

Interview: Louis Dorion
Interviewed by: Leah Dorion-Paquin
Date: June 8, 2000

Practicing Cree Language Development

Leah: What was it like growing up in Cumberland House and when were you born?

Louis: It was great. I will answer in English for a few sentences just to let people know what we are talking about. We will be talking about my lifestyle growing up in Cumberland House. My daughter was asking me some questions. She wanted to know how it was like in my younger days, and ah, I am very happy to have this conversation with me. She is going to give an oral presentation. She is going to record it and transcribe it in books so people can read what is being documented. We are doing this here this evening and most of my conversation will be in Cree but some of my information will be in English for information, so they can at least have an idea of what I am talking about...so people can understand what I am talking about. It is an outpost hospital. There was two rooms in the hospital, that's where the hospital had a nurse, no doctor. It was a very small health center but it had all the conveniences for keeping the patients for short term and for giving births. What was it like growing up in Cumberland? There was a lot of us children that grew up in Cumberland. It was a small community. It only had a population of about 1000 people. Every time something happened in the community, dancing, whatever, every one came around because it was a big family and community affair. Well what I am trying to say is that the parents really looked after their children in Cumberland when I was young. It is different now, but in my growing up years, the family was very close knit [it was a reciprocal system for survival, families interrelated with one another]

Leah: What do you remember most about your mother? And what is her name?

Louis: My mother, that's your grandmother Leah, my mother's name was Mariah Dorion. That was one of my Grandfather's daughters, Jack Dorion. His name was John, but every one in the community called him John [Jack]. My mother she was small but she took really good care of us children, and that is just the way it was. Families were close knit back home. One thing about the family, my mother, she always looked after her children very carefully and kept them learning and kept us well fed. A family, that's what it was like in a northern settlement. And what do I remember about my Grandfather? I was brought up by my Grandfather. I always accompanied him wherever he went. I always helped in the activities, whatever it was fishing, hunting, trapping, moose hunting, always accompanied my Grandfather. What do I remember about my Grandfather the most was his love of the outdoors. I was raised by my Grandfather. My father didn't survive the battle of Normandy and he got killed in the Second World War and he is buried in the military cemetery in Europe at Caen, France. What I remember most about my Grandfather is the type of person he [loved outdoor camping, a very quiet and carefree lifestyle during the summer seasons, earned his money from the bush economy] was. My Grandfather never regretted a lot of the things he did. He was in the First World War, 1914 to 1918. My grandfather was one of a lot of people who went to enlist for the First World War. That was because his friends, his growing up buddies, Tom Settee, William Greenleaf, Felix Fosseneauve, had entered. The wounds that he had left him a little crippled up, it left him with lumbago that he had when the seasons changed, in the spring and the fall there were pretty evident but he knew they were coming every year. He'd be getting these pains, he called it Lumpage – took TRC pills for his medication. My grandfather was a really good hunter. He was also a very good trapper and a good fisherman. We spent two summers near the McDonald's Bay [an inlet] at Sturgeon Lake logging. That was how we cut pulp. When I was 13 years old we also cut pulp; that was the last time we cut pulp with my grandfather was at Sturgeon Landing right in the community of Sturgeon landing in 1955. We

cut pulp and stored it in racks over there and they'd haul it in the winter time by train [Cat train through the bush] to The Pas. We used to do a lot of muskrat trapping in the spring and in the fall. They used to trap a lot of beaver. Suggi Lake [Suggi is a pelican in the Cree language]...that's where the Pelican's are...that's where we went two summers in a row to go dig Seneca root at Suggi Lake. We set up our tent over there, we set up our camp and that's where we spent the summer. It was a wide open area, old camp site, and we'd dry it camping so we could put it in bags. These were actually my teenage years, they were the best years of my life, I really enjoyed them. We didn't have to go to school, it was summer break. We could go prairie chicken hunting and stuff because it was nice and we always carried a 22 calibre rifle.

Leah: Dad, describe your home, what it looked like, the development of the rooms, what was in the rooms and how you came, got the home in the first place?

Louis: Well, our home was situated in probably the heart of the community, right in the middle of the community, we were situated half-ways between the Big Stone River and the other end of the community toward the Anglican Church, pretty well centered, pretty close anyway. And our home was actually a big log house, a big two story log house, it used to be a fur trade post by Bert Howell, and Bert Howell was an independent fur trader in the fur trade and my grandfather bought it when he was a young feller after he came back [from WWI] and got married and needed a place to stay, so he bought it back in the 30s from Bert Howell when he went back east after he left Cumberland. HBC was the sole fur trading post in Cumberland after that. Our home it was pretty big because it was an old outpost [store], big by Cumberland standards, I'd say the room itself, the building itself would be about 16-17 feet wide and 20-24 feet long. That's not very big but by the standards at the time, that was quite big and it had a nice lean-to that we developed into a kitchen that was the other part of the store, that was pretty

good to, it was pretty wide, it was probably about 12 feet wide so it was kind of a separate storage area, it was really nice. It had an upstairs, a second floor with stairs going up, that's where it used to be a storage area for Bert, they kept the area there, so we wouldn't get too overcrowded in the store. We had a storage area, we had a big log cabin, we had them plastered with mud. That kept the people inside comfortable so they wouldn't be uncomfortable. That mud plaster cut down the draft [during the cold winter months]. The house that was built for a trading post originally, the walls were all treated with 1x4's, that's the way he looked after his building, he developed it into a trading post. That's where we had the kitchen in that little lean-to, with a big McLary stove from the Eaton's catalogue or the Hudson's Bay. It was delivered by barge in the summer time [by a fish company called Booth Fisheries, this same barge traveled hauling fish and freight to Moose Lake in Manitoba]. In the winter time the transportation was a little different. They had a bombardier that the Hudson's Bay contracted to work for them, to haul freight for them and they also hauled the mail. They had a nice little run for them, they came once a week. We could have some movies one night a week at the legion hall, Thursday nights. Thursdays and Saturdays at the legion hall, everybody looked forward to the movies, old westerns, the children all sat on the floor close to the front because the hall wasn't very big. They had a bunch of wooden benches, that's where all the elders and older people sat, on the benches, they had the luxury seats, and we sat on the floor. 5 cents a cup of Kool-Aid, called HIPS, mixed into an empty one gallon wine jug. We looked forward to these Thursday and Saturday nights when the legion would provide this entertainment. It was an evening out for the whole town.

Companthk – how people referred to the HBC

Suggi Lake – sassgew – sagahikan (Pelican Lake)

**Wapesiw-sipi – White Swan River – the river between Windy Lake
and Suggi Lake**