

Mike Mercredi, Frank Tomkins, Ron Laliberte

Métis Political Activist Interviews (Jan 24, 25, 2004)

Tape 1

**Start Time: 10:15:39.19**

**(Video Time: 10:15.39.19) Ron Laliberte:** Okay. Frank what's your first sort of recollection of the, of your parents or grandparents becoming involved in the political process? Have you got any memories of that?

**(Video Time: 10:15.51.03) Frank Tomkins:** My, my grandfather was the Grand Master of the Masons and, and he belonged to the lodge in High Prairie and Grandpa was quite an influencing guy and well, well-respected by, by everyone because he was the kind of guy that went out of his way to help people. And between my grandfather and another gentleman with the same type of attitude towards others, I guess, was they got together and they built the first hospital in Grouard, Alberta. And they built it for the church, of course. My grandfather was a Mason but nonetheless, you know, as far as he was concerned, you know, the church you can help the people and that was it. So they built the first hospital in Grouard, Alberta. Mind you now when I talk about hospital and I saw the place and it's not any bigger than any home that you'd find in the city. You know, of course in them days there wasn't such a thing as a great big hospital. But nonetheless they built the first one in Grouard and I guess that's how come my father got involved, like in politics because my grandfather, having married an Indian woman, he was sympathetic to the, to the Native cause you might say. And, of course, he

got my, my Dad quite involved and right from the time he was a young man he pretty well followed the footsteps of my grandfather, like to help the people. He went out of his way to, to help people didn't matter what. And he was well-respected by both the white people and, and everybody that in the community because he could always count on Pete Tomkins for a handout or help of any sort. If you needed any, any problems with government he was there to give a hand. I remember one incident there, I recall that it was a white woman and had a, a boy that was deformed at birth. Both feet were like this and they went to my father, to see what he could do about it and, of course he got in contact with a, with ah people in Edmonton and eventually got somebody interested in doing some work on the kid and they straightened out the kid's legs. So, of course, things like this get around. Word like that gets around to others and pretty soon you earn the respect of everybody in the community. It was through that I suppose, and also as I mentioned earlier that Joe Dion had to be some sort of a relative to my grandmother. And Joe Dion, of course, was a school teacher and saw what was wrong with the system as well and he figured maybe there's something we can do about this. So he got in contact with my father and through, through I'm sure through Dion, as well, he got in touch with guys like Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady and together they decided to form the, a, a, Métis Association. Actually it was the Métis Association of Alberta at the time. That's what it turned out to be anyway. So the majority on that was involved in that Malcolm Norris, Brady and my father, and of course, my grandfather, being as influential as he was certainly was involved as well. One of the

things that I guess that people are not aware of is that my father when he got involved he just pretty well went at it full time but he neglected his, his blacksmith shop and, and went at it full time. Because these people were dedicated, you know, they were committed to help the cause and weren't at all interested in any political gain on, on their part, or any monetary gain, particularly. They went at it, you know, with the, with the, committed to the cause you might say. And one of the things that they, that I learned from them because they always stressed it was never accept money from government because if you do then you'll be under control of the government and you'll never be able to accomplish things that you really want to accomplish because you will be dictated to by government. So in order to accomplish what they did, and I must say it was quite the accomplishment because it was probably the, the largest land take over by Métis or Métis organization and, and, you know, in the history of Canada. They were quite fortunate in be able to attain this, this land set aside for the Métis people. But they did it on their own and how they did it was they would hold dances, concerts and things like that to raise money. Mind you people were poor then, you know, there wasn't a hell of a lot of money that could be earned even doing that. You know, maybe 5 or 10 cents here, a dime there, a nickel, another nickel here and they would hold pie socials and things like that and concerts and charge. I remember I was about, oh I must have been about seven years old at the time and I got involved in one of the concerts and they used to make up, make it up themselves what, you know, how to go about, they didn't take it from a, from a book, you know, here's how you run

the thing. And there was half a dozen of us kids and some guy asked us what we would like to be. Of course, one kid wanted to be a fireman, and another kid wanted to be a doctor, some kid wanted to be a trapper and when it came to me, of course, this is all, you know, arranged before hand, ahead, when it came to my turn, I was the last, I says "I wanted to be the President of the Half-Breed Association of Alberta." Course this is the kind of thing that...

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah...

**Frank Tomkins:** ...got quite an ovation...

**Ron Laliberte:** Oh yeah.

**Frank Tomkins:** ...because they were building up the ...

**Ron Laliberte:** Yeah.

**Frank Tomkins:** ...the, the momentum of, of the cause, you might say, people, and people really, really were behind the, behind the movement. Cause in those days there was nothing, absolutely nothing.

**End Time: 10:22:35.06**