

## **Barbara Bruce: Metis Entrepreneur**

This Michif-speaking Metis entrepreneur was born in St. Laurent, Manitoba. She is the daughter of Jeanne Perrault and Arthur Bruce. At home the family spoke French and a Cree-Saulteaux Michif. She is currently employed as Vice President of Marketing at Tribal Councils Investment Group of Manitoba Ltd. (TCIG) and is the President of the TCIG Charitable Foundation. In late 2008 she was appointed as a member of the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board for a term of one year.

Her previous professional positions include: Co-Owner and Director of Blue Sky Planners and Consultants, President of Winds of Change Consulting, Executive Director of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and of the Manitoba Métis Federation, Chair of the Province of Manitoba's Communities Economic Development Fund, and owner of a number of businesses.

Barbara has served on the Board of Directors of over two-dozen organizations, was a director of the Top 40 under 40 National Awards out of Toronto, and has served with the Manitoba Chapter of Canadian Women in Communications. In 1993, she received the *Manitoba Human Rights Achievement Award* for her work in employment and cross-cultural training.

Barbara is the middle child of eleven children. Her family was very poor; they lived in a two-room house until they moved to a larger home, which had only four rooms and four cots. Barbara's favourite childhood activities were picking berries with her family and swimming and skating on Lake Manitoba.

Every day she had to walk two miles to school. As a young Metis woman she entered a Roman Catholic-run education system that did not encourage Metis culture or traditions. The Nuns, all Quebec born or from other local French-Canadian centres, tried to teach young Barbara and the other Metis students that their language, Michif, was a poor and unacceptable form of French or a "patois." This type of environment made her more inward looking as a child but it also made her work harder to prove to the Nuns that she was a talented person, despite her Metis heritage. At one time, everyone in her community was ashamed of being "part-Indian," and Barbara was no exception.

One day she noticed an old photograph on the wall and asked a Nun in the school library who it was. The Nun said it was Louis Riel, leader of the Metis people. From that day onwards, Barbara became proud of her Aboriginal heritage.

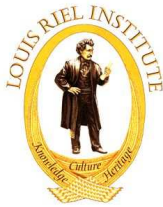
At age fifteen she contracted tuberculosis, a disease that has killed many Aboriginal people since its introduction to North America several centuries ago. Barbara had the disease in her right foot, not in her lungs as was more common. She had to go to Winnipeg to recuperate. Despite the fact that most of the other patients in the sanatorium were Native, she was lonely and did not like the city. After being cured of her illness Barbara attended the University of Winnipeg and eventually got used to living in an urban setting.

As an adult, Barbara held several positions with the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF). This allowed her to travel to many Metis communities across Manitoba. She noticed that the artwork produced in these communities had no market. Eventually, she founded a retail store known as Northern Traditions, and then Northwinds Art Company, both of which specialized in selling Native artwork and crafts. In 1997-98 she worked with the Tribal Investments Group of Manitoba to organize "Spirits in the Sun," the first

Canadian Aboriginal arts festival which was held in Scottsdale, Arizona in February of 1998.

Barbara has wholeheartedly embraced her Native heritage, taking the name “Thunder Bird Woman.” Her drive also led to her being appointed as Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Aboriginal Business. Barbara’s most recent work for MMF (Metis Women of Manitoba) was completion of the study and final report “Needs Assessment of Residential School Experiences of Metis Women in Manitoba.” Barbara was a participant in a major Status of Women Canada research report, *North American Indian, Metis and Inuit Women Speak about Culture, Education and Work*. She has been honoured by Sagkeeng First Nation for her work in human and economic development and was presented with an eagle feather.

In her leisure hours she earned a second degree Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do. Her commitment to social justice was acknowledged internationally when in 1994, she was asked to be part of a team of peace monitors and election observers during the South Africa elections. She has also been contracted to work in such diverse locations as Fiji and Australia.



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