

Billyjo DeLaRonde Interview, May 29, 2010

Interview by Darren Prefontaine
Transcribed by Kayla Morrison

Darren Préfontaine (DP)—Who are you and where are you from?

Billyjo DeLaRonde (BD)—My name is Billyjo DeLaRonde, and I am from Manitoba.

DP—Who are your parents and grandparents?

BD—My (Daniel) father's parents were Magloire DeLaRonde and Magloire DeLaRonde's father was Louis DeLaRonde who was married to Judile Morin who was the daughter of Antoine Morin and Pélagie Boucher which come from this Green Lake area. Louis, Judile's husband, his father was Louis DeLaRonde Sr. He is from the Red River community, Métis community. On my mother's mother side ... oh as well my father's mom was Adeline Chartrand and her parents were William Chartrand and Sophie Genaille. William's father was Bacheese (Baptiste) Chartrand and Louise (?), an Indian woman. Sophie Genaille's parents were Pierre Genaille, a French Canadian from Quebec, and his wife was Charlotte Lafleur, which was from around Île-à-la-Crosse. On my mother's side, my mom was Lizzy (Elizabeth) Campbell, her mother was Élise Richard and her parents were William Richard and Madeleine (?), an Indian woman. And her Father was John Campbell and John Campbell's father was Joseph Alexander Campbell and we can trace that ancestry back to Scotland. So that's my background I guess is a lot of Plains Cree, Anishinabe, French, and Scottish.

DP—How did your family make a living traditionally?

BD—I guess like any Métis family they took advantage of every opportunity they could get. My father did everything from hunting, trapping, fishing, raising cattle, raising horses, managing a multi-million dollar fishing and store operation for another fellow. My mother did a lot of the traditional stuff of running a household. We come from a family of 16. So she also would hire the local Métis women from around the community to come and help her because it was such a large operation that my father was running.

DP—So you have 15 siblings?

BD—Yes, there were 11 boys and 5 girls.

DP—Do you or any of your family members speak any Aboriginal languages?

BD—Yes, I speak several Anishinabe languages. The more that you learn Aboriginal languages, the easier it becomes to learn them. A lot of them are very related; for

example, the Plains Cree, the Kinistino Cree, the Swampy Cree, the Muskego Cree, the Anishinabe, the Ojibway, and Chippewa. They are very close languages. Yes, I speak them.

DP—No Michif though?

BD—Yes, I speak Michif as well.

DP—So language and culture are very important to you as a Métis person. It is one of the cornerstones of your identity. Did people from your community traditionally speak all these languages all the time or did they speak English or French?

BD—There's a funny story about my community that one of the people, the first inhabitants of my community which was called Baie-des-Canards which was been changed to the English version of Duck Lake. It was bay of the ducks, Baie-des-Canards. There was a fellow that drifted into town by the name of Bob Jones and he was a black person. When he observed in the community that nobody spoke English, that everybody either spoke Michif, French, Saulteaux or Cree, low and behold, he declared himself to be the first white man in Duck Bay because he spoke English.

DP—You had a lot of fond memories growing up in Duck Bay?

BD—Oh, very much so. I didn't think that there were other people out there. I only thought that there were Indian people and Métis people, and that they were the majority in the world. That's the way I grew up 'cause I always thought that there were no others but then you would see the teachers and the nuns and the priests and they were white, Caucasian people. They were the minorities. So there were never any problems with racial identity or who you were because you were the majority. They changed when I left the community.

DP—Did the non-Aboriginal people discriminate against the Métis/First Nations in your community?

BD—No, they didn't because of the dynamics of how groups operate. When you're the majority, it gives you a sense of power and belonging. And so when minorities try and dominate their... (Interruption)

Continued...

DP—So you grew up in the community of Duck Bay. Now, I know a lot of very committed Métis people came out of Duck Bay like political people, activists, and cultural people. We work with a lot of some people from Duck Bay. Was there a strong sense of community activism in the community, to make things better?

BD—I think that when the community started realizing the impact of the larger society coming into the community and coming into not only in my area but

probably throughout Western Canada, that they begin to hear alarm bells. For example, why is all of this fish being harvested and taken out of our community and what are we getting? One cent a pound on pickerel, that's crazy. Same thing with logging. Why are all of these logs moving out? So people started becoming active, and started organizing and started asking questions, why? Why?

DP—So what was your first memory of political activism in Duck Bay? When you were a small child, what do you remember?

BD—I remember going to hunt with my father. He was sick, probably one of his last moose hunts, and he had brought a moose down. And a game warden came by and asked him “Daniel, where is your moose licence for this moose?” And I remember him putting his hand up and making a fist and saying “here is my licence.” And the game warden not saying nothing saying, “Well enjoy your meat then.”

DP—So that's your first memory then?

BD—Yes that's my first memory of someone asserting their Aboriginal rights.

DP—Did any of your family members take part in the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) or First Nations or mainstream politics?

BD—Very few of them. They're not politically interested, although I got brothers that run for community council, and got elected. My first memory of the MMF when it was being formed in 1967 at the Marlborough Hotel in Winnipeg, I was one of a few students that were taken and asked to go. We had been moved to a residential kind off school which was Frontier Collegiate up in Cranberry Portage. Every Caucasians and non-Indians were sent there. Every Métis I guess in northern Manitoba ended up at Frontier Collegiate. I was one of the students picked to go, and I remember the two guys that ran for president, a guy by the name of Tom Eagle and Adam Cuthand. It is interesting; their names just reflect their background. They only had one microphone so whenever somebody would speak the Chairman would say “Hey could you go pass that microphone to that person?” Tom Eagle, I guess was getting a bit stressed there and he wanted the microphone. I had to take a washroom break and I remember coming out of the washroom and Tom Eagle is kinda bellowing out “Where is that running mike?” That was my first experience with Métis political activity.

DP—And Mr. Cuthand was the first president of the MMF right?

BD—Yes that's right; Mr. Cuthand was the first president of the MMF.

DP—After that point, was the MMF quite active in Duck Bay?

BD—It was low key. It was low key because the community you have to remember that in 1874/1875 the community signed Treaty 4. It's called the Swan Lake

Adhesion. And Duck Bay was created as a reserve. And then eventually, we have to be clear, if you sign the signatories they are all half-breeds or Métis who signed the treaty, and so it's only through a process that they lost their reserve, and they created a Métis community. So I guess you can say the community was there, and the reserve was created around the Métis community, and so in that sense they didn't necessarily use the word Métis, they just called themselves half-breeds and they exercised their treaty rights.

DP—And everyone, First Nations and Métis, they intermarried. They're all family and kin.

BD—Yes, they were all homogenous, they were all one group, and so I think they had that clear understanding from Treaty 4 because towards the end of Treaty 4 there was a question asked by one of the negotiators, the Gambler, and he says, "What about our Métis, our half-breed brothers?" And the federal, government, negotiator says, "We will treat the half-breeds equally with the red people." So I think given that, that's why they would allow the community of Duck Bay to sign the Treaty even though they knew that these were half-breed people because in Treaty 4 they are guaranteed equal rights.

DP—When did you become involved with the MMF?

BD—As I said earlier, I was 15-years-old, in grade 9, and I started going to meetings and this is one of the first meetings I went to in the formation of the Manitoba Métis Federation.

DP—What positions did you first hold with the MMF once you took part with them?

BD—I was a Secretary of a Local and a Vice-Chair of a Local and then the Chairman of a Local, and from there I got involved in the administration, then became an Executive Director, then became a Principle Secretary during the Meech Lake discussions, and then I became the President of the Manitoba Métis Federation.

DP—So pretty much every position leading up to President you've held?

BD—Yes.

DP—What were some of the issues that concerned the MMF during your time with the MMF? And do you think they have been addressed?

BD—No, I don't think they have been addressed. I think it's difficult to see that expression, "You don't see the forest for the trees" you know? And sometimes when you are immersed into something you tend not to look at the bigger picture, the overall issues because you get involved in the day-to-day life of trying to better Métis people, better housing, better education and better opportunity, but then you almost forget—not forget, but you don't give as much attention to the bigger issues

of addressing the nationhood for example, addressing Aboriginal rights, addressing the exercise of those rights, understanding government, and understanding the difference between corporation and government, and being a nation as opposed to being a community. So I think those are not being addressed.

DP—Did the MMF have generally good relations do you think with the provincial government in Manitoba?

BD—I think it's adversarial.

DP—So, you would say that the federal government has had a better relationship with MMF during the course of the MMF's history?

BD—Yes, I would say that the federal government has had a better relationship.

DP—What were areas of concern for the MMF before and after you became President? I guess we talked a little about that. How long were you President? And what were your main accomplishments as President of the Manitoba Métis Federation? What would you do if you had to do it all over again as President of the MMF?

BD—First of all, I wouldn't do anything different. I would maybe, if anything, be a bit more patient. But, what were those accomplishments? Well, I think that I opened the eyes to a lot of people not only in the MMF but in the Métis National Council to become aware that they were a nation of people, and if they are paying lip service to it, then they should start exercising it, and begin a process of transforming the Manitoba Métis Federation Incorporated into the Manitoba Métis Federation, period. That we were not a corporation. That we were a government. So those were, I think, the big accomplishments.

DP—Now, in terms of what the larger society, its relationship with the Métis in Manitoba, I can think of one issue I think in the '80s and 90s that was really big, and that was the Louis Riel statue controversy. Were you involved in any of the negotiations to try to make right for the Métis community regarding the statue that was first put up in Manitoba of Louis Riel?

BD—Yes, in fact, that is a very interesting point, Darren. I was completely involved in the issue of the statue of Riel and I did a lot of research for this, for example, there was a guy by the name of Warren Jorgenson who said when the statue was unveiled, I think it was in 1970, when the statue was unveiled under the Ed Schreyer NDP government. When it was unveiled, Warren Jorgenson, Conservative member, of the Manitoba Legislature said, "The persecutors and prosecutors of Louis Riel must be smug and smiling tonight on this unexpected windfall." What he meant was that there was a twisted, naked statue of Louis Riel encased in two cylinder cement pillars. So I wanted to find out why the statue was made. So I went and seen the people who were responsible especially by the guy by the name of Lemay, Marcel

(Marcien) Lemay, and I talked to them and he said that he wanted to show that Riel had been stripped of power, and that he was naked, and that some people thought that he was a little bit touched, a little bit off the deep end, and that's why he was twisted, and he was imprisoned, and that's why they had these cylindrical cement walls around him. So I disagreed with him. I told him that the Riel of 1869-70 was the power in Manitoba. There was no doubt that the Métis under Riel's leadership were the only power in Manitoba. They had it all, there was nothing touched about him. He was the leader of the Métis government of Manitoba, and there was no jail. So this depiction of Riel was totally out of whack. So from that time on, I started to lobby even before I was president. I started to lobby to get the statue removed, and eventually I succeeded on May the 12, 1995, which was the birth date of Manitoba. The new statue that is there was officially unveiled, and there is a lot of symbolism in that statue.

DP—The new one?

BD—The new one. If you see there he is holding a scroll which is the *Manitoba Act* in his hand, and he is kinda being very forceful by saying to (he faces east by the way), to Ottawa like “In your face,” and in the back he has got a clenched stance, so either negotiate or force, so that's in there. He is dressed in his traditional, what you would call a business suit. He has moccasins which represents us, so his Indian heritage. He's got the Métis sash on, and it is the largest statue in Western Canada, and second only to Laurier's statue in Ottawa in Canada. I think it's 18 feet high or something. The golden boy was 13, and I wanted to beat the golden boy. So I think I under my leadership, I brought the new statue in Manitoba. Long after you and I are dead and gone Darren, that statue will still be there.

DP—And it is interesting to note that the children of Manitoba, when they decided on the holiday in February, they called it “Louis Riel Day,” and that was a decision made by all the children of Manitoba. So, that was a good legacy as well...

BD—I think you hit it right on the head there. I think that by the fact that the old statue was removed, and that there was a new statue there promoted pride and joy of the Métis people, and a truer representation of who Riel was, what he was I think had that effect on children because a lot of children would come there. We also on the inscription changed the name from a “rebellion” to a “resistance” for the first time, and I sat down with the minister who was in charge of Aboriginal affairs at the time, and we came to an agreement ... (with some) arm twisting, but we finally agreed “rebellion” to “resistance,” and it ended up being a good moment, but it was strange. I had run into some people, and they said, “They are doing something to that statue you, you built over there. You better go check.” Somebody phones me, (I'm) still President of the MMF. So I drove down there and there were these guys around there and they kinda got this hat on the statue. They somehow got somebody to climb up there and put a hat, a cap on his (head). So I says, “What are you guys doing here?” and then were saying, “Well, from what we know, we don't know much about this Riel, but it seems to us that he was like a Che Guevara. So I

guess these were people from Bolivia. They honour Che Guevara. So they kind of thought this Louis Riel guys must have been like a Che Guevara. They were doing an honour thing.

DP—That was interesting. Do you think that in Manitoba the non-Aboriginal society has a better view of Riel and Métis people since you came through the politics of the Métis community, have things changed for the better in that regard?

BD—Absolutely, I think they have. I believe that they have. Just for example, that one example of the statue. There was a woman that I hired for one week to sit there with that old statue, and (she) asked people what the statue represented, and there wasn't one person who said something good about the old statue. They said, "What is this monstrosity, who are they trying to insult here, what is this thing?" People would say that. But now since you switched that now you have the Father of Manitoba and dressed properly and properly acknowledged.

DP—I often wonder what would happen if people did that to a statue of John Diefenbaker, like the Lemay statue, or John A. Macdonald had a drinking problem. You know what I mean?

BD—Yes.

DP—How people would react to that. It's not until they themselves are in that position that they can understand, you know? I often wonder what would happen if say, for instance, you mentioned the statue of Laurier, if that had done that to him or to Macdonald. How differently people would have reacted?

BD—Yes, and I even went one step even further, and I said, that very question Darren. I said, "What would you do with Queen Victoria that is sitting up in legislative grounds here and stripped all her clothes off and had this wrinkly old lady sitting there." I said, "I don't think they would last very long." I said, "What if you had the statue of Jesus Christ with his cloth here, his loin cloth, and you took that off. How long would you think that thing would be up there?" And so it started sinking home about what we were saying but here is Riel naked, twisted, and you know, and his manhood hanging down.

DP—I guess we could move on to your current life. What's it like to be the chief of a First Nation, and what made you decide to run for Chief of the Pine Creek First Nation?

BD—I never had any intention of running for chief or being chief. It would take a long time to tell you, but in a nutshell, it is people who came to see me and asked me to move and be their chief and I told them, "I'm a Métis person, get somebody there from your reserve to run." And they said, "No, anybody can be chief. You don't have to be Indian to be chief. So we want you to be our chief." And so through a process and through the advice of Elders, I decided to say "okay," and I went to my dead

father's grave as well. See, my father died, like I said, when I was a young boy, and he is buried on that reserve, and so after this kind of process, I decided. And when I made that decision at the grave to run for chief, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to win. I knew it was going to happen. And it's a very humbling experience.

DP—So, you definitely identify as a Métis, and not as a First Nations, or do you do both?

BD—I think that I am certainly not a First Nations person. I guess, if you want to call me Métis in the English language it's fine. I identify as an Anishinabe person, and I am comfortable with that because I think that society generally, even today, still wants to impose its English language, its French language, its English traditions, its French traditions, its "Europeanness" on Aboriginal people. And, for example, they used to say, "Well, the English half-breeds are all ugly and the French half-breeds are all pretty." And it depends who was writing, right? But they never understood that maybe one sister would marry an English person and the other sister would marry a French. They never acknowledge the Indian side of our lives, eh? So I identify as an Anishinabe, and feel comfortable with that which, by the way, Anishinabe means "the people," a "human being."

DP—So, you'd be an Anishinabeg?

BD—Uh-hum.

DP—So, you would have no problem saying that I am a Michif and an Anishinabeg?

BD—Yes.

DP—But unfortunately, a lot of Métis people have a hard time admitting that they have all this different ancestry. That they are Métis, but at the same time, why can't they be First Nations? Like you said, you have French Canadian and yet a lot of Métis could say that they have Canayen (French-Canadian) ancestry, and there are Métis people in Manitoba that are Francophones who aren't Métis people but it is always these identities that others impose on Métis people. That's always been the problem, hasn't it?

BD—Yes, and I think also that people have to educate themselves and, for example, they will say like this morning I asked a young man, "Are you an Aboriginal?" "I'm not sure, I know my mom's was Métis and my grandmother was a Treaty, but I'm not sure." So they don't understand the question, "What is an Aboriginal?" The other reason I think that Métis have, for the lack of a better term, an identity crisis is you take the census of 1869 and you take two communities, one hour North of Winnipeg is Fort Alexander and one hour South of Winnipeg is Ste. Agathe. Both in 1869, were 100% Métis communities. The census of 1874, Fort Alex is 100% Indian; Ste. Agathe is 100% French. You said, "what happened to the Métis? Where

are they?" And what happened was because Garnet Wolseley, that his expedition came into Manitoba to what, save the settlers from Indian war and attacks? The truth was that they were there to come and annihilate the Métis, whichever way process. So those Métis who were in Fort Alex, north they had darker skin, they had darker hair, they spoke a Native language, an Indian language, so their parents told them, you will now be Indians. You will say you are Indians, don't ever admit that you are Métis; they are hunting Métis right now in Winnipeg. Don't you admit you are Métis, you're just an Indian. Just say that's what you are. And then when the Indian Agent came around documenting Indian people, all those Métis in Fort Alex were registered as Indians. There are some interesting names there. You do the research or whoever wants to. Read about this. Look at the Fontaine name, you'll see. Look under (D. N.) Sprague's book, *The First Métis Families of Manitoba (The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation)*, and look under the name Fontaine. Now you look south at Ste. Agathe, the other Métis community. They were lighter-skinned, lighter eyes, and spoke French or Michif. So, they were told, "You are not Métis anymore, you are French. You are French people, and don't admit that you are Métis because you will be persecuted."

DP—So then they became Canayen?

BD—That's right. There you go. Then the process started, right? And so to this day, the original purpose hiding being Métis was to save the nation, to save your identity, and you had to do that because you were being persecuted, you were going to be annihilated, and in that process, that process was lost to a point where people were ashamed to admit because they were taught to be shamed, and then same with Indian people. They said, "No, no, we're not Indians, we're Métis." Come on, give me a break, look at them.

DP—That partially explains why recent census the Métis population has really swollen in Western Canada cause a lot of these Métis are coming back.

BD—Yes.

DP—What other positions have you held in public life other than being the chief and the president? Which one of these has been the most rewarding?

BD—I've held several positions. I was mayor of a community, a Métis community. I guess the most rewarding one was I was Chairman of Frontier's School Division, the very school that I was sent to when I was 15 to take my high school. I guess a comparison would be with Northern Lights School Division in Saskatchewan. It was an administrative act, with the stroke of a pen, that created Frontier School Division; larger than a lot of countries in the world, and if you lived in that district, then you would go to that place north of the Pas called Cranberry Portage, and you would go to school there. Eventually, I became chairman of that school board, and I think under my leadership I created an actual, recognizable school board like any other school board in Canada or Manitoba that functions with a chairman and board of

directors that are elected through a process of community consultation, and they today are the governing body of Frontier School Division. Whereas before I came there, they had an official trustee appointed by the government like an Indian agent.

DP—So it's Métis/ First Nations people determining the education of their children?

BD—Yes, at the community level.

DP—And that you think is a model for education in Manitoba and Western Canada to have Métis community, First Nations community people determine their children's education? Because obviously the system hasn't worked up until this point.

BD—Absolutely, and also if you do it at the community level, then you address those issues at that level where it affects people the most. The people that are the most affected are the children, and then the next one are their parents, and they live in those communities. So if you start giving that local control to those communities they know what is required, and then they have a sense of ownership and belonging, and at the same time, you also have to be careful that you do not create institutions that become self-serving where, for example, the governor and body serves itself as opposed to serving the community. So you gotta have like checks and balances.

DP—Have conditions improved for Métis and First Nations since you entered public life?

BD—Oh yeah, absolutely, and I'll just tell you a little funny story I guess that says it all. One of the Métis Elders, and identify with this, was invited to a school to go and speak to Indian and Métis children, so while he was speaking ... and this is in Pine Creek, and Pine Creek is now the hub of all the education from grade 9 upward instead of sending kids to school it told you about in Cranberry Portage up in north of the Pas. They can now go from Duck Bay, and seven minutes they are at the school, and then they go home. Same thing with Camperville, because there was a real mixture of Métis and Indian children. So they invited the Métis Elder to come and speak, so he asked the teacher, "What am I going to talk about?" The teacher said, "Well whatever you want." So I guess the teacher said, "Well we are going to..." The Elder says, "Well I am going to tell you children what it was like when I was growing up. First of all, there was no cell phones, there was no telephones, there was no lights, no light switches, there was no washrooms, there was no faxes, there was no computers" ... and on and on, right? So he went through all this stuff. "There was no cars, there was no roads," and all of this stuff. So at the end I guess he had a few minutes to... the teacher said, "Maybe the children will ask you some questions." So he said, "There was a little guy at the back going like this, eh?" (Snapping his fingers) So finally the teacher got to him and kind of said, "Ok, what do you want to ask the Elder." He kind of stuttered a bit and he says, "Wa-wa-wa-wa was there any dinosaurs in them times?" So he says, "There are changes, there has been changes." I think the greatest change is the intangibles like the pride of beginning to

understand who you are and your contributions to Canada, what your people did, and that your leaders like Gabriel and Louis were not crazy, that they weren't war mongers, but that they were standing for something. And they're beginning to learn those things like through the Gabriel (Dumont) Institute, and the others, like the Native Studies departments. They are beginning to learn that. So there is change, and with that kind of nourishment to our people, they begin to take pride, and they begin to understand what shame is, and that they have nothing to be shamed of.

DP—Where would Canada, as a country, need to improve in its relationship with Métis, First Nations, and I guess Inuit as well?

BD—I guess what has to be done is two things that would specifically address the question. One is that the government of Canada has to acknowledge and live up to the Treaties that they signed with Aboriginal people. Secondly, the government of Canada has to specifically accept that the *Manitoba Act* is a treaty between the Métis and Canada, just like in modern-day language, the Free Trade Agreement is a treaty between Canada and the United States. So, I had the opportunity to find a write up ... by a reporter from the *Globe*. That was before the *Globe and Mail* were one paper: there was the *Globe* and then the *Mail*. This was the *Globe*, and this guy says, "After a lot of red tape, I am finally standing in this cell in front of this man who is probably going to have his last sunset. It's his last sunset today." And he said, "I expected him to be excitable considering that he was going to hang." Talking about Louis Riel. And he says, "On the contrary, he was very calm," and he says, "The only time he got excited was when he talked about the Manitoba question." And then he quotes Riel as saying ... "At the time of the *tapis* (clothe or fabric), at the time of the treaty, what was on the *tapis*?" Meaning, to be talked about, you know? It's a French expression, Michif expression. He said, "We were promised one seventh of the lands, and as our country grew, and as Canada grew, that we would continue to enjoy one seventh of those lands." So what he was saying is that when we started with Manitoba, it was a postage-stamp province, a very small province, but as it expanded, so would the ownership of lands to the Métis people. And then he said, "And we were also promised certain rights," And he says, "Not one iota of those promises were ever kept." And he said, "In fact, the entire *tapis* was swept away." And *tapis* means treaty, the entire treaty. So, in Riel's understanding the *Manitoba Act* is a treaty between the Métis people and Canada, nothing more, nothing less. And then he says something like, "And they think I am insane." But then he says, "In about a hundred years, we will find out who was crazy because they signed the treaty in an indelible manner, meaning it can never be changed." And if you see, look at how much problems they had trying to change the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord, it just keeps falling apart. And I think that's what Riel was talking about. That the rights of the Métis are enshrined in the 1867 Constitution in the *Manitoba Act*, and they can never be changed, and I think in time Métis people will realize what those rights are, and will exercise them because they are on strong, legal and constitutional ground.

DP—And many, many court cases to follow.

BD—Yes.

DP—Who are your Métis heroes, and why are they your heroes?

BD—First, I guess, I would say the first one is Cuthbert Grant and Bostonnais Pangman. They call it the “Massacre of the Seven Oaks,” but if you look at it, it’s the only place where the Métis kicked the ass of the Europeans, and it’s the only place where they became a nation, they understood nationhood. And I think there was seventeen Caucasians killed and no Métis, no Indians, and they asserted their rights. So I think that people should learn about Cuthbert and learn about Bostonnais.

DP—So you think going back to those original Métis nationalists, and like bringing back the Métis anthem, like the “Battle of Frog Plain,” and honoring that tradition, is the way that Métis should go?

BD—I think so. I think that they need to. I mean, you know, we make a big issue of Batman which is a comic character or Superman, and you know, people and kids really believe that these people exist, but they don’t. You know, it’s only creations, but Cuthbert Grant lived and so did Bostonnais Pangman, and both of these people have their roots through Duck Bay. I guess the other one, the other hero, for me is ... and I can’t comment yet because I still don’t understand ... Gabriel. Gabriel to me is an enigma, and I hope to understand him. Riel to some degree, I thought that he made some strategic errors in his decision-making processes, but that wasn’t an issue so I don’t know why he did some of the things he did. And lastly, I guess, my mother and my father are my greatest heroes because how can you raise sixteen children, you know? And still be able to raise your kids, and raise them to learn respect.

DP—What lessons would you like to see young Métis people learn from your political experience?

BD—One thing, I guess, that if I can tell any young Métis person, and the younger the better, to never stop believing in themselves, and no matter what the odds are, if they want to change something, if they want to accomplish something, the biggest obstacle is not to believe in what they are thinking. If they believe in themselves, and believe that they can accomplish what they choose to and put all their energy into doing that, they will accomplish it. There is no doubt. I have done it, and I know. Sometimes things were so insurmountable, an example, removing that ugly statue and replacing it with an appropriate one. Others tried before me, and it never would have got done, but once I made up my mind that that statue was going to go, and I wasn’t even the President of the MMF when I made that decision. I started eating, drinking, sleeping that idea, always at the back of my mind, always pushing forward, and I got it done. So if there is anything that I could leave young children, young Métis people, young Aboriginal people is to believe in themselves, and to believe that they can make a difference, no matter how difficult.

DP—So, it's twenty years in the future, what will be the position of Métis people in Manitoba and Canada? Where do you see the Métis Nation in twenty years?

BD—There is two futures out there Darren, and it might be anywhere from 20 to 50 years but we're near. I don't think we have approached the forks yet, but the forks are coming and I don't know when that's going to be. I know it's not going to be the next two, three years, but it might be five, ten years. But there is a fork coming and the fork, once you walk down your shoes, there is no turning back. And these are the possible futures in twenty years you say; I'll say twenty to fifty years, here's the possibility. Number one, the one that is least palatable to me is that the Métis will be assimilated. They will become cheer boards, become little fund raising groups, little activity groups. They will have lost their identity. They will not operate anymore cohesively as a group. They will be dispersed and assimilated, and more and more become known as general Canadians. That's one. The second will be that the Métis will take their rightful place in Canada, and they will be a force, they will exercise their birthrights as a nation. They will be acknowledged as Canada's true original Canadians, and they will flourish. They will not be doing this on the backs of other people, of other nations. They will be doing it on their own strength, and that they will have had the tenacity and the patience to have convinced the rest of Canada that they are legitimate, legitimately belong ... and that is in the hands of the major leadership of today. If they could address that big issue, it will decide where they go on those forks because it is coming. And I guess the little story I have with that is an older woman, an Elder, told me a story about she was talking to some young people, very up and coming Métis, and she would answer these questions. And this one young Métis man came and said, "Okay old woman, I have a bird in my hand, now tell me, old woman, if this bird is alive or dead." And the old woman knew if she said, "The bird is alive." He'd go like that (crush the bird) and say, "There you go, dead." And if she said, "The bird is dead," he would open his hands and say, "You're wrong, the bird is alive." The bird would fly away. So, she said, "Young man, the bird is in your hands." So that's what I tell the Métis people.

DP—The future belongs to the Métis people.

BD—Yes, especially young people, and especially I would think the artists, and the educators, and the storytellers. That's where the hand is and those artists, educators and storytellers can concentrate on the young ones, then we will take the right road at the fork.

DP—This, I think, could very well be possible given the demographics in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I think long after you and I leave this world, majority population in these two provinces will be Métis and First Nations so perhaps this dream can come true?

BD—Yes, and you're right, and there is no doubt that that's going to happen in Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and probably in Alberta, that the majority will be

Métis. But the question is, will those Métis be identifying as Métis or will they be identifying as general Canadians? Will they be assimilated or will they be able to hold their heads up as Métis?

DP—So, a real federation would mean Canada has ten provinces, three territories, but we'd recognize people like say Inuit, Métis, First Nations, Québécois, Acadians, and whoever else, that we are all part of this federation. That would be the dream.

BD—Yes, you see and that was Riel's idea. You see, when Riel went to the seminary to become a priest and he left because of things happening in Manitoba, his idea, and it became even more clear when he came to Saskatchewan, his idea was that the Atlantic provinces would represent the Irish and the Scottish peoples, the Orkneys. Quebec would represent the French peoples, Ontario would represent the English peoples, Manitoba would represent the Métis and the Indian people would also have a place in Western Canada and he said, "We will invite the Germans to come in and have their representation. The Ukrainians will have their representation." So if you look at what's going on in Canada, it is exactly what Riel was talking about. It's just that it hasn't gelled yet. And it is a federation.

DP—Maybe, it will become the federation Louis Riel wanted?

BD—Yes.

DP—Do you have anything else to add?

BD—I appreciate talking to you Darren, and if people want to follow this up, if you put this in your magazine, if you wish, I'm honored to give you the permission to give them my phone number, and my address if they want to speak on these issues.

DP—Okay, thank you very much for that. *Marsii. Meegwetch.* Thank you.

BD— *Meegwetch.*