

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: ROD BISHOP
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: GREEN LAKE
SASKATCHEWAN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: LA RONGE
SASKATCHEWAN
TRIBE/NATION: METIS
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 6, 1977
INTERVIEWER: MURRAY DOBBIN
INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
SOURCE: SASK. SOUND ARCHIVES PROGRAMME
TAPE NUMBER: IH-423/423A
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 69
PAGES: 42
RESTRICTIONS: NONE

ROD BISHOP:

Rod Bishop was born and raised in Green Lake, Saskatchewan. On returning to Saskatchewan in the early 1960s, he became involved in the reorganization of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan and was vice president of the amalgamated Metis Society.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Life in Green Lake in the 1940s.
- Political consciousness of Metis people.
- Political organizations and the roles of Malcolm Norris and Howard Adams.
- Metis resettlement schemes.
- Differences between northern and southern Saskatchewan Metis organizations, and between status and non-status groups.
- The Neestow Project.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Rod Bishop was an early leader in the formulation of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan. He was a protege of Malcolm Norris' and talks about the early days of the Association - 1965-1967.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: Okay Rod, I wanted to get an idea about the history of Green Lake in terms of when white people started coming into Green Lake. I presume that for a long time it was mostly native people except for what, a priest and RCMP officer and a couple of government people. When to your recollection did larger numbers of white people start coming into Green Lake?

Can you remember that? What year would that have been?

Rod: The early, I suppose, 1900s the first Roman Catholic priest, and he made the mission here.

Murray: The Catholic mission wasn't set up until...

Rod: Oh, prior to that of course, that was used as one of the stopping places, the stopping places for fur traders. And eventually communities were established throughout the north and throughout other western provinces.

Murray: There had been a road south for quite a while, eh? From Green Lake?

Rod: Yeah, well I think the first trail to Meadow Lake was... as a matter of fact, it still exists there. In those days they used axes and Swede saws and what not and they blazed a trail through to Meadow Lake. And exactly what year that was, I can't give you.

Murray: It was quite early. A lot earlier than roads to the other parts of the north?

What was the main economic activity when you were young as far as the native people were concerned?

Rod: At that time there was quite a bit of trapping. There was also some fishing.

Murray: Some commercial fishing?

Rod: Very little, it wasn't commercial fishing of course. It was used mostly for domestic purposes. And they had logs in the wintertime. There was the forest industry.

Murray: Where was that located in? Not in Green Lake but where was that, Big River?

Rod: That was located within that area, Big River, Dory Lake, and Green Lake. And in the summertime there was a small farm, Green Lake Central Farm, and a few people were employed there for the summer. And dairy was also one of the industries. And the main was self-employed ways of being able to help yourself.

Murray: So people lived off the land for the most part. They trapped, they hunted as well, and ate whatever they could from the land?

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: I know that in some parts of northern Saskatchewan there wasn't, at the time, much feeling among the Metis people of a pride in being Metis. But in some communities there was, where they had that sense of their own history. Do you think that in Green Lake the Metis people had a sense of their own

history and were proud of being Metis when you were growing up? Can you remember how they felt about that?

Rod: I think consciously some people were a lot stronger than other people, let's put it that way. And perhaps this is the reason why it could look like some communities were, I suppose, further advanced than other communities in terms of the nationalism and that kind of identity. But you must remember that the Indian and the Metis culture in the earlier years of the history of Canada, the white people, or the governments, deliberately set up a pattern to destroy the culture of the Indian and Metis people. And this was done, of course, through various ways. Missionaries were one of the most effective people that were used. And through trying to get people to forget about their own identity.

Murray: Who were these people?

Rod: The missionaries were.

Murray: The missionaries.

Rod: One of the most effective forces that governments could have used. And so not much of the good things about the Metis or the Indian people were often talked about in communities when I was young and growing up. And some very likely talked about the rebellion of Riel or the war of 1885.

Murray: There was some knowledge of that?

Rod: There was some knowledge of that but also very little knowledge of that. So as a result of that, native people really, after a period of time, because of the fact that there was not information I suppose, and that no effort was made to know the true history of Canada and the participation of native people in Canada, the development of Canada, it was very difficult for them to be able to identify as a political nationalist group.

Murray: Do you think that the knowledge of the Riel Rebellion and that whole period existed among a certain minority of the people? Did everybody have that consciousness or was it restricted to a few people who knew about that whole history in the Saskatchewan valley and that sort of thing?

Rod: I suppose what I am saying is that the whole educational system was geared to be different, to steer us away from the history of the Riel Rebellion and...

Murray: And what knowledge you had was discouraged.

Rod: What knowledge we had was discouraged. And also very little of the knowledge came to us from the elders at that time because it had already been discouraged in some form. And when I was growing up, we took catechism in school for an example, and most people were very religious in terms of their own beliefs, religion beliefs. And there seemed to have been a lot

of energy and concentration put in that particular area. So this is why I am saying as far as the politics of native people were concerned, stories were never articulated to us, so that we could identify it and be able to take sides as to what was right or what was wrong.

Murray: So, as far as your education was concerned, they were trying to make a white person out of you? Was that the impression you were getting? Did they deny any native history or what did they talk about in the terms of the history of native people? Or did they talk about it at all?

Rod: The only history that I learned... of course I didn't go to school, you know, my grades weren't too high. I believe I was in grade five when I left school but I can recall that some history was taken on Montcalm, Christopher Columbus and people like that who discovered America. But no mention was ever made of Louis Riel or Gabriel Dumont or what really took place in 1885 and back at Batoche. Of course, at that time it was very difficult to become aggressive in terms of fighting for certain things that one would want as a human being, as belonging to a certain race of people, simply because you grew up in limbo. Okay? And when you are in a situation like that, it's hard and difficult to be able to find your way around. You don't start trying to liberate yourself as opposed to you, you know, don't accept the fact of turning the other cheek. It's only then that people will start thinking. And it's rather funny that not too many of our people yet think along those lines. And I suppose from that time till now it has changed because they have bigger pacifiers now. That means that a lot of our native people now are getting paid fairly well. Get good paying jobs, and so that is what I call a pacifier. Of being able to identify yourself and being able to fit your race of people in society.

Murray: When you were young then, you had nothing from your education, that was religious education, and you didn't get much of the Riel Rebellion or anything from the elders either. This was something you learned later on was it? Or did you get some from....?

Rod: I cannot recall where we've learned or where we were taught about the Riel involvement. Okay? From school. Some of that, of course, was talked about at home. But to go into the actual detail and to do sophisticated political analysis of the situation, no, that wasn't there. There was just bits and pieces and other than the fact that to us Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel were heroes. Okay, 'cause there were times the older people talked about Riel or Gabriel Dumont, it seems to me that their eyes were lit up and...

Murray: So that meant something there.

Rod: Which meant something to me. And so at a very early age, I thought... I had this nationalist, nationalism in me. Being proud of being Metis. And I would have thought that being part Indian and being Metis was a special breed. What made me think

that, I don't know. That's simply because I believe that there was such a barrier between the white people and the Metis people that I felt that, at that time as a child, that for an example, native people were more masculine than white people. We were stronger physically.

Murray: Living in the bush.

Rod: Living in the bush. And I didn't realize that that wasn't everything in life. Later on in years I realized that white people are very powerful and we certainly are living in a white supremacy society. And there is no question about that.

Murray: At the time when you were young, you didn't see that so clearly.

Rod: No, we didn't see that because we were a community of about 600-700 people and not too many white people were there. But all the white people that were there had fairly good positions. Jobs, and whatnot. And for some reason I was never able to identify with that. I couldn't place them. I didn't really know what they were doing in the community. And so I wasn't able to do a political analysis at a very early age of what white people were all about.

Murray: One of the things that I've noticed too in talking to Metis people in certain places like La Ronge, I would ask the question, "Who were your leaders in the days before the Second World War?" And they would say, "Well, we didn't really have any leaders." But then some communities, there were. Now it seems to me that, from talking to people in Green Lake, that your father was a leader before the Metis Association ever got started. He just did so because he felt that a leader was needed. Could you describe the influence of your father a bit and what some of his activities were before the Metis Association developed? What kinds of things would he do in terms of being a leader in the community?

Rod: Okay, first of all, I suppose one of the reasons why the people identified Dad as a leader was, number one he, at that time, I suppose he could be considered as a man that had a fairly good education. He was actually raised in Duck Lake at a convent where he had completed his schooling. To draw parallels today of his education to the present situation, I can't say, except that the fact that he had completed. He went as high as he possibly could at that time. And so he was able to do a lot of correspondence for people; he was able to write letters; he was able to also explain to people the kind of letters that people were receiving at that time. Automatically since people were lost in terms of not being able to understand

the language, they looked at Dad as a leader. And Dad took great concern and in trying to do the best he possibly could for people. He was also a very outspoken man. He wasn't afraid to debate with anyone. He was not afraid to carry a debate with either government officials or church leaders and

whatnot.

Murray: And this kind of thing happened quite often, I guess.

Rod: This kind of thing happened quite often and by some he was liked, by some he was hated. And of course, the hate situation is usually promoted by people who are in positions of power. And so this is the kind of struggle that those native people, certainly in my Dad's time, were also involved in about the local power, the white power structure in the communities.

Murray: So it wasn't so much an organized opposition, but it was there nonetheless. There was a feeling of...

Rod: Yes, it wasn't an organized thing, as you see organizations today, but it was there and civil servants were also there. And immediately when civil servants did come to a community for example, then if there was any public meetings to be held, Dad was the leader, he was the interpreter and also was the spokesman.

Murray: Was there opposition to him from the white community as well then? Because he was a leader, did...?

Rod: Oh, there was opposition to him from people who were in government. And opposition too even from church leaders. I say this simply because I had heard Dad argue and debate with certain priests that came over to the house and they would try and convince him otherwise than his beliefs, political beliefs. And so that was made very clear to me, that there was definitely opposition from that area. But most opposition, I suppose a lot of opposition, came also from government, various government officials. And the history of our family and certainly the history of employment for an example, it was never favorable. When there was a job, for an example, in the community, the person who would conform to the bureaucrat or to the boss of the community (which I could call civil servants), would be the people that would get the jobs. Dad was even denied jobs of picking roads or any kind of little job that there was in the community. So quite often he had to leave from Green Lake to go up south, picking roads, picking rocks and clearing land for farmers.

Murray: Because he couldn't get work.

Rod: Because he couldn't get work in the community.

Murray: Was he a CCFer at the time? Was he involved in that kind of politics at all? Did he support the CCF?

Rod: Dad was involved in party politics. He was also involved in the CCF. He was involved in some of the campaigns.

Murray: Would this be what the church was opposed to, do you think?

Rod: I suppose that for that reason that the church would be

opposed of, more so at that time than today.

Murray: The church used to see the CCF as being sort of communist and red and that.

Rod: Yes, right.

Murray: What kind of issues would Alex deal with in those days? Were they primarily things to do with government or was it to do with economic issues like jobs and that sort of thing?

Rod: There was a lot of local issues primarily with jobs, economics and also the natural resources such as the lake. They were allowed to use, of course, the lake for domestic fishing and later on in years a little of the lake in the community was used for commercial fishing. But somehow people were always divided on certain issues and eventually the provincial governments managed to have things their way in terms of policies of the lake and in terms of policies of the whole community.

Murray: But if people's rights were being challenged or if the government was doing something over the people then your father would be the person who would try and fight that. That was the kind of thing he would do?

Rod: Right.

Murray: And he would normally do that on his own. He wouldn't have to have people come to him. He sort of watched...

Rod: Well, from what I understand that a lot of people went to him. But it seems to me that he did most of the fighting alone simply because all the people didn't really understand. And the strategies or tactics that were used I suppose in a kind of a fitting way would be that, he does all the speaking, he would do all the fighting.

Murray: He was better equipped to handle that.

Rod: He was better equipped to be able to handle that situation. And today I'd consider that to be suicide. If you don't get the backing or there is no emotion from the people that you are supposed to be speaking for, I often considered that you don't get anywhere.

Murray: Many communities in the north have various kinds of divisions. Can you remember some of the ones that existed in Green Lake? Were they religious or political - what kinds of things divided people?

Rod: I suppose there was a multiple of things, kind of what you would call a complex question, eh?

Murray: Yeah.

Rod: Like, what I am saying here is this. It is easy to

divide people. First of all, when you have been taught that you really have no culture, that being Indian was something terrible... And of course, this inferiorization effectively took place. The seeds would plant and they'd grow. And so there was divisions, political divisions I would call it. For an example, if a local member of the power structure stood up and said, "This is the way the community should run," and if you disagreed with it, then immediately the citizens of the community would say, "Well, he should know better. He is working for the government. He is smart. He should know what he is talking about."

Murray: The white man was...

Rod: So the white man always had that edge. He was always right. And the native people were wrong. And that's when the sides took place because of that particular situation as described. And this was a method, of course, of dividing people, which was effectively used. And to me, I call that to politically, anything to politically suppress people.

Murray: Right. Were there Metis people in Green Lake who tried - it's hard to put this in words but - sort of tried to deny the fact they were Metis, who tried to be white? Do you think that took place? Your father mentioned that once.

Rod: Oh, in the community, I suppose people would try and do certain things to try and act white. It was fairly hard to deny what you really are within your own community particularly if the majority are Metis or native people. But to decribe

that particular situation, a lot of native people would do anything to identify with white people. Your example would be, for example certain young people mauling either the Hudson's Bay manager or the teachers or the RCMP. And they did this simply because they thought that it was something great to make friends with certain people of the establishment. And so that is how they were able to take advantage of people. And that is why it was so easy for white people coming into a community to be able to practise paternalism very effectively.

Murray: There was always that group of people who would respond to it.

Rod: There was always that group of people who would respond so naturally the rest of the people would be treated like idiots.

Murray: What were some of the other ways that they tried to be white? What about their lifestyle, the way they arranged their homes, things like that? Was that part of it as well or did that not come into it?

Rod: I'm not too sure how to answer that question or say the way they would arrange their homes. One thing I can say, that many of the native people were hard workers and so at home, it was shown. I mean it was easily seen for them to prove the

fact that they were very hard workers. But I would say out of the community and into say, Regina, or away from the native communities, you would find a lot of our people all of a sudden who would deny the fact that there was Indian blood in them. They try to pass themselves off as white people because it was made very clear if they were Indian they were no good. Or you would be discriminated or some of your white friends would disassociate with you the moment that they find out that there is Indian blood in you. I've had that experience myself as a teenager and having left Green Lake and going to work on my own and appreciating that whites ruled(?) whites. It's because I'm fair and as far as white kids, I could pass as a white man.

Murray: So when they found out you were native, they treated you differently did they?

Rod: They would not be associated or be identified with a native person as far as that was the problem. The white kids (inaudible).

Murray: So it would actually come to... as soon as they found that you were native, they wouldn't even talk to you again, was that it?

Rod: That was made clear, that was made clear. I was approached on that in that particular situation by a white person that I should not let them know that there was native in me because if I did that they wouldn't associate with me socially otherwise.

Murray: How old are you now, Rod?

Rod: Thirty-eight.

Murray: Thirty-eight. So you were going to school 30 years ago. What was it like then, what would happen for example if you spoke Cree in class? Did they allow you to speak your own language in class at all in the school? What was their attitude to that? Can you remember anything about that in particular?

Rod: I really can't remember too much about that because I think in a community where the majority are native and our main language of course was Cree.... Living away from your community and into, I suppose, an Indian Affairs branch, a residential school, or whatever you want to call it, then those kinds of practices were very much in use. To try and make those native children forget their own language. Catechism, of course, was taught and it was taught very strongly. And I have disagreements with many of the ones in my younger days when I was going to school but I can't recall...

Murray: Particulars in any way.

Rod: Any particulars of it, other than the fact that when I had disagreements with some of the teachers in school, or sisters, we were called a pack of timber wolves or otherwise.

Murray: One of the other things that comes up in the north is that a lot of the Metis people in the north really developed completely separately from the Metis of the Red River and Saskatchewan Valley. That for many Metis people in the north that whole development was unknown for many, many years. And yet on the southern edge, in places like Cumberland and Green Lake, there seems to me, there was a mixture of Metis people from the north and from the Saskatchewan River Valley. Were there people in Green Lake who were related to those involved in the rebellion at all? Were there people who moved up from Batoche and Duck Lake and those places into the Green Lake area?

Rod: Much of the people that settled in the northwestern part of the province originated from down east, which was Manitoba at that time, and they had that first rebellion in Manitoba. Shortly after that the Metis people left Manitoba from my understanding and migrated into Alberta, south of Alberta and...

Murray: Prince Albert and Lac la Biche...

Rod: And Lac la Biche and into Green Lake, Meadow Lake and Ile-a-la-Crosse and all those places. After the rebellion in Batoche, very little input came from the permanent residents of northern Saskatchewan because of the isolation, I suppose. But all through the history of Green Lake... the Hudson's Bay Company for example, was taken over one time, or the Hudson's Bay warehouse was taken over by native people. And I believe that was just before the rebellion, the Riel Rebellion.

Murray: So there were hints of rebellion in Green Lake at the same time?

Rod: Yes, there was.

Murray: It was happening in the southern part?

Rod: I got some facts on that.

Murray: Good, let's see them.

Rod: I don't have them here now.

Murray: Oh, I can get them from you some time perhaps, yeah?

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: There was a period, and I'm not sure of the date from what I've got here, when there was an attempt by the government to resettle Metis people in the Green Lake area. Do you remember when that happened?

Rod: Yeah, I can recall. I believe it was in the year of 1948 when some of the Metis people got off the train in Meadow Lake and they were being moved into Green Lake.

Murray: They were getting land, was that the...?

Rod: As far as I know, promises were made that they would get land and jobs were available and homes were waiting for them. When they got to Green Lake, of course, this wasn't the case. So an old church, an old mission was used to store the furniture and also some of the Metis people used the church for accomodations. And right from 1948 into the middle part of the 1950s it was a whole trend of relocating people for place

and shortly after in 1955. Then Metis people, some came in 1948 and stayed for about five or six months and then left. This went on until 1955. And the population, for example, of Green Lake was over 1000 at one time and now there is about 400 people.

Murray: And when would that have been in the peak, in the early 1950s then, eh?

Rod: The peak was in the early 1950s, yes.

Murray: Where were these people coming from?

Rod: They were coming in from Punnichy, Lestock, Balgonie, just south of P.A. around Kinistina, Glen Mary.

Murray: What was the logic behind it? Was it because they felt it was a better chance for Metis people in the Green Lake area? Did anyone know why the government was doing it?

Rod: Well, like in Punnichy for example, the Lestock area, the Metis people were living in road allowances, eh. And I believe that there was a lot of dissention among the white farmers. So some pressure was being put on the provincial government to do something about getting people away from the road allowances.

Murray: There was a tension between whites and...?

Rod: There was a tension between whites and Metis people. So, this is when Metis people were approached and through an order in council in 1948, land was set aside for the Metis people. That land has got to be used for development for the betterment of Metis people.

Murray: Did many stay on the land? Was it...?

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(Side B)

Rod: ...had a little hospital, like. The sisters lived in a convent and in one end they had a little nursing station, what we used to call a nursing station. And this is where native people would go for treatment, if they had a cold or otherwise. So I ended up in this section one time at a very early age and lived in that nursing station for a week. I was there for a week as a patient. One day I was accused for stealing some

money. They had lost money. When you came into the hospital part there used to be a statue there of little Jesus and it cost you an x number of cents if you wanted to light a candle. So this was the purpose of putting a collection pole right beside the statue. And while I was staying at the hospital I was approached one time and accused for stealing by the nurse, who was a nun. And of course I denied that I had taken any money. So I was made to crawl on my hands and knees for three days looking for this money. And it got to the point at which the end I said I did take the money although I didn't take the money. And when I was questioned on it, who did I give the money to, I would just think of a name on the top of my head and say that person. These people were called in and the money was never given to them. So, this happened from morning till night and I was made to crawl on my hands and knees and get the strap on my back every now and then. And I became very bitter. As I grew up I thought to myself that I would be able to handle myself. So as I grew up, I...

Murray: You were determined at that point.

Rod: I was determined at that point, yeah, that I'd be able to fight back. So when I grew up, I became a kind of a stubborn person in school and I kind of rebelled every chance I got simply because of the way I was treated and I was accused.

Murray: You were quite young in this incident you described, eh?

Rod: I was only about eight at that time.

Murray: You would have been in school then too, would you?

Rod: Yes, I had already started school. So I had this feeling in me that people must fight, that they must do something, although I had not become a card-carrying member of any native organization until 1961. Before the reorganization of the provincial Association of Metis (in 1964 it was reorganized), we organized it locally in Green Lake. I believe it was 1961 and 1962. And the purpose of that was of course to try and articulate our problems, show our problems to the government.

Murray: What was that organization called?

Rod: We had just called it the Green Lake Metis Association. And this is how we organized. I became a card-carrying member of the Association back in 1961 or 1962, shortly after I was married. And then in 1964, of course, the Association of Metis was revised, if that is the word you want to use. Because for

approximately 20 years... I believe it was in 1944, the association at that time was called the Metis Society. It had made some efforts in organizing the people and it went dead. It was revised in 1964.

Murray: As far as you know, at the time when you were organizing just the local in Green Lake, were there any other

Metis Societies or Metis Association locals or was Green Lake the only one as far as you know in your area?

Rod: As far as I know, Green Lake was the only one.

Murray: Nothing in Beauval or Ile-a-la-Crosse or...?

Rod: Not that I am aware of, I don't think there was, no.

Murray: What were the activities of the Green Lake Metis Association? Were there regular meetings or was it more informal than that?

Rod: No, we had regular meetings. We used to take the minutes of the meeting. We had a secretary, we had a president and although our objects were really not that clear, we said that we must organize and we must try and do something to help ourselves.

Murray: The idea of what, there would be strength in unity?

Rod: Yeah, the idea was that there would be strength in unity.

Murray: What were some of the issues that association tried to deal with?

Rod: We tried to deal with the economics of being, we tried to deal with the lumber industry. Most people that were Metis worked for one particular person and they owned and operated the sawmill. And we were concerned...(break in tape)...and the provision of, was up at it's peak by native people, saying, thinking that they weren't getting paid enough. At that time we didn't know what the dimension of a board field(?) was, but we used to work on piecework. And so those were some of the issues that the local organization tried to deal with, tried to work on.

Murray: Did most people in the community respond to it, come out to the meetings? Was there pretty good support for it?

Rod: We used to have quite a few interested people, quite a few interested people. And these were, of course, considered as leaders. I suppose more work could have been done in that area but when you first organize and you are trying to do

something, it seems to me that you have to go through certain steps in order to try and develop your communication. And we were weak in communication although there was that effort of trying to get people involved at meetings. We always made it clear that any Metis could join the organization. And we thought that if they were really concerned, that they would come up and try and join the organization.

Murray: How many people might you get out to a meeting on an average?

Rod: I'd say that we used to have about 50 people.

Murray: And how often would you have meetings?

Rod: We'd have meetings perhaps once a month.

Murray: So this went on right up until the time in 1964 when Malcolm started the bigger organization?

Rod: Right.

Murray: When did you first meet Malcolm?

Rod: Well, I knew Malcolm as a child. My first real encountering Malcolm Norris was back in 1964 at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I was a delegate to a conference along with three other friends from Green Lake and Malcolm Norris was at that conference.

Murray: This was the meeting organized by the Liberal government was it?

Rod: This was the meeting that was organized by the Liberal government, yes. But prior to that, as a child, Malcolm Norris used to come in and stop. He was working for the provincial government at that time. He used to stop by the home and this is how I remembered Malcolm Norris when I met him in 1964.

Murray: He would come and talk to your father at your father's place?

Rod: That's right.

Murray: What can you remember of him as a child when he came to your home? Do you have any particular memories of him being there?

Rod: Yes, I can see the man talking to Dad. I remember him as a native person who was very impressive, who was to me an educated man. Not, I suppose, into the eyes of the white man, but educated simply because I looked at him as a native person who was concerned about other native people.

Murray: You were impressed by that more than by any educational stand as he was concerned?

Rod: Right.

Murray: Do you think that he and your father had conversations in 1962 and 1961 about the local Metis Association? Was Malcolm interested in that at that time do you think? Or can you recall that?

Rod: Malcolm was interested but I believe that they had worked on various ways. He was a very sophisticated man. His policies were sophisticated and his approach, I suppose, was very sophisticated. So Malcolm had, from my understanding, a lot of experience before he moved into Saskatchewan. He had

experiences in organizing the Association of Metis in Alberta and also the Treaty Indians of Alberta. And I believe that Malcolm and his friends moved in from Alberta, used issues to try and get people aware, rather than formally trying to get people to organize into an association or a society, whatever you want to call it.

Murray: So it was consciousness raising more than forming an organization was his interest until 1964?

Rod: Right.

Murray: Now, that meeting in Saskatoon was a pretty important meeting in the history of the Metis Association wasn't it?

Rod: It was.

Murray: Because according to what I've learned anyway, Malcolm used that meeting to gather people together and talk about Metis Association. Can you describe what happened at that meeting and why it was so important?

Rod: Well, first of all, it was that year that the Liberal party was elected into office in the province of Saskatchewan. And previous to that the leader of that party was quite conscious that there was going to be quite a movement of native people. And as a matter of fact he had made statements that the native people in Canada and in Saskatchewan were being treated worse, were living under conditions that were a lot worse than those of the southern part of the United States among the black people.

Murray: So there was a consciousness on his part...

Rod: So it was a consciousness on his part to bring the native people together. And of course, when we came, when we attended that conference, the treaty Indians were invited the same as the Metis or the non-status Indians and we all attended this conference. And his idea was to try and build some kind of a framework of trying to form some kind of a policy for native people in the province so that they could take it to Ottawa to present to the prime minister at that time. And it seemed to me that there was some conflict between the treaty and non-treaty although I couldn't quite comprehend why there would be this conflict because we all looked the same and I couldn't really make any distinctions between the status and the non-status Indians. That there was some paranoia about their treaty.

Murray: It came from the treaties rather than from the Metis?

Rod: It came from the treaties rather than from the Metis. And of course, they were right, why should the provincial government be dealing with the treaties when this was a federal responsibility. But it seems to me that the leadership within the treaties always used at some history point where the

Metis and treaty people had gotten together and look what really happened to the treaty as a result of that. And also the treaties always glorified their rights as treaty Indians of this country which was, I suppose, some kind of declaration which was signed by the Queen's representatives at that time. And of course, we were singled out as the number one enemy of perhaps being used to try and...

Murray: Chip away at those rights?

Rod: Chip away at those rights. And this is what really created some kind of a division between the Metis and the treaty Indians. So at that time, Malcolm Norris said, since they weren't in favour of some of the things that we were asking for, that he would start an organization. And that if he started one, it would be built from the bottom up, not from the top down. I can remember him making that statement to the treaty Indians at that time.

Murray: That was an implied criticism of their organization?

Rod: Of the organization. So, one evening after the regular conference was held, the Metis got together and the few dollars that we had we donated to be used for such(?) purposes and to try and make people aware of the fact that we have now officially organized ourselves as an association of non-status Indians in the province of Saskatchewan. And of course, Malcolm Norris was the leader. The secretary at that time was Don Nielson and their information, through a newsletter, went out once every month to all of the locals and to those people who were particularly involved at that time.

Murray: According to this, there was a committee formed at that meeting in Saskatoon. Do you recall that happening? A steering or coordinating committee?

Rod: A coordinating committee. It was called a coordinating committee. It was formed, yes, and I was part of that. Practically all of the non-status Indians voluntarily took the responsibility of acting as coordinators to form a provincial organization.

Murray: What was the responsibility of each of those people? To go back into their communities and spread the word? Was that it?

Rod: That was the responsibility of the committee at that time was to go back to their communities. And in 1965, the provincial conference I believe it was called, and Malcolm Norris was elected as the president for the Metis Association of Saskatchewan. I wasn't there at that time. I had already left the country and moved to B.C. And...

Murray: That must have been between the Saskatoon meeting and the conference then, eh?

Rod: Right. The Saskatoon meeting took place in the fall and through the winter I left. I went seeking work in B.C. I came back, I believe it was in the spring of 1966. At that time, I met with Malcolm Norris, who was the executive director of the friendship centre in Prince Albert, and it seems to me there was a lot of confusion among people in the north, divisions and what not. So I decided to have a chat with Malcolm Norris which I did. And so I managed to get myself settled in the province and worked down here....

Murray: In Prince Albert or...?

Rod: No, in the province and I managed to work in Saskatoon. And my goal was to move back to Prince Albert to try and get the Association reorganized. Or to help reorganize the Association. Through the summer, I guess Mr. Norris took sick.

Murray: That's when he had a stroke.

Rod: That's when he had a stroke and that's when he became ill. By that time I was able to move back to Prince Albert, he was already confined to bed at home. One side he was more or less paralyzed. He was unable to do very much.

Murray: Before you go further on that, when you arrived back in the spring of 1966, you mentioned that there seemed to be a lot of confusion. Could you elaborate on that a bit? How did you get that impression? Was the organization in poor shape? Was that your impression when you got back?

Rod: It was not in very good shape. I must admit that it wasn't in very good shape but the fact is that the organization also did not have the resources to try to bring people together because the native people in the north were scattered for miles from one community to the other. And in the southern part of Saskatchewan there was no longer Metis communities. They were an absolute minority in small towns and cities and what not. And so in the meantime, the government was able to work very effectively against a very outspoken man like Malcolm Norris and so there was some suspicions drawn about Malcolm Norris being a communist. There were some suspicions being, you know, all kinds of things were being said about Malcolm.

Murray: This was a campaign on the part of the Liberal government then was it?

Rod: A campaign on the part of the Liberal government, yes. And as a matter of fact, it was an outright campaign.

Murray: Well, they forced him out of the position of the director of the friendship centre.

Rod: Yes, he was forced out as the director of the friendship centre simply because the Liberals at that time had threatened that if they didn't get rid of Malcolm Norris that they would lose their grant.

Murray: Right. What other kinds of things did they do?

Rod: Also, they had spoken to some of the people in the north, particularly in my community, the Liberals did, and kind of used threats. Like, they had what they called a Neestow Project at that time in the community. And the Liberals, the premier, at that time had approached certain people in the community saying to them that as long as the Neestows are in that community, they would hold back the aid that they intended to give the people of the community. So that eventually the Neestows left. And what did Thatcher come up with? What did the Liberals come up with? They came up with the idea that they were going to set up five farmers. But when you take a look at that situation, and those farmers will admit today, when they signed the contract there was nothing written on that piece of paper. It was later filled out in Regina. It was just a blank sheet, or a whatever you call it, that they have filled out. It was taken to Regina and filled out there. So the conditions of that agreement, there was a a lot of propaganda on it. Like, good things were going to happen but really the people did not know what kind of a deal they were getting until after they got their applications or contracts.

Murray: This is the first I've heard that there was sort of a campaign against Malcolm as a leader. Was it spread among native people in general that they should avoid Malcolm or...?

Rod: I would say that that machine was very effective but not too much of that came to me because naturally I was a very outspoken person and that was no way that I would tolerate the white people would be promoting this type of propaganda or hate campaign or whatever you want to call it. Criticisms are levied at our own leaders.

Murray: But there was evidence of that?

Rod: Oh, there was evidence because when Premier Ross Thatcher died, the leader of that party, Mr. Steuart - it was Mr. Steuart himself that told me that Malcolm Norris had threatened to kill him so that's why he had to get rid of him politically.

Murray: He was serious about that, was he?

Rod: He was serious about that. They said he had no choice but to get rid of Malcolm Norris because Malcolm Norris had threatened to kill him. So he got rid of him by putting political pressure on the board of the friendship centre. Of course, that can be denied by him. But that's true. He did approach me.

Murray: What did Malcolm say when you first talked to him in 1966 when you got back? When you went to talk to him about the state of the organization, what was his state at that time? Was he still trying to organize it?

Rod: Malcolm died fighting. Malcolm used to say to me, "I might be sick but I'm not dead yet." He used to say that there was a lot of work to be done. Also I approached him on several occasions for directions. When I came back I would look at some of the old files and found some of the people who were actually the executive, the local executive of Prince Albert in 1964 and 1965, within that area. But I got to Prince Albert, there was no movement at all; it was completely dead. There wasn't a local in P.A. So what I used to do, I used to go along to public places, coffee shops, lots of places and what not. And I used to talk to some of the people in there, telling them that something must be done and that we must get organized. Finally we got a local meeting going one night at the friendship centre. That is when I became elected as the local president of the Association of Metis in Prince Albert. And Malcolm, of course, felt very strong about government grants. Although Malcolm was way ahead of people; he was before his time. I would say it was difficult sometimes for us to be able to figure Malcolm out. And many of us could never figure out why Malcolm Norris was so strong against taking money from governments.

Murray: He wasn't able to put across why he thought that was wrong?

Rod: Right. Well, I guess he would have been able to. The thing is, how can you really justify to people even today... a lot of people will tell you, "We can't live without money, you can't do anything without money." In one way it's true.

Murray: Especially in those days.

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: It was hard for Malcolm to get around and organize by himself.

Rod: That's right, yeah. And he was the only organizer.

Murray: By the time you got back, Don Nielson was no longer in the picture?

Rod: Don Nielson was no longer in the picture but while Don was in there he was a very good man. Unfortunately, Don had left the province but he could have been a very effective leader and still could be an effective leader today.

Murray: But it was just the two of them really who could be described as organizers from that first organization. So once Don left, Malcolm was on his own and Malcolm was getting older and weaker.

Rod: That's right, older and older and older, and weaker, yeah.

Murray: When you came back in 1966, did Malcolm seem pretty

frustrated or was he still feeling pretty optimistic?

Rod: No, I went to work, I went to work. I had to. I couldn't depend on Malcolm; he was sick. Within my own judgement, I thought something had to be done. Malcolm knew I called a meeting. Malcolm read in the papers that I became the local president of the Association. He congratulated me at the first public meeting, although he was paralyzed, and attacked some of the native people for being idle and sitting on their "big fat fannies." That's exactly the words that he used. And of course, I think he had known that the Metis had actually organized the Metis Society of Saskatchewan and this took place in the south. And Malcolm was utterly against us amalgamating with the Metis Society of the south which I couldn't comprehend at that time what he meant, why we shouldn't. But I can understand now, I think. The Liberals were working on the leader at that time.

Murray: That was Joe Amyotte.

Rod: Which was Joe Amyotte, to become the leader of the Association and I think it was clear during the unveiling of the statue of Louis Riel (back in 1967 I believe it was), that Joe Amyotte was used by the Liberal party. And that as a leader he had nothing but nice things to say which was a speech written by some bureaucrat or civil servant of the government.

Murray: There was a constant communication between Amyotte and the government people in that organization. That's the impression I get from Amyotte. Is that what you, is that what Malcolm realized too?

Rod: Yes.

Murray: Did Malcolm see through that?

Rod: Yeah, I think that's why Malcolm was deadly against us amalgamating. But either 1967 or 1968 I was approached, and at that time I thought to myself now that I am working with more power, I feel that the people from the south and the north should unite. And so, an annual convention was held in Prince Albert here. That's before we had started getting government grants. And I became the vice president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan and Joe Amyotte the president.

Murray: Of the amalgamated one?

Rod: Of the amalgamated one. And approximately a year after that, I was nominated to run as president. I think I could have been elected as a president but as a young person at that time, I decided that I should perhaps resign and let someone else that was older, accept the job and take the job.

Murray: And that was....

Rod: And the elders were respected at that time and I thought... That was Joe Amyotte, yes. And that was the time

that they had first gotten their grant of \$10,000. And at that time, they had various people coming into the organization then who immediately got on a paid staff of \$400 and this is how the grant system - since that time some of these people haven't got enough to payroll. There's this long payroll in the Society today. One of them was Jim Sinclair but don't mention it.

Murray: So at the time you were perhaps not sophisticated enough politically to recognize some of the things you were getting into.

Rod: It's true. It's true, I wasn't politically sophisticated enough. It's true.

Murray: But did Malcolm try and warn you of these things? What was his message?

Rod: My association with Malcolm Norris was minimal, in a sense, but I knew him enough. Minimal simply because he was living in Prince Albert, I was living in Green Lake and I was living in B.C. and I was living in Saskatoon.

Murray: So you never had the opportunity to be close to him long?

Rod: So I really didn't have the opportunity to be close to him, yes. And so it was difficult for him to be able to politicize or warn people of various things that could have happened.

Murray: I suppose by the spring of 1966, Malcolm was more and more confined. Well I guess he wouldn't be confined to his home but he wouldn't have the energy, I suppose, to get out and organize.

Rod: Not to organize but I used to go pick him up on a wheelchair and I would bring him to public meetings.

Murray: This was in the fall of 1966 after he had the stroke?

Rod: Yes.

Murray: But he did try and convince you of those things. The two things I am interested in are one, about government grants, and two, about joining the southern organization which, in his view, was a partisan organization.

Rod: In his view, yeah.

Murray: Do you think he was the only one at the time who really saw the significance of those things, of the idea of taking grants and the idea of joining that southern organization?

Rod: Yes. He would be the only one. There was another fellow by the name of Jim Brady but I never did meet Jim. I had heard a lot about Jim but never had the opportunity of meeting him.

But certainly Malcolm would have been one of them, yeah.

Murray: What was Howard Adams' role at the time. Adams told me that he sort of got encouraged to be active by Malcolm and yet he also, in a conversation with me, Adams said that he at the time also didn't realize the importance of the government grant issue and joining the south. What was Howard's position in that whole thing, you know, while Malcolm was still around?

Rod: Malcolm was sick already when Howard Adams came into the picture and when Howard Adams came into the province of Saskatchewan. And I think that Malcolm had met with Howard Adams twice. What the conversation was all about I can't say. But I'm sure that Malcolm had met with Howard Adams twice.

(End of Side B)
(Side A, Tape IH-423A)

Murray: You mentioned that Howard and Malcolm had met a couple of times but you didn't know exactly what they had talked about. What was your feeling about Howard? Did you think at the time he had potential for being a leader?

Rod: I really didn't know who Malcolm Norris was. Or Howard Adams, I didn't know who he was. The first time I knew or heard of Howard was a letter that I had read in Saskatoon in the summer of 1966, through the Neestow Partnership Project. The Neestows used to work in Green Lake. And a letter was written to them by Howard Adams indicating that he was of native ancestry and born in St. Louis and he had all these degrees and what not and that he was a Metis himself and that he was interested in and wanted to get involved in the native movement.

Murray: This is the Neestow Project, eh?

Rod: Yes, and that was the first time I heard of Howard. And of course, at that time, I was immediately delighted to think that a man who was so educated and wanted to be a native and work for native people. So when I became elected as the president of the Prince Albert local, I immediately invited him that fall to speak at one of our local meetings. And that's how I got to know Howard Adams.

Murray: What was his state of his consciousness at the time? What did he see as the important issues in the...?

Rod: Howard Adams told me at that time that there was a lot of discrimination and that he was a professor himself and all his degrees and yet he was unable to get a job. I understand that he was able to get a job teaching at the University of Saskatoon through the old Indian and Metis branch. And I forget the name of the person who was the executive director of that branch at that time. I believe it was a Mr. Ewald.

Murray: Yeah, that's right.

Rod: And he was the person that was supposed to have gotten that job for Howard at the University of Saskatoon as a teacher.

Murray: So he wouldn't have gotten it without that help.

Rod: It's a possibility that he wouldn't have gotten it. So Howard used to talk a lot about discrimination. And was also a historian and was able to know more about what was written, about the history of the rebellion than anybody else did in the province of Saskatchewan. I think in later years he was able to utilize that to his advantage. He was able to draw the media by all of a sudden doing certain things that Louis Riel had done in early years, like form a provisional government. He would use those kind of situations to his advantage in order to get the media and to get on national television.

Murray: So, Howard was a person who came late to a Metis consciousness. Would that be accurate?

Rod: I would say very much so because he was 41 years old when he migrated into Saskatchewan.

Murray: He had been born here but he came back....

Rod: When he was 41 years of age.

Murray: Right. So he, I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'm wondering whether he really had roots among the people or whether he was in some senses an outsider who didn't have a feel for what was happening.

Rod: I think that it would be fair to say that Howard Adams could not have had consciousness for native people. Because you would have to look at his history. Sure maybe the early years, he was poor, I will not deny that. That he lived in St. Louis and going to school there. But also went to school in Prince Albert. I suppose that could have been the hardest part of his life, was while he was taking grade school.

Murray: Went through the same thing that most native people went through.

Rod: Yeah, right. He went through practically the same thing that most native people went through. But shortly after he left high school he joined the RCMP force and was with the force for about three years. And after he left the RCMP force, he went to California. What made him go to California, I don't know. But this is where he took his education.

Murray: But he was pretty far removed from native people.

Rod: And otherwise very far removed from the native people. This is why I feel that he wasn't really conscious as to what

was really happening or could have had any real strong feelings in terms of his own people.

Murray: Do you think that Malcolm tried to give the message to Howard too, warning him about joining forces with the Metis Society in the south and the government grant question?

Rod: I think Malcolm would have made that very clear and very strongly to Howard. But when this happened, the amalgamation took place, Howard did not object to it. He didn't want to really get involved but he thought that I had made a good decision, that I had amalgamated.

Murray: So he basically supported you and what you were doing?

Rod: Yes.

Murray: Could you describe a bit how Malcolm felt about Amyotte? Did he think that Amyotte was an opportunist or did he think perhaps that he was being manipulated by the government? What was his view of Amyotte as a leader?

Rod: If Malcolm Norris thought something of Amyotte, it would have been that he was being manipulated.

Murray: He didn't talk much about him personally though, eh? He talked more about the organization. Or did he talk about Amyotte?

Rod: He had never talked about Amyotte because Amyotte wasn't really in existence at that time.

Murray: He wasn't an important figure.

Rod: (Inaudible) Other than the fact that he knew very well that the Liberals were looking for a native leader in the south to try and organize an organization (inaudible).

Murray: Can we go back just for a few minutes? There were a couple of things I wanted to ask you about that meeting in 1964 that was so important. Who were some of the major figures among the treaty Indians who put forward that, what you described as sort of that paranoid position about them being afraid of losing their rights and that? Who were the people putting that position forward?

Rod: Well, the leaders at that time were a guy by the name of Belgarde. I can't say whether it was Wilf or... Belgarde. It was a Belgarde that was the chief of the FSI at that time. And Tootoosis, John Tootoosis was also very active in and around those years but was no longer as part of the executive of the FSI.

Murray: Tootoosis, as I heard it, was at those meetings but wasn't actually a delegate. He was actually on the platform with some of the government people. Was that how you remember

it?

Rod: I understand that at that conference that Tootoosis made some effort in order to dominate to the floor. But was shot down my Malcolm Norris and Don Nielson.

Murray: So there was a conflict between Norris and Tootoosis at that meeting to some extent?

Rod: Very much so.

Murray: Did Norris, do you think, try and convince other treaty Indians there that unity was the thing that they should follow? That Indian and Metis people should work together? Did he attempt to put that position forward?

Rod: Yes. Malcolm Norris made it very clear that he felt that there had to be unity among the treaties and the Metis as well. At that meeting, he raised a lot of issues with the provincial government and cabinet ministers where he tried to get a debate going but was unable to get the ministers to debate with him on issues.

Murray: But he did try also to convince the Indian people, and he must have been unsuccessful in that, to join a unified thing.

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: And was it upon his failure to do that that he then made the statement, "Well then, we'll have to organize the Metis as a single group." Was that the sort of way it worked, that he was unable to convince treaties?

Rod: Right, that's true. He was unable to convince treaties and that's when he said that we have to form our own organization.

Murray: In fact the organization had already been started about a month earlier, I think, hadn't it?

Rod: Yes.

Murray: Don had started it in August, I think, and this meeting took place in September. But he must have anticipated perhaps that that was going to be the result of this meeting, that the treaty Indians wouldn't agree. Did he ever talk to you about that? Did he have strong feelings about the foolishness of the treaty Indians and wanting to divide the movement?

Rod: As I said before, very little time was spent to do any analysis and to have long discussions with Malcolm Norris but he did say that he was very happy to be able to see young people like myself getting actively involved in the Association.

Murray: That pleased him?

Rod: That pleased him more than anything else, to see young people in the Association. And when he said that and made that statement, he did it doing the pow-wow or some kind of a victory dance. And in a very tribal way. You know, he was singing a song in Cree and danced at that same time when he said that. He was very happy to see it.

Murray: Where did that happen?

Rod: This took place at the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon.

Murray: So he was visibly and emotionally pleased, you could see.

Rod: Right.

Murray: What did he say to you? Can you remember what he said?

Rod: Precisely that.

Murray: That he was pleased to see you and...

Rod: That he was very happy to see young people like myself. That he had waited for this a long time and now that young people were actively being involved, that he felt very pleased about it.

Murray: It's puzzled me for some time that although Malcolm's consciousness was always there right from the time that he came to Saskatchewan in 1947, that nothing really happened until 1964. Why do you think that was? Do you think that he felt

that the time hadn't been ripe up to that point? That in 1964 was the time, the time was ripe to organize Metis people or did he ever talk about that in those terms?

Rod: No, he never did talk about that in those terms. But my understanding of the presence of Malcolm Norris in the province along with Peter Tomkins and Jim Brady was that they had been well-known leaders in the province of Alberta and so when the NDP or CCF first came into power in the province of Saskatchewan, they decided that they would get these Metis people to come in here and to talk about cooperatives and those kinds of things. And the fur marketing service. So basically, the CCF at that time had some ideas of their own and who could help them with those ideas better than anybody else was the trio. They were often called the trio, Malcolm Norris, and Peter and Jim Brady. And basically this was the job of these three. And I think in through the years Malcolm Norris was involved in what I would call the transition period with the CCF and the new NDP party. And perhaps it was 1964 and in around that year. He, of course, was fired by the Liberals when the Liberals first were elected. And that's when he really became actively involved, but he was also actively involved in these trappers' conventions. He quite often used to call them a farce. They weren't establishing anything. And they would just kind of go (inaudible) and that he used to go

in there and really debate and argue on issues and quite often that they had no alternative but to call in his minister. And his minister at that time was Woodrow Lloyd. And you know, to get them all to these conventions. So, Malcolm, like, he was working for the CCF too.

Murray: He was outspoken all the time?

Rod: Yeah, he was outspoken all the time.

Murray: Of course, Malcolm at one time was active in the NDP and the CCF as the party as well as working for the government. Do you recall him saying anything from the time you knew him in 1964 onwards, did he indicate to you that he was disillusioned with the NDP? Or did he have anything to do with it at all as far as you know in those years?

Rod: He never indicated that he was disillusioned with the NDP but he also never said that perhaps the NDP was the closest thing to helping native people or poor people.

Murray: So, as far as your contact with him, his interest was in the Metis Association and not in anything to do with political parties whatsoever.

Rod: No.

Murray: People knew he was an NDPer though I suppose, eh?

Rod: Yes, but don't forget that the NDP... or at that time it wasn't the NDP it was CCF. And when the CCF first organized they were a little different from where the NDP are at now, today. So, that is perhaps the reason why that he may have taken a membership out in the old CCF party was because he felt that there was some hope within that particular party.

Murray: It seemed to me that Malcolm, some of the stories I heard, would go to the meetings even after he had a stroke. He would go to the meetings in his wheelchair and those meetings often ended up to be pretty emotional events. Could you describe in detail one or two of those meetings and what would happen when Malcolm would speak and he would come there in a wheelchair and that sort of thing?

Rod: Well, they were emotional events and I suppose when you are up there fighting and really struggling and being able to analyze what the future would be all about, the development of this country, the economic development of the Metis people, northern development... You take that all into consideration, to me those are all emotional events. And to be able to see the fact that the only way that you can really help people is that some radical social changes must take place. Like, there had to be reorganization, a reorganizing of the development structures of this community, or of the province. And how many times he tried and how many times he got knocked down without any real support, simply because people weren't conscientious enough and simply because that the powers were so much greater,

the opposition is so much greater.

Murray: The people just hadn't responded to him yet.

Rod: The people just hadn't responded to him and that was enough, I suppose, to become quite emotional. And that still happens today.

Murray: Wait. I'm not in any way criticizing him but I want to get a feeling for the man as well as the leader.

Rod: No, no, I know that you're not. And I suppose that can happen today yet. Like what I'm saying, that there is a lot of work that has been done but it's getting to the point now that more work has to be done.

Murray: Right.

Rod: So, as far as being emotional, he was emotional based on politics rather than self-pity.

Murray: It was described to me that he would be speaking and that he would bring up an example of someone being discriminated against and get extremely upset and often even cry over that. What kind of effect did that have on people? I mean they obviously had a tremendous respect for Malcolm. Would that disrupt the meeting when he got that upset?

Rod: It had a lot of effect on me. I couldn't help but shed a few tears myself. Because I was able to see Malcolm as a man who fought all his life for people. He was getting up in age and just looking at the man and knowing that he tried hard and that he had this fighting spirit in him was enough to get me angry. And that's how it affected me.

Murray: And a lot of people reacted that way did they?

Rod: And I suppose a lot of people reacted that way. Of course, you also had a lot of political demagogues who were only concerned about promoting and meeting their own self interests.

Murray: Right. That was already happening was it, even before Malcolm left?

Rod: Yes, definitely. Very much so. Yes, it was happening. In kind of an indescribable way because I think that they... you're more effective I suppose. People like Jim Brady were lost, you know, a political person. So, yes you had people like that already who could be used to knock off their own people.

Murray: When you came back in 1966, were there meetings being held at that time? In P.A.? You said that the P.A. local was pretty much dead. Was Malcolm not holding any meetings as far as you knew, when you talked to him?

Rod: Malcolm could not carry out the general business of the Association when he became sick. I became involved because I wanted to get involved. I very much wanted to get involved and I always believed that our people had to unite because there is strength that way. And so I more or less became a self-appointed leader.

Murray: The de facto leader of the...

Rod: Of a concerned group I suppose.

Murray: Right. So that the organization in the spring of 1966, at least in Prince Albert, had sort of faded, had it?

Rod: Yes.

Murray: What about other places? Malcolm had gone visiting... almost twenty locals organized or something I think, by he and Don Nielson. What was the situation in the rest of those locals, had it deteriorated as well do you think? Or were you able to tell?

Rod: There wasn't very much activity. I don't assume that there was very much activity. Even today yet, in many cases there isn't that much activity for various reasons. Okay, Malcolm Norris could not be everywhere. Don Nielson could not be everywhere. People were complete aliens to this society. They weren't aware of government structures. We weren't aware that no matter how educated you are, that you must struggle for whatever you may be fighting for. Okay?

Murray: Yes.

Rod: We always had the belief that if you became educated that one would be able to accomplish wonders for people.

Murray: The world would be at your feet.

Rod: The world would be at our feet, okay. So we always had a dependency on certain people who could speak the language, the white man's language, because we felt we had already been inferiorized, that we can't get along.

Murray: Without that help.

Rod: Without that help.

Murray: And so Malcolm was one of the first people who was number one, a Metis, and number two, someone who could compete with the white man successfully.

Rod: Good.

Murray: Do you think that that's perhaps why the organization sort of, grew and fell with Malcolm's activity? That people

needed his push? That they still weren't at the point where they could independently carry their own weight?

Rod: It is true to a very large degree, that that situation could be described properly. Except that after he became sick, someone had to take the initiative and that is what happened there.

Murray: But as far as that first period, and with the exception of communities where there were people like yourself, Green Lake and maybe Cumberland, the other communities, people were ready for that kind of leadership, were ready to be organized, and yet there wasn't that leadership development in those communities. It needed someone like Malcolm to articulate it. And if he wasn't there then it would tend to die off.

Rod: That's right. I think people were prepared to organize, they were prepared to talk about local issues, but they weren't prepared to meet governments.

Murray: Right.

Rod: On the floor.

Murray: So, it was just an immature sort of political consciousness.

Rod: And also I think a lot of the people, because of the fact that we are so badly inferior, a lot of our people expected too much out of leaders like Malcolm Norris.

Murray: So they saw him as sort of, "Uncle Malcolm would do this for us."

Rod: Yeah, right, yeah. If Uncle Malcolm didn't do it then he was a son-of-a-bitch or the Association was no good.

Murray: So then it just wouldn't get done.

Rod: Right.

Murray: Do you think because Malcolm was such a dynamic individual that he maybe was responsible for that attitude to some extent? Do you think that he came on so strong that he almost created himself as a demagogue without meaning to?

Rod: I really don't think so. I really don't think that that is the case. It is difficult to be able to put into perspective the kind of feelings, the kind of situations, that (?) people go through. And we needed a dynamic leader. Certainly Malcolm, I felt, made a personal impression. He

impressed me with the way he came out. Yeah, he made me feel as a native that should be proud. I felt proud and I felt that I wanted to fight and work along with my people. So rather than looking at Malcolm from that particular viewpoint, I

looked at him as a man who tried to persuade and encourage native people to get up on their own two feet. So, just by the way he was able to get up and debate and carry on a fight, that was very encouraging from my viewpoint. And perhaps the reason why I look at it this way is because I was always interested.

Murray: So you were ripe for kind of encouragement. You were already feeling that way and Malcolm tended to encourage that in you and build it up.

Rod: Right.

Murray: Did Malcolm ever talk about the differences in strategies that were necessary for the southern Metis and northern Metis? The fact that the southern Metis were, in all their situations, were in a minority situation whereas the Metis in the north were, at least in this period of time, were in the majority. Did he ever talk about that at all?

Rod: Malcolm realized that situation from the south and the north was different. And his classification was, of course, that the halfbreeds from the south were already badly brainwashed. That they were different from the people in the north.

Murray: They had assimilated to a large extent.

Rod: Yeah, they'd assimilated to a large extent.

Murray: Would that have been one of the reasons that he wanted to see a separate development of the northern Association as well, because of those differences do you think?

Rod: I would say that his decision was largely based on those arguments.

Murray: So there were really three things that he felt strongly about as far as the joining of the two. One was that he didn't want government grants. The second was that the southern organization was dominated by government influenced people, and thirdly that the differences in the southern Metis and the northern Metis in terms of their consciousness and their whole cultural situation. So those would be the three things that he felt about.

Now, some of these questions you may not be able to answer because, as you mentioned, you didn't get a chance to talk with Malcolm as much as you might have liked to. But there are a few things I am wondering about. How did he see the whole question of integration? Did he think that for native people to improve their situation, integration was inevitable or did he hope to see a partially separate development of Metis people so that they could keep their culture and sort of stay on the edge of white society and get the benefits? That is a sort of complicated question but I'm wondering how he saw the native person progressing.

Rod: Well, from picking up bits and pieces and putting them together, I would say that Malcolm Norris saw the native people as developing separately from the rest of the white society. And if you take a look at the structure of the Alberta colonies, the colonies in Alberta, you'll find that Malcolm had worked very hard to try and get these colonies for native people in Alberta. And again here in Saskatchewan, some time was set aside to help fully develop native people, segregated from the white society. And whether this was through the influence of Malcolm Norris or through the advice of people like himself, I can't say but definitely was that situation also north in the province. And perhaps that was the reason why that separate development for native people could have been taken and started by Malcolm Norris.

Murray: There wasn't any long conversations about it but that was the feeling you got from picking things up?

Rod: Right.

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Murray: When Malcolm spoke at meetings, what kind of message did he give to native people? Did he talk about native people being proud of their heritage and that sort of thing, was that part of his message?

Rod: Malcolm Norris in his meetings and his message to the people was bravery. He often talked about the rebellion of 1885. He talked about certain warriors that participated back at Batoche. And described and was able to name a few of the people, elderly people who were involved, how they were able to take the front lines, what their dying words were at the battlefield, and those kind of things that Malcolm spoke of. That we were a proud race and that we had very, very brave people fighting against great odds without any real military support, without any sophisticated weapons to fight back with. He also talked about the strength of the unity, talked about the power, talked about the social and economic problems that we faced, talked about alcohol, the drinking of the native people (how we are able to talk bravely over a beer table and, but really had not guts when it came to facing the white man), and talked about the state of welfare as a suppressive weapon. So these were generally the messages that he had delivered. And also spoke on local issues, also spoke on the development of the country. Or cite out examples as to why his native people were not, for an example, given the land, and outsiders coming in there, getting the land over the original citizens of that community. And those kinds of things were the issues that Malcolm talked about, but talked about them in such a way that they were understandable and also that they were dealing with the local issues.

Murray: So he would try and tie things in with local issues,

would he?

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that some of what he said went over people's heads? Do you think there were some who...?

Rod: There is no doubt about it that a lot of education... and I understand today of course, usually after a man is dead or somebody like that, they are appreciated. But I don't think you'll find too many people today trying to criticize what Malcolm Norris really stood for. And today those same people are becoming more politically sophisticated. Today they argue. They say, "Well, this is what Malcolm Norris used to say."

Murray: But at the time they might not have understood.

Rod: And at that time they didn't understand. Now they understand. Malcolm Norris was ahead of his time.

Murray: So his influence is felt perhaps more now than it was when he was speaking in some of those meetings. In the sense that people recognize it now.

Rod: Well, "Long after I'm dead people will talk about me," Malcolm Norris used to say.

Murray: He said that?

Rod: Yeah, and so it's true.

Murray: He knew that he was ahead of his time?

Rod: Yeah, I think that he knew he was ahead of his time.

Murray: Well, it would have been easy for him to see that.

Rod: It's true that today that a lot of native people talk about him you know. Except for a few people who still wouldn't want Malcolm Norris to take the credit.

Murray: Right, and wouldn't want him around now. (chuckles)

Rod: And wouldn't want him around now.

Murray: They would know that they would be no match for him.

(Brief interruption)

Murray: One of the things that the CCF assumed when they were developing programs for the north was that because the people in the north were Indian people, there was a sort of a primitive communism or a natural cooperativism among them and in fact, in some cases, it is quite the opposite, where people were pretty individualistic and for the most part didn't cooperate that much. They were trappers and their families

would move around and they only came together occasionally. Did Malcolm feel that there was this part of the native culture that made the native person more susceptible to socialism? Did he ever talk about socialism and the native movement and how those two things would fit or did he ever talk about socialism to you at all?

Rod: No.

Murray: That was something too remote for this period, was that how he felt about it, do you think?

Rod: I would say that he felt like it was too remote.

Murray: That native people would have to take a couple of steps before they got to where they could deal with those kinds of questions?

Rod: Right.

Murray: Is there anything else you can really tell me about Malcolm that I haven't asked you? It would be useful for me to have some anecdotes, you know, not just his political positions and meetings and things but maybe if you could describe some incidents or some meetings or something that would tell me something about Malcolm, the kind of man he was. If anything comes to mind, you know.

Rod: Not really, except Malcolm had, of course, tried to invest his money wisely and when he left Saskatchewan he was living in a nice home. His family was living in a nice home. Whether that was just a mortgage or what it was, I don't know. I understand that he had taken shares on mines. Malcolm Norris always looked towards independency.

Murray: For himself, yeah.

Rod: For himself, because he had to try and survive. And at the same time, a man like him would have to very much try to also concentrate on that. A man like him had to have an alternative. But to concentrate on trying to become more independent because of his political beliefs.

Murray: Because he could be dumped at any time.

Rod: Yeah, because he could be dumped at any time. Yeah. That's why today, some of us are also looking at that. Although there is always that tendency of co-optation. But the thing is that I always say you're better off alive than dead. The organization has gone dead. When you are alive, naturally you are going to get all kinds of labels, you are going to be called this, you are going to be called that. As long as your objective is clear, you yourself know what direction you are going.

Murray: Right. And Malcolm felt this too.

Rod: And Malcolm Norris felt that too, as well.

Murray: Okay, the last thing I wanted to find out about a bit was the whole Neestow Project and how you felt about that and what Malcolm's role in that project was.

Rod: Okay, when I came back, I can't say what Malcolm's role was in that other than the fact he had recommended that the Neestows were fairly good people to work with.

Murray: He had told you this personally?

Rod: He had told me that himself, personally.

Murray: This is when you came back in 1966?

Rod: That's when I came back in 1966, it was that spring. I didn't stay in Green Lake for long and I went to work in the southern part of the province. But by the time I got into Green Lake, I heard a lot about the Neestows. They were communists, they were everything else. And there had been some articles in the Star Phoenix where the Neestows had talked about the conditions of people in the community, deplorable housing conditions for an example, unemployment, poverty and all those kinds of radicals. And as a result of that, the government of Saskatchewan did not like it. And so, there was a lot of rumors and essentially I came in like that there. But I had to find out for myself, you know. At that time already I thought to myself, I can't totally accept one side of the story. I must go find out. I must go talk to them. So I made this effort of walking across the bridge to go and see the Neestows. That's when I first met them. Rob Wood and some other people who were involved in there. Clayton Roby I believe it was.

Murray: Richard Thompson?

Rod: Richard Thompson. And they had talked about various activities in there. And to my knowledge, I thought that they weren't too bad of people. Although I didn't really get to understand the politics, I understood one thing, that as long as they could prove to me that they were making some efforts regarding our people in terms of them as people, who were actually trying to help people and from there of course, I looked at them as allies. Although I didn't relate to them before they left that the general feeling of the people in Green Lake was for them to move out of the community because certain help was forthcoming to people. Okay. And I had got this information from Dan Ross. Dan Ross of Green Lake.

Murray: He was the president of the Metis Society local at that time.

Rod: At that time. So they left and later on I met with them in Saskatoon.

Murray: So they were sort of forced out of Green Lake. There was a lot of Liberal government - what? There were threats and that and stories started about them? Was there an effort to get them out of town by the Liberals?

Rod: Yeah. Yes, there was a lot of things happening.

Murray: They were most active in Green Lake, I think, at the time you came back.

Rod: The police would try and instigate something there too. Trying to get rid of them.

Murray: So that campaign was successful basically then? The people finally did say that they wanted them out.

Rod: Yeah.

Murray: Was the Metis Society connected with Neestow at all? Were they cooperating in any way?

Rod: Well, the Metis Society was not the Metis Society as you know it today. It was there but we didn't have all the paid workers around the country.

Murray: Right, but was there a cooperation, sort of, at that level that existed?

Rod: Well, people didn't really identify as the Metis Society at that time. Okay, but there was some cooperation on the part of the Metis people.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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