

Nora Cummings, Peter Bishop, and Ron Laliberte:
Métis Political Activist Interviews (Feb 28, 29, 2004)

Tape 1

Start Time: 2:39.16.27

Ron Laliberte: Interesting. Can, can either of you remember how, what role politics played in your younger life?

Peter Bishop: Oh definitely.

Ron Laliberte: Was there any kind of...how did, how did your family become politically involved initially and did it have, what kind of an impact did it have on you?

(Video Time: 2:39.32.00) Peter Bishop: Well that is when my father comes in. Before I get into him I, I just remembered that my Grandfather used to haul freight from Fort Carlton to the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company. I don't know if they used an ox cart or a wagon but he hauled freight all the way on the Carlton/Green Lake Trail and they took it to the Hudson's Bay Company post in Green Lake. Because they had big warehouses. And that's where they dropped it off. And after they were finished they'd go back. That's what they did because Green Lake was the hub of the transportation area. Because from Green Lake then they went different parts of Northern Saskatchewan to deliver the trade goods, groceries and stuff like that. And now back to my father. After my father left the residential school he wandered around for a while. He went and lived in the United States in Montana. That's where his brother had moved to and

they'd stayed together for a few years and he decided to come back. Then he moved to Calgary. Because when their father dropped them off at St. Michael's he took two of my aunts. They were older than Dad and Uncle Harry. One's name was Bertha and the other one was Georgina. And they went to Calgary. So my Dad went to Calgary and lived with them for a spell. And in 1912 that's the year of the first Calgary Stampede, he got a job. He was driving a hack. You know what a hack is?

Ron Laliberte: Cab?

Peter Bishop: It's a cab in a sense. It's a horse drawn carriage with two or three seats with a, a canvas top. He used to drive the big shots, eh. Rich people, he used to drive them around. He, he used to drive them to the houses of ill repute. And Dad found that funny. But in those days, you know, the law was just a little more tolerant than it is today. That's what he used to do in Calgary. I don't know how long he stayed there. But then eventually he made his way back to Saskatchewan. He married my mother in 1922. And it was right in Green Lake. He too had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in Beauval and Ile a la Crosse. He worked as a clerk. He wasn't involved in, in, you know, shipping or hauling freight. He was a clerk because he was quite smart. When he went to school there at, at the residential school, he was quite smart. Although he could only, couldn't go past grade eight.

Ron Laliberte: Right.

Peter Bishop: Had to leave. There was a reason for that. You know that don't you? So they didn't want the Aboriginal kids to get that well educated in those days. Yeah. Half a day of school in the mornings and the rest they

had to do outside work. That's for the boys. And, of course, the girls had to work on the inside. So anyway he began working for the Liberal Government for a while but he didn't like the Liberals at all. That's before 1944, see the CCF didn't come into power until 1944. But before that the Liberals were in power. They did very little for the people in that community. They did provide work for them building roads, government roads. But my Dad and the other men had to use horse-drawn scrapers, handles like this, and I've seen them building roads. That's before the machinery came along. That was their job. And they were only getting paid 50 cents a day at that time. This is during the Liberal era before 1944. So he detested the Liberals immensely and I'll tell you why as I go along. So anyway when the CCF came to power in 1944, my Dad became quite actively involved with the CCF party. At last he found a party that was willing to, you know, look at the Métis problem in these communities especially.

Ron Laliberte: You're talking about the transfer of the, the Liberals under Patterson?

Peter Bishop: Yeah...

Ron Laliberte: Over to Tommy Douglas.

Peter Bishop: To Tommy Douglas.

Ron Laliberte: Yeah.

Peter Bishop: Yup. So anyway, he was quite strong in his politics. And whenever they were going to have an election the CCF used to come and pick him up by plane because most of the communities in the north were inaccessible by road.

Ron Laliberte: Yes.

Peter Bishop: So they had to use a plane to go to places like Beauval, Ile a la Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, Patuanak, Pinehouse. All those northern communities. He did not visit the Indian reserves because Indians weren't allowed to vote at that time.

Ron Laliberte: Yup.

(Video Time: 2:46.06.06) Peter Bishop: They didn't get that right up until 1960. So anyway, he'd fly all over the place with these people and he'd be the interpreter. He'd say, "This is what the CCF is willing to do for you people." Anyway he had to work against the Catholic Church and that wasn't very easy. But he was bound and determined he was going to try and, you know, make a change for his people so they'd get employment, better living conditions, so forth. And so whenever Dad was home and, of course, the election, whether it was federal or provincial, they'd always make sure they'd, they'd come and find my Dad. Sometimes the Conservatives used to use him but because he didn't like the Liberals. But the priest was so consistent, you know, trying to change Dad, trying to win his vote to support the Liberals. But Dad would have nothing to do with it. The reason why the Catholic Church supported the Liberals was because of the fact that Louis St. Laurent was the Prime Minister at that time. And he was a French Catholic. So like I said, the priest would come to the house and talk to Dad. But he went all over the community. But he'd come to the house too. And he still tried to change Dad. And they would get into awful arguments. I was just a

young fellow and I saw it. And it came to the point where if it wasn't for my mother, my Dad would have assaulted that priest. I'm not kidding.

Ron Laliberte: Yeah.

Peter Bishop: He would have. Sometimes my mother had to push the priest out of the house 'cause she didn't want any trouble. She didn't want Dad to get into trouble with the Catholic Church. But I remember him saying one time, "Father, I respect you as a person of the cloth, but as a politician you're no better than anybody else." He'd say, "There's no way I'll ever support your party."

End Time: 2:48.39.18