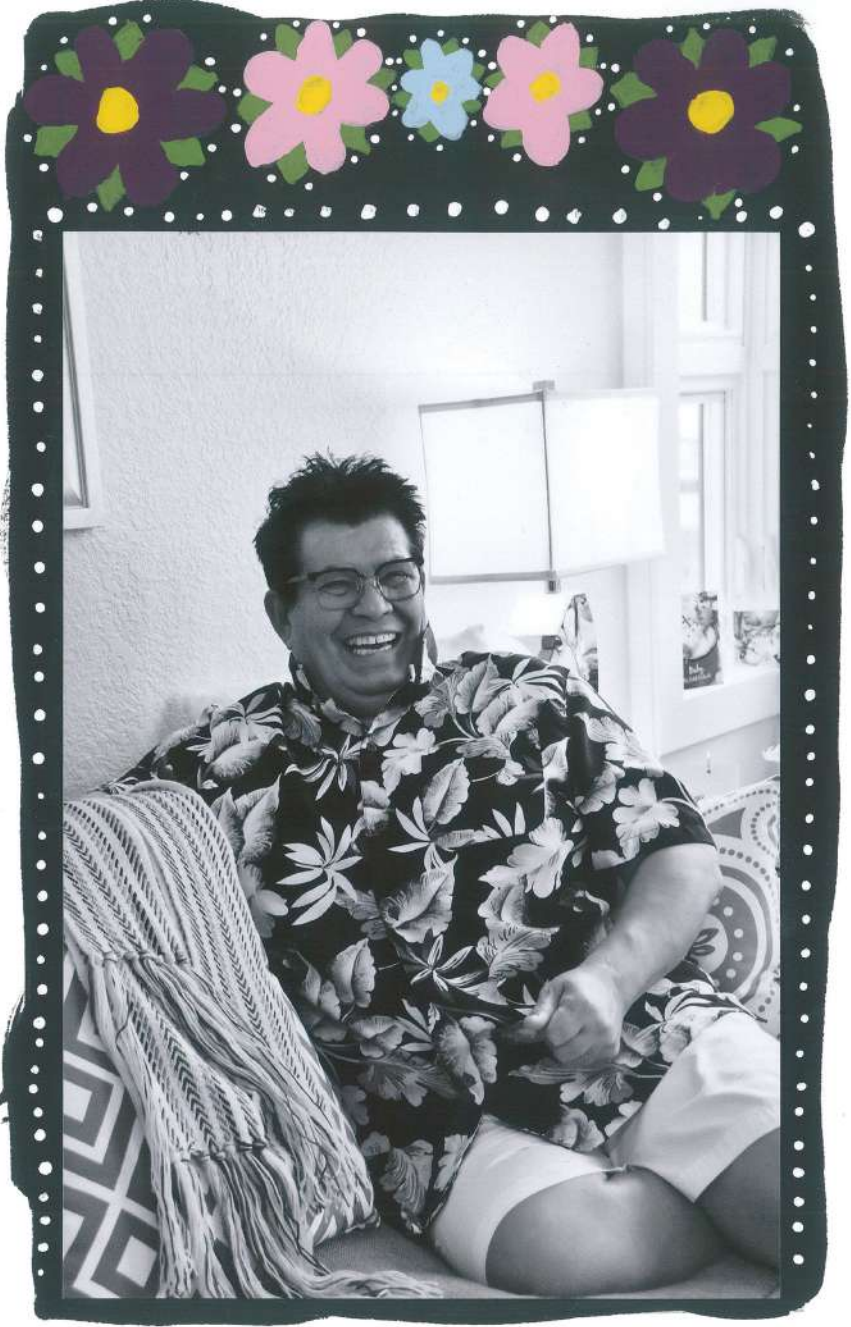
In "The Corner" community, we had a school. It burnt down, though. A few stories are floating around as to why it was burnt down. It was devastating for us Métis kids. We had no school. It meant that we all had to get our education at a log house with Mrs. Boushie. Then all the Métis children from the log house had to attend another school that was predominantly all-white. This school was located a few miles away. It was hard because all the white kids and teachers would say racist comments towards us Métis and they were very mean toward us. They didn't like us, and we didn't like them.

Growing up, I was known as the *bardaush* kid**. I didn't know what that meant, but that's what everyone called me. I knew I was being called this because of who I was. I was confused and felt dirty. It was tough growing up and being visibly Métis, but on top of that, I was a two-spirit Métis which made it even more complicated. I was being discriminated against because of my skin colour and culture, but also treated terribly because of my sexuality. It was a rough life. Throughout my life, all I wanted was to be loved. People were telling me I was a savage because of my skin colour in one direction and the other direction, the religious side of my life, was saying I was going to hell because of my sexuality. These extremely racist and derogatory comments messed up my life for a long time.

My family didn't teach me anything related to being Métis. I didn't know

**two-spirited – a term used by some Indigenous nations to describe someone who has both a masculine and feminine spirit*

***bardaush – a derogatory term used to describe a gay male*



Artwork by Jenny Veilleux

anything about the Métis sash or anything attached to the Métis culture and traditions. It was all hidden from me. I also wasn't taught to be proud of my Métis heritage. I lived right by my first cousins, and they were Métis, but they wouldn't identify with anything Métis. They spoke French but looking back now, my cousins probably could have spoken Michif, but other than that, it was French and that was it. They never mentioned being Métis. I remember my cousins and their parents would speak French to my father all the time. I do remember when company would come over. I would sit there and listen to them talk. I learned to speak Michif by listening to my parents and relatives come over and hearing them talk to one another.

There wasn't any First Nations ceremonies or traditions practiced in my family. I did see my aunty lay some tobacco down on the ground once, and that was it. I never saw or heard any more First Nations traditions after that until later in life. My family was heavily influenced by Christianity. The church was a part of my family, and I didn't like it. I hated going to church. I hated being an altar boy. I hated everything associated with the church, and when I was little, I heard stories about the abuse taking place at the church.

I have lived a colourful life. I'm now in my 60s and I'm very comfortable with my Métis heritage and my sexuality. More than half my life was spent trying to figure out my identity and what the outside influences wanted me to be. It was hard, and messed up to think about this now, but I love me and who I am. I'm a proud Métis, two-spirited person.

Where I Come From

GROWING UP ON THE MARIEVAL ROAD ALLOWANCE

Told by Marie Schoenthal and written by Jeanne Haywahe

My name is Marie Schoenthal. My maiden name was Flamand. Everyone spells it different. Even my brother spells our last names different, but that is the way I have always spelled it. I was born in the year 1937 in my parents' house on the Marieval road allowance. My dad worked at the neighbour's farm as a farmer's helper; Kendrics, his name was. He would wake early in the morning and ride his horse over two miles to go to work. I was the youngest of seven, and there were about 18 or 19 families that lived in our little settlement. We only spoke Michif at that time.

“

...there were about 18 or 19 families that lived in our little settlement. We only spoke Michif at that time.

”

I can remember the cold winters in our little log/mud house. I can also remember the white settlers up the hill calling us names that were very insulting. I think they were French or German. I can remember many times there would be a knock on our door and just like that my mom would be gone – sometimes a few hours, sometimes a few days. I would always wonder where she would go. After a few years of her coming and going, she would come in the house and would say, “Well, so and so had a baby.” My mom was a midwife and when she would leave she was delivering babies. In 1946, my dad built us a bigger house made of log and mud. He would go work for the farmer all day and would build our house late into the night. It was one big room. I can remember sleeping under my parents' bed.



Artwork by Jenny Veilleux

School was very expensive and we were very poor. My parents couldn't even afford pencils for us. We went to school on the other side of the reserve in a little mud shack. I can remember watching the students at the residential school. I wanted to go to that school because they all had nice matching clothes. I asked my mom if I could go to the residential school. She scolded me and told me to never ask that question again. There was a school built on the Métis side about 1944 but it was for the students that were in Grade Seven or Eight. The teacher taught them French. It was the only building that had electricity. We were teased about our school. They called our school the "bannock school."

My dad was very close with the nuns and the priest at the residential school. When I was 13, the priest asked my dad if I would go work in Lebret. My dad told him yes without even asking me. I was packed up and taken to Grayson where he put me on a train to Balcarres. I was told I would be met by a priest or a nun. I worked very hard at the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School. When I was 15, my dad had a stroke and was sent to Regina for medical attention because there were no doctors near the road allowance.

That is when I left the residential school and accompanied my dad to Regina. When I left Lebret, I never went back there or to the settlement. Growing up in Regina was very hard because we were known as "halfbreeds" and I felt ashamed of who I was and never claimed to be one until I heard about the Métis Nation. Today, I am very proud of who I am and where I come from. I travel throughout British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan to tell my story, my history of who I am and where I come from.

We Taught Ourselves These Languages

ROAD ALLOWANCE MULTILINGUALISM

Told by Adrienne Neault (Breland), Annette Philips (Neault), and
Lea Bage and written by Nick Bage

As a kid, we didn't speak English. It was all French. And a Métis French at that. Not the "good" kind. My father though, now he spoke Cree as well. He would yell for something in Cree and get mad when I didn't understand.

a Métis French
at that,
not the "good" kind

I learned how to speak English in the schools, and we had poor teachers. All young ones. We had a hard time getting teachers. They used to send them to Cayer and we thought they didn't like it and they'd leave, too. Very lonely for them up in Cayer. There was a lot of people living up in Cayer, too. But anyways, my English isn't really good, but I'm smart in French. I made damn sure I was.

My parents spoke English, French, and a bit of Cree. My father, he never swore. Neither did old Pepere (Grandfather) or Uncle Ernest. Uncle Robert though, if he were drinking there would be swearing in all languages! No one liked that English anyways. Too many words, that one. But everyone would look at you weird if you tried to skip them. Same with French too, I guess. But I liked that one better anyways.

We taught ourselves these languages. I remember being told that. When the priest would come by once a month, for Mass you know, only the



Artwork by Laura Thomson

Old Ones could understand. But I made sure I knew their prayers and prayed every night with all the kids. The Frenchmen that came to see us never knew what we were saying too, it was funny that way sometimes. We had the same words as them, but barely understood one another.

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He's learning that Cree though, and he sounds pretty good, and sounds just like the Old Ones from back home.

”

You know we Brelands used to be Dubois, hey? We switched to Breland. Easier to hide that way. Easier to say we spoke French, too. Easier to live that way, pretend we were just Frenchmen. If only we could understand that French, we would be real good now. Not so poor, hey? That's what I think anyway. My daughter learned French in school. In Grade Five they let her learn it. And it was that “good” French, not my French. She can read it, but barely. She struggles with her words and remembering what means what.

My granddaughter was always good at that, the praying and speaking. She knew that white man English, and that Frenchman French. She knew my French too. Every time I see her I ask her to speak French and she knows I want my French, not the good fancy French. My great-grandson only speaks the English though. Shame, that is. He's learning that Cree though, and he sounds pretty good, and sounds just like the Old Ones from back home. It makes me miss my Old Ones. Even if they were old and mean. You know, it's like a switch for him that Cree. Kind of freaky. His mom speaks to him in French, but just a bit, and he won't learn too fast that way.



We Had the Whole World

GROWING UP IN THE COULEE

Told by Norma Welsh and written by Petra Rees

They said we were poor, but we had the whole world. In fact, I didn't know what poor was. We had a wood burning stove. My mother made 13 loaves of bread per week because our family was so large. We drank fresh milk and churned our own butter. We snared rabbits for stews and soups. We ate duck and fished for our own fish. We had chicken, too. I remember how Dad went down to the lake to get blocks of ice to bring back to the cellar to put the meat on so that they lasted through the season. I didn't mind plucking the chickens or chopping off their heads. That's what we did. It was fun. Everything was fun. Our job at the Métis Farm* was to do whatever we could, which was to collect the eggs, milk the cows, and weed the garden. We laughed when we squirted each other with milk. My dad worked on the Métis Farm for many years. He became skilled at butchering meat and often others would ask him to do it for them. People didn't have money to pay him to do this but paid him in meat and bones for soup instead.

About ten families lived on our road allowance up in the hills south of Mission Lake near Lebret. We picked berries in the hills, all kinds of berries. I remember the jams and pies my mom made: gooseberry, raspberry, saskatoon berry pie. Everything was just so good back then. We were 15 kids in one house. One family even had 21, so we always had someone to play with. We built our own homes out of wood from the trees, mud and grass. We had two separate shelters – one for cooking and one for sleeping. Even though there were 17 of us, we were a quiet family. Dad made all the kitchen furniture by hand. He would make tables and kitchen benches and would make us sleds for sledding. My aunts had a knack for finding deserted shacks and seeing how they could fix them up and make them better for us. I remember my aunt mixing the cement with her feet, like they do to make wine. I remember we had glass window panes at one time, but our horse

**Several "Métis farms" were developed by the CCF government in the 1940s as part of a scheme to remove Métis/Michifs off the road allowances and to encourage them to become farm labourers.*

“Prince” kept sticking his head through the glass and would break them so we had to use cardboard to keep them closed. If you went to the hills you would see all the trees and bush that gave us a place of wonder and protected us from the wind and such. There is a story of a lady that saw her husband coming out of the trees resembling a werewolf. I think they told us this story to try to scare us so we wouldn’t wander too far. The story didn’t scare me. I liked to be alone. I could spend hours outside by myself with the land and just daydream. My grandma used to walk the hills alone even in her 80s. She could be seen walking the hills. They said she walked fast and some thought she was crazy. Anyways, still today I don’t mind being alone. I like it.



Artwork by Courtney Brown

Every once in awhile in the summer my mom would pack us up in the buggy and make a picnic. We would fish and swim all day. I always loved to fish. Sundays we would go to church. In the summer, we would take the long way around and in the winter we would cut across the lake. My mom died giving birth at home to my baby sister. I was 15 when she died. I miss my mom the most. She used to call me “honey.” She had a way of making every one of us feel that we were loved. Things were never the same after my mom died. My dad never got over it. We had a good life. We had all the food, love, and space that we could ever want. I didn’t know that life could be anything but good. If I could go back in time, I would be a kid forever.

When Cousins Came to Visit

FIRST NATIONS ON THE ROAD ALLOWANCE

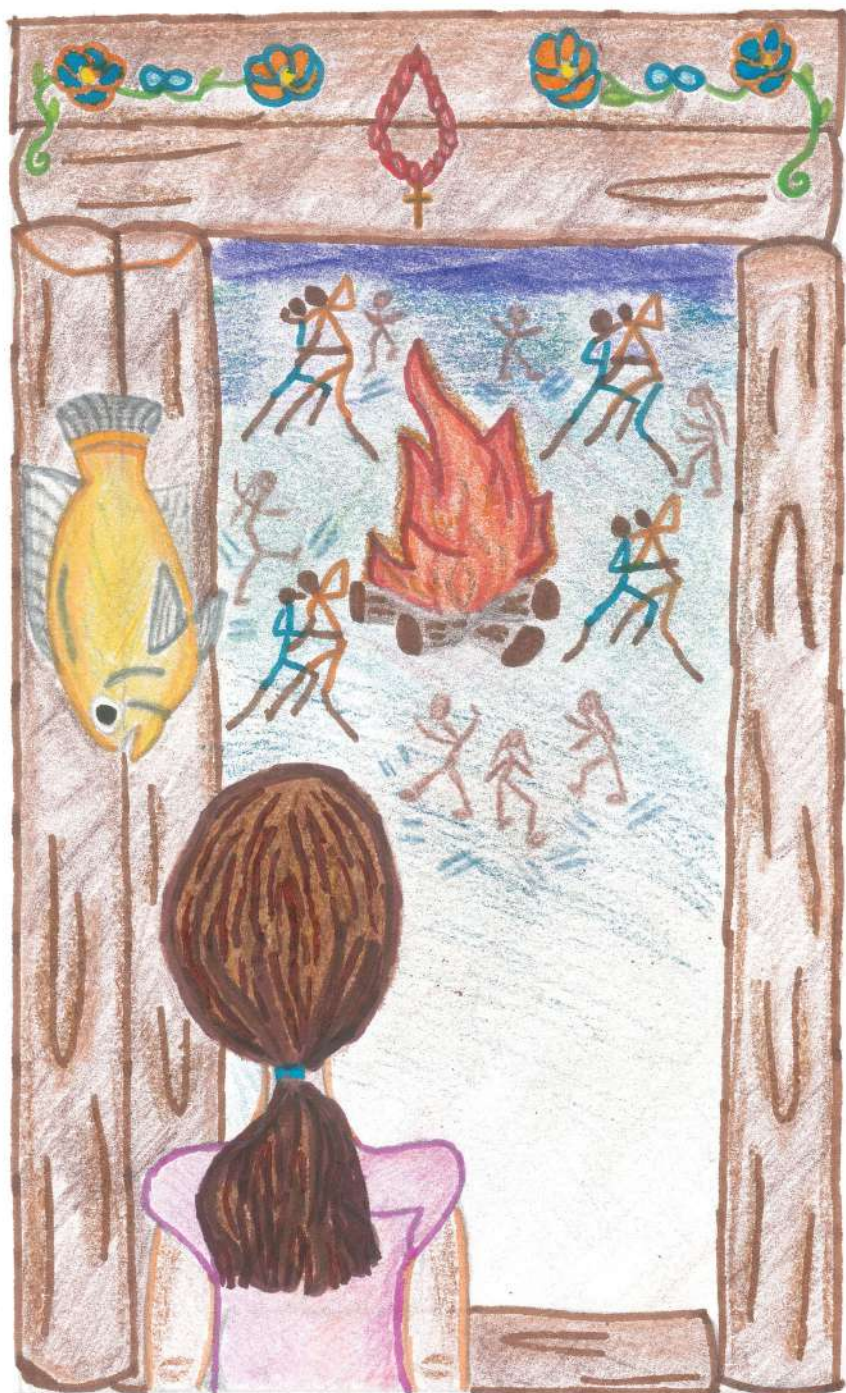
A story told by a Michif Aunty and written by Jeremy Kretschmer

It was a beautiful day in Dogtown. This is what my family calls the road allowance outside the Lebret area. I was spending the day with my father, Edward. We went fishing in the morning and the lake was just full of fish. We grabbed our pitchfork and threw it in the lake and we got enough fish for supper. On the way back to the house we stopped and picked many berries such as chokecherries and buffalo berries. I love *lii grenn** which kind of looks like a little burger patty. It is made with chokecherries. We would dry them on the roof when we got home, but we had to keep moving all the chicken wire around to keep those damn birds away! Then we stored them below the ground so we can eat them whenever we want. They make a good fry with salt and pepper. Yum!

Once we got home from the fishing and berry picking, my dad decided to take a break. While I was helping Mom out with the chores, I heard my dad say something. I came running to my dad to see what he wanted. All of a sudden, I see 17 carts just heading up towards our house, which wasn't a big house. It was a two bedroom log house. I was curious to see what was going on. Someone came walking up to my dad and offered him fish. I mean, we could have walked down to the lake and got our own fish. My dad and the First Nations man spoke for awhile and then they started to take little hunting tents out and were camping out in front of our house. Dad told me, "Just leave them alone." I figured that my dad made some arrangements to let them stay. I could hear some noise at night. They were singing, drumming, and I could hear dancing. I bet they were having a big party.

In the morning they were heading out. I wondered where they were going. They left and said they would come back. They left a huge bone behind a pile of rocks. It was one of the biggest damn bones I have ever seen. Maybe it was to remember where we were and that they were welcome there. The days went on without seeing the First Nations people. Finally, a couple weeks later the people came back. They had once again set up tents in front of our house and that night they had another big party. My mom went to visit them that night. I could hear her singing and I could see dancing. The next morning Mom had a few gifts for us that she got from the people. There was some new toys and good food! I was kind of sad that they left and I didn't get to join in on the partying. I hoped maybe one day they'd come back and I would be old enough to visit them.

**lii grenn – a mixture of berries and fat which is shaped into balls or pucks, dried and stored to be used to flavour soups, stews, desserts or other dishes*



Artwork by Zachary Klyne

We Always Tried to Keep Our Sense of Community

ROAD ALLOWANCE PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Told by Barbara Desjarlais and written by Kaleb Desjarlais

I was born in 1941 and lived on the Métis Farm* until 1955 when we left to move into the Fort (Fort Qu'Appelle). My father Leo grew up on a road allowance. He left the road allowance to move onto the Métis Farm and from what he told me, he left for something to do or a new opportunity. A reserve close to the Fort wanted him to work in the residential school but he wanted to go work on the Farm. He always made sure we all had what we needed. I enjoyed my time on the Farm. We had everything we needed. We rarely left the Farm to go into town because we didn't need to.

“

We rarely left the farm to go into town because we didn't need to.

”

My favourite memory about the Farm is when we played ball with the brothers and sisters from the church in town. It was me and my brothers' and sisters' favourite thing to do when we weren't doing our work. When we didn't have real bats or gloves, we would make our own, and make up our own field, and we would play. We had to make our fun and we sure knew how to. Sometimes when we played, all the grandparents and parents would go get together in a house and have tea and talk in Michif. None of the children were allowed to go and sit with them. I don't really know why. I always figured they were talking about secret stuff the kids didn't need to know about.

**The Lebret Métis Farm was one of several farms that were a part of a scheme developed by the CCF government in the 1940s. The farms were established to remove Métis/Michifs off the road allowances and to encourage them to become farm labourers.*

We eventually left the Farm for a new opportunity. In 1955 we moved back to Touchwood for only a little bit, then into Fort Qu'Appelle. I was sad to leave the Farm because I was so tied to everything there. There were 14 different families but we all treated it like we were one. Leaving that was pretty hard, but living in the Fort wasn't so bad. It didn't feel like a huge change moving because I was still at home in the valley – just in a different spot. My daughter still lives on the property my parents owned but the old house was burnt down and a new one was rebuilt. I still live in the Fort to this day, just down the road from where my daughter lives.

There is a lot of family history connected with that shack. Many of my siblings and their children were raised there. My mom took care of all of us until she couldn't. We had celebrations, get-togethers, parties, just like we did on the Farm. We always tried to keep our sense of community. We didn't want to forget where we came from. We lost many things leaving the Farm, but also had some things that made life better for us. We were closer to school. We weren't doing hard labour work, and we felt as if we had a new start in the Fort – just like my dad when he left the road allowance for the Farm.



Artwork by Kayla Ward

Never Forget Where You Come From

MOVING TO TOWN

Told by Irma Klyne and written by Kyra Menhart

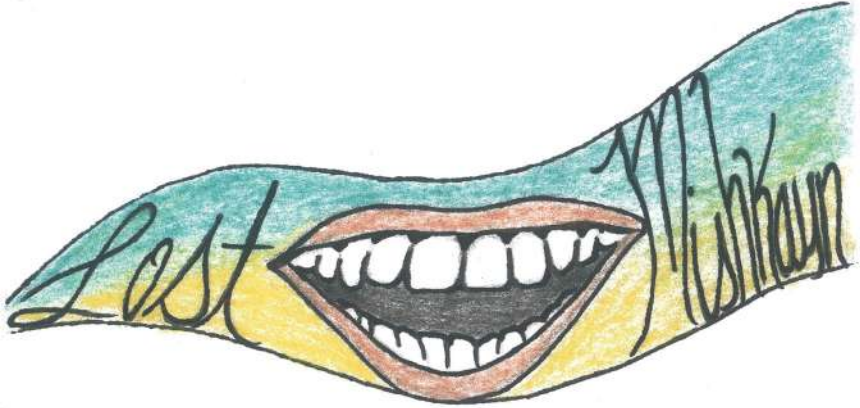
When I was born in 1949, my family lived on the Katepwa road allowance in southern Saskatchewan. The population of the road allowance all spoke Michif, although some of the people did speak everything – from broken English to very good English, but also French, Cree, and sometimes even Sauteaux. While very young, I learned everything I knew by listening and living it. No one in my family had ever gone to school. As Métis people, we were not welcome in public schools.

Life was good. We had a large garden. My mother would snare rabbits and friends or relatives would provide meat when someone killed a deer or moose. We had chickens, one horse, and a dog. In the mid-'50s, our family moved to town because my grandfather and one aunt had tuberculosis and went to the sanatorium in Fort Qu'appelle, and we wanted to be near them. My mother bought a plot of land from a farmer close to the river and built a house from the ground up. There was no running water or electricity for the first while. Then, around 1960, we got electricity and a phone, but the house never did have running water. We used a well and an outhouse. My grandfather and aunt came out of the sanatorium in the late '50s when the miracle cure was discovered.

As a quick learner and a light-skinned Michif, I found the transition from the road allowance to the town not as challenging compared to some of my relatives. When it came time for me to go to school, there was a little difficulty in that I could not speak English very well as mostly Michif was spoken at home. At that time, a school official came to my house and asked my family if they would speak English at home because, “this girl has to speak English to go to school!” As a result, one of the teachers tutored me in English and by Grade Three, I was the first one picked to a team during spelling bees.

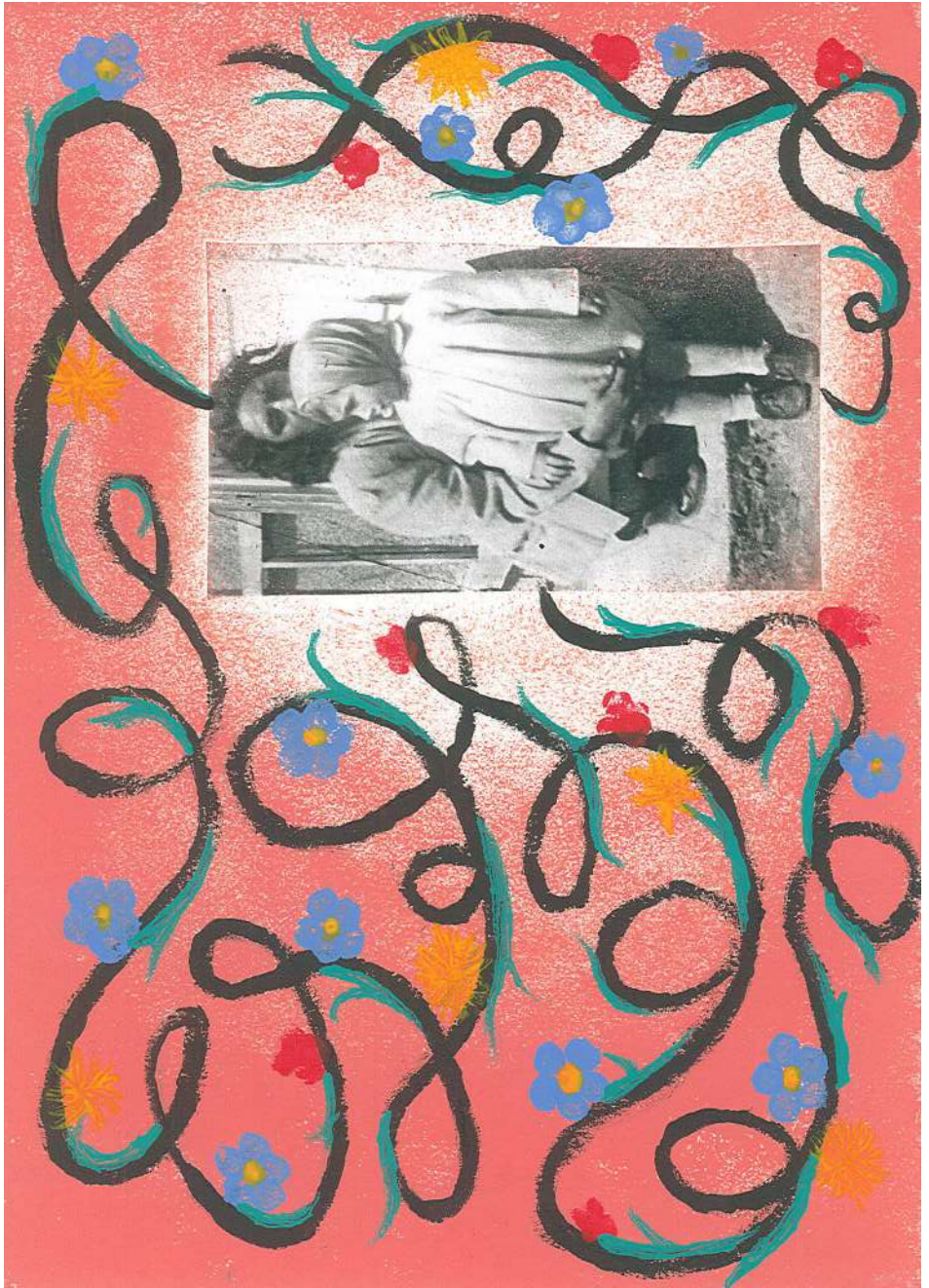
I didn't have a lot of friends at school as there were very few Métis children going to school that I knew in Grade One. No one else that I could see had bannock sandwiches, so I ate on the sidelines mostly outside by the trees around the school yard. Not knowing the school system, my family was not equipped to make sure that I was taking the right classes, and left it up to the teachers to make those decisions. Looking back, that decision ultimately led to my failure in accomplishing a higher education,

as I hadn't taken all of the pre-requisite classes to move forward. Despite that, I eventually finished Grade Twelve, but lost my Michif language in the process of schooling. I am currently trying to get it back by speaking at every opportunity and team-teaching it to students at SUNTEP Regina. I strive to be a kind-hearted, hard-working Old One who finds beauty in laughter, regardless of my past. I choose to live by my life philosophy which is: *Pahpi too lee zhoor manka kiya waneebkay tanday ka oobtoobtayen*, which translates to: Laugh every day, but never forget where you come from.



Artwork by Kayla Ward

Artwork by Brenna Pacholko (page 36)



Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the generosity and kindness of the Michif Old Ones, who allowed us to write their memories. They welcomed us into their homes and fed us with tea, bannock, and story. We know that these stories are precious and are not offered up lightly, and we are grateful that they have entrusted us with their caretaking.

We acknowledge the institutional and financial support of the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which has backed this project from day one. As the leading Métis-specific educational organization in Canada, having GDI's support has meant ensuring these stories will reach far and wide in an era when Michif stories are often erased or misunderstood.

We must acknowledge the work of the students of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program who gathered the stories and produced the accompanying images. They trusted the process, took substantial risks, and demonstrated great respect for the Old Ones and their stories.

It has been a great pleasure to work with Métis researcher Dr. Sherry Farrell-Racette on this project. Sherry was generous in offering her time and expertise throughout this process. The visual artists benefitted from her advice and encouragement to bring the stories to life.

Finally, we acknowledge our Michif ancestors whose struggles and triumphs planted the seeds for these stories that continue to provide sustenance. We thank them for building and preserving a culture that reveres humour, stories, and self-efficacy. Just as we continue to visit those small pieces of land to preserve our connection to place, we hope this collection of stories will be used to preserve the knowledge that your voice, your presence, and your contributions extend well beyond road allowances into the wholeness of the land that became known as "Saskatchewan." *Marsee por lee zistvar pi por tanishi ka pimantishiabk.*



Photo Captions, pages 17-18

*Men, Legs Crossed.
Gabriel Dumont Institute
Museum Collection.*

*Lavalley, Mooshom
Norbert, Old Buffalo
Hunter. Gabriel Du-
mont Institute Museum
Collection.*

*Métis Family. Gabriel Dumont
Institute Museum Collection.*

*Flamont Family (03).
Gabriel Dumont Insti-
tute Museum Collection.*

*Métis Women and a Boy.
Gabriel Dumont Institute
Museum Collection.*

*Lebret c. 1938 (01).
Gabriel Dumont Institute Muse-
um Collection.*

*Women, Buckets.
Gabriel Dumont Institute
Museum Collection.*

*Flamont, Andrew and
Family.
Gabriel Dumont Institute
Museum Collection.*

*Flamont, Emile and
Mike, Coyote Furs.
Gabriel Dumont
Institute Museum
Collection.*



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