

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

Tape 2

Start Time: 6:44.58.03

Ron Laliberte: What do you think about the role of Harry Daniels and the importance, in terms of his contribution to getting the Métis in the *Constitution*?

(Video Time: 6:44.57.14) Nora Cummings: Well, I think Harry played a very big role in that as well. I think, you know, Harry Daniels is no, he's a no exception to us as Métis. Harry's been involved for a number of years, I remember the early '70s he was a young man then and he was into the Métis Nation then. There was him and Rod and Sinclair. Them three stood out the most in my mind. Harry Daniels is to me, I've always respected and, the other thing, I always thought he had a, a fas-, a whole style of his own.

Ron Laliberte: Yes, he's quite unique Harry.

Nora Cummings: He is, and he's, he reminds me of another Gabriel Dumont. Honestly, just the way he talks and acts.

Ron Laliberte: Very flamboyant, right?

Nora Cummings: Yes, yeah.

Ron Laliberte: That's Harry.

(Video Time: 6:45.55.28) Nora Cummings: And, and he, he's contribute a lot to the Métis, a lot to the Métis. And I remember when he was the, he worked with the Métis National Council. He was the Vice President of the

Native Council of Canada when I first went to Ottawa when I was just in the early stages of organizing our women. And it was Harry that helped me a lot in Ottawa. He's, you know, helped me find the resources that, and tried to help me in that way and I've always given him credit for that.

Ron Laliberte: Well, I've heard this said about him that he helped women organize, women's organizations, Aboriginal women's organizations. Did you have any feelings on that, that you know of, or any experiences with that?

Nora Cummings: Yes, I did. I, I, we I used to always tease, we teased Harry, I didn't realize it. You know, the Jeanette Corbier Laval case was a big case, which was a political issues on the, of the women fighting for the status...

Ron Laliberte: Yes.

Nora Cummings: ...back if you remember that...

Ron Laliberte: Yeah.

Nora Cummings: That was in the early '70s and that was a, a very political thing. And we were with the Native women at that time and we went to Ottawa and I was on the same plane, I believe, with, with Harry, or we met at the airport. And he was telling me he was there to chair the Women's Conference. I said, "Get out of here." You know, "You're going to be chairing the Women's Conference? You're crazy." And he says, "No I'm serious." And, and sure enough Harry well honestly, I've never, I don't think Harry will ever forget that. It was, I tell you, that conference was a very, very intense conference and he couldn't control them women. He couldn't control them women. So the Saskatchewan delegates were sitting on one side and he

said, "If these women get up and walk out I will resign the chair." We said, "Mr. Daniels you wanted to chair a Women's Conference. We're sitting." He never forgave us for that I think, but we were bugging him we would. But he, you know, he done, he, he was, he was very supportive with women. Very much so. And I think also he was a good resource for our Métis as well.

(Video Time: 6:48.02.02) Peter Bishop: Yeah. You have to remember that if it wasn't for Harry that we wouldn't have gained a seat...

Nora Cummings: That's right.

Peter Bishop: ...in the Constitutional talks.

Ron Laliberte: Yeah.

Nora Cummings: Yes.

Peter Bishop: He was the one that one that was responsible, that convinced the government, Trudeau and them, we want, we want representation at this table. We want a seat, that's what we want. And finally the government relented. But I'll tell you how I met Harry. That was back in '60-, '68 or '69 when Ross Thatcher was still in power. He came with us, like, Rod had a small Green Lake delegation and we went to a meeting that was held by the Indian and Métis Department. Now you'll remember that Ross Thatcher created that department in order for him to deal with Indian and Métis issues. Big mistake. Indians had their own agenda. The Métis had their own agenda and in most cases the Status Indians dominated the meetings. But they had a sharp lawyer in Rodney Soonias. We didn't have anybody like that. But anyway Rod managed to get in a word edgewise. He told the, the gathering, the meeting where he was from and he was concerned that we

don't have any resources where I come from to create employment. He said there's a lot of things there that we could be tapping into. The forest industry, the fishing industry, we can't. The government has made sure of that, you know. They hold a monopoly over the fishing rights, timber rights. You know, and they're the ones that, that make the decisions who should get those rights and most of the time it wasn't the Métis. And he asked the government, he says, "What would, what we would like to begin with is to try and get our own stud mills started so we can create employment for our guys, you know, and sell the product to whoever they, you know, wants to buy it." So one government minister, the minister in charge of, I don't know, DNR or department of northern or forestry department, I forget. I was green, that was one of my first meetings. And the guy, in front of all the people, said, "Well what's wrong with the Green Lake Sawmill?" He says, "Well, it's there, it's operating." "Well," he said, "You can have that Sawmill, what's wrong with that?" He says, "We'll give you that Sawmill." Well, Rod felt so ecstatic after this guy made that promise. He never said any more. He was so excited, oh boy we're going to get the Green Lake Mill and Harry was right there, beside us. He said, "Well Bishop you finally done it. You know. Maybe good things are going to come out of this after all." So, very next day he told us you come and you see me at the office tomorrow morning. Oh yes, we went. We made sure we had an appointment for 9:00 o'clock in the morning, went and seen this minister, **Coullineur [unknown spelling]**, I think his name was, I forget. We walked to his office and after the nice, niceties were exchanged he said, "Well, there's a problem. There is a lot of preliminary

work that has to be done before we can complete the documents so your people can take over. So we're going to try and work on them. It's not going to be right away." So we didn't stay very long. Rod's face just hung down like this. After that minister had the intestinal fortitude to promise that Sawmill to the Green Lake people in front of all those people, he changed his mind, using excuses like that. And Harry was right there and told, "Well listen Mr. Minister, I was there too and I heard you say that, that you were willing to give this sawmill to the Green Lake people. And now you're, you're refusing to do that? Is that, says something about politicians like you, doesn't it?" Minister couldn't say anything.

End Time: 6:53.18.28