DON NIELSON

Don Nielson was one of the original organizers, with Malcolm Norris, of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan in 1964.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early organization of the Association: where and how meetings were held.
- Differences between Metis group in the north and south of the province.
- Norris's fight against government funding.
- Norris: his style, his health, his family, his relations with government and with the church.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Don Nielson - Nielson and Malcolm Norris were the two main figures in the birth of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan - the northern Metis organization. Norris considered Nielson the most promising prospective leader of the Metis. Nielson talks about the MAS and about Norris - the early days of organizing, Norris the man and leader, anecdotes, etc.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Don Nielson of Regina, formerly of Prince Albert, and who was active in organizing the first northern Metis Association. Don, you were with Malcolm right from the beginning on that. When did it first occur to you and Malcolm to start that organization? What was the motivation to get going on it?
Don: Well, I think it was a political-based thing that Malcolm had been involved with the NDP party/CCF party, for some time. Very shortly after Tommy Douglas came to power in 1944, Malcolm was brought over with Tommy Douglas and I think, like you stated, Morris Shumiatcher. Dr. Shumiatcher had something to do with that in bringing over Malcolm, a knowledgeable Indian person who spoke the language and who was dedicated to the cause and the plight of the Indian people and who, ever since the First World War, had been involved in obtaining the rights of the treaty Indians as well as the halfbreeds and Metis in Alberta. And he helped in forming the Indian Association of Alberta and definitely in the Metis Association of Alberta back in the twenties and thirties when they were organizing. I know he was jailed eleven times for going on Indian reserves and that. Him and Johnny Yellowfly.

Murray: That was in Alberta?

Don: Yeah. And he did a lot and he was involved in the Royal Commission on the Metis lands and that and the Metis claims in Alberta which eventually led up to the formation of the Metis colonies, the ten original Metis colonies in Alberta in 1939. And some years later, as you know, Malcolm himself by profession was a geologist. He wasn't only that. He was quite a politician. He knew his politics well. He grew up with it like every Indian does. And he was a die-hard socialist, fighting for the benefit of all people and not just any one sect of people. And I think this is primarily why the CCF, the socialist government, brought him over here, to help them understand the situation of the native people here which Malcolm knew also. And Malcolm was quick to move into the different regions and areas of the province in many different departments. And as you know, he was given ex-officio powers within the Tommy Douglas cabinet which brought a lot of backlash to Malcolm from a lot of the ministers and that at that time. Even at one case I can remember Malcolm saying, that he had to stand up and call them white racist supremacists right in the cabinet meeting, which was shot down by a lot of cabinet ministers. They really resented Tommy Douglas for that, for giving him the powers. But as time went on, they tried to form some organization back in the forties, not only in the north but in the south. There were meetings with different government departments and with cabinet ministers and that and there was some formation of memberships even in the north back in the forties. And even before then when the people were transferred from the south to the northern communities and that and promised some great land and everything else like that. The land of honey, as Malcolm used to call it. Here they hit the land of swamp and muskeg and mosquitoes and that. And I don't know, Malcolm had his own way of saying things and because he really understood. I was fortunate in meeting Malcolm over several different periods of time in the fifties and that. I knew of Malcolm quite some time ago but we never really became involved together at any
length of time because he was up in La Ronge and I was over teaching up that way and also living in Prince Albert, going to school in Saskatoon. But eventually we got back to Prince Albert and I was teaching school there and Malcolm was there then at that time.

Murray: What year would that have been?

Don: I would say that would be 1964. And it was in August I guess was actually when we came back to P.A. and we started really forming the Metis Association of Saskatchewan in the north. There was some formation in the south but actually...

Murray: Under Joe Amyotte, eh?

Don: Yes. Under Joe Amyotte I think at that time. There was really no meetings of the north and the south of the Metis and non-status Indian peoples. Even, at that time, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians was not very strong. And well, anyway, in Prince Albert the friendship centre had been going for quite some time. Malcolm Norris was involved in that friendship centre there also. And when I was teaching school in Prince Albert, the native people within the city of Prince Albert - that's treaty Indians, Solomon Sanderson and Danny Keshane, there was many treaty Indians in along with us halfbreeds and Metis and that - we formed together and we took control, entire control of the Prince Albert Indian/Metis Friendship Centre. It was the first time there was an all-native board of directors. And I was elected president at that time and we had a pretty good board. Malcolm never ran for the board of that. He had his own business with the mineral department of the province of Saskatchewan. And it happened that time, that summer, I believe it was April 22 when Ross Thatcher, in order to cross the house, the floor of the house and he became leader of the opposition, of the Liberal party. It was April 22, 1964 that he became the premier of the province. And also the NDP... and I guess there was a lot of hatcheting going on and that. And to play on the safe side, Ross Thatcher called a meeting of the people of native ancestry and the provincial government of Saskatchewan at that time and they held that big meeting in Saskatoon.

Murray: When was that meeting? Do you remember? Was it in the summer or...?

Don: No, it was in November. I believe it was in November, in the fall. I'm not too sure now, it was 1964. And there was quite a few hundred native peoples from across the province from all the sixty-nine, seventy bands, chiefs and councillors and from many, many different communities. Right now we have about 116 locals in the Metis Society of Metis and non-status Indians but at that time I don't think we had that much representation from all of - but we had many representatives from the far north, central and from the south. And it was those native people, that were involved initially before, that
were in attendance at that meeting. And during those three days or so that we were at the Bessborough, we were able to deliberate over many aspects of our situation. Not necessarily what the Liberal government or any government... but just our own plight.

Murray: Talking among yourselves?

Don: Talking among ourselves and discussing different issues, education, economic development, local control. And this is actually when the treaty Indians really started thinking about their own local control of schools and doing away with the residential schools and having their own schools on their own reserves. I remember Malcolm speaking for many, many great lengths of time on that. And the chairman of the meeting at that time, and he was the head chairman over the three days, was John F. Cuelenaere and he was the minister of, I believe they called it Natural Resources at that time. There was no DNS or northern Saskatchewan or that; it was just Natural Resources. And I can remember them putting Malcolm out of order many, many times because Malcolm would speak... First of all, he'd give a short talk in English explaining what he was going to say and he'd turn his back on the podium there and the ministers and them up in front and he'd turn and talk to the people whom he was addressing. And he really got them going and instigated them.

Murray: Would he speak in Cree then?

Don: In Cree, yes. He was speaking in Cree in that. And he went on and he was ruled out of order many times and even the people themselves told the chairmen and them to let him continue. And the ovations and the applause and that that he got, it was tremendous and the people were really moved by that. The old chiefs and them, and he went so far as to even scold some of the old chiefs and that for their lack of leadership and to lead their people on to independence from capitalism and control. And it's happening today, you know. Even today, maybe twelve years later, you can see the effects of that one meeting. At least I can always say that.

Murray: But it was quite an important meeting wasn't it, in the history of native organization?

Don: It was, it was. In the last fifteen years it was probably the greatest. It was the meeting to begin all meetings, I think, and to begin a lot of these things that Ahenakew and the FSI are carrying out and the Metis Society and Jim Sinclair are carrying out. Well, anyway, going back to, you asked about how did we really get going on that. Well, people from the meeting got together at that meeting in Saskatoon and a meeting was called for the non-status, non-treaty Indians - that's Metis and non-status Indians. And it was there and then we formed kind of a standing committee, coordinating committee, and it was from there that we went
ahead and organized locals throughout the north. The locals were being formed in the south but actually there was no direct relationship. There was some reason in Malcolm's mind and in the mind of a lot of peoples in the north why there was no union as yet. It seemed too far and too distant between the north and the south. Although the problems basically were the same, the situation and the communications and that were a little harder in the north, although we travelled much and we formed many locals. We had nineteen locals formed in the north within the first short while and there was another thirty-seven being formed, I can remember. And we held our first annual assembly in Prince Albert at the Hotel, Central Hotel, the Avenue Hotel in Prince Albert. And I believe there were fourteen of the nineteen locals. I believe there were fourteen that were formed and there was an executive formed. Malcolm was elected the president. There was one vice-president, Montgrande, I believe. And another vice-president, I believe it was Beaulieu from up around Canoe, and I was elected the secretary-treasurer, the first secretary-treasurer of the Metis Association. We registered it as the Metis Association of Saskatchewan, similar to that of the Alberta Metis Association. And that was in the summer of 1965 and that summer I had left....

Murray: That's when this meeting took place, eh?

Don: Yeah, it was in the summer. Pardon me, it wasn't in the summer, it was in the spring. I'm sorry, it was in the spring of 1965 and in the summer we had our second annual assembly actually and I was not there to attend but they reelected and at that time Rod Bishop had come home and he was involved in there. And from what I know right now and from what I see, that time sometime later that year, Dr. Howard Adams came home, back on the same, wherever he came from. No one even knew he existed at that time.

Murray: He was influenced by Malcolm too, I think.

Don: Yeah, very much so. Him being a socialist also. But he was more socialist than he was native, as it turned out to be. And Malcolm was a true Indian socialist. I don't care what you say or anyone says, that's the way I look at him and that's the way I've always seen him. He was a socialist but his people came first. And although with Howard, I think his party lines came first, his NDP party lines came first, rather than his native people. He went even so far as to instigate trouble and that among our own organization and leadership and our own objectives and that. But this was his political goal.

Murray: His ideology came before his commitment to the native people.

Don: Yes, his political ideology. And Malcolm had always stated to Rod and them never to join. That was his last statement that I remember him making, never to join to become
more powerful first in the north, unify strongly in the north because if we have it on a wider basis, it's going to be a little harder to keep together, at least in the beginning, in the initial stages. And eventually Malcolm proved true because once they did join, I think the Indian principles went down the drain a lot of them, when Howard became president and that. It was more publicity seeking or what have you. I don't even really know whether it was along the lines that Malcolm had hoped, you know. Complete economic independence for the native people and control of the natural resources in the north mainly is what he was thinking of.

Murray: And Howard was less interested in that did it seem when he was...?

Don: Well, he was more interested probably in working together in the north and the south. He could see the unity coming. Malcolm could see it too, long before him. I think he taught Howard probably everything he knew about the native people in Saskatchewan. Even though Howard came from Saskatchewan, Howard was never here. And the life he did grow up in, it was really never part of the native people, although he states it was. But over the years it proved out to be true what Malcolm said. Without complete control and the native people getting control of the natural resources and the economy in the north, if they don't do that first, there is no point in unifying with the south. Because the south have to work on their own too, because it was two different systems altogether. One was a farming land base in the south and in the north it was mainly natural resources, timber, mines, fishing, water, that sort of thing. It was actually two different things. There wasn't much farmland in the north where most of the native people live. The land would have to be cleared and everything else. But this was the timber rights and that Malcolm was thinking of, the mineral rights and everything else.

Murray: So these were the reasons that Malcolm was hesitating to join with the south?

Don: Yes.

Murray: There were two different kinds of situations.

Don: There was two different ideologies, political ideologies involved there too. Again Malcolm says the Liberals and the NDP were splitting the native people. Because a lot of the people in the south too were Liberals or whatever. They weren't socialist anyway. And a lot of them went along with the co-op farms, and yet in the background they were still holding hands with other political parties rather than with their own native people. And at many meetings, Malcolm would bring this up about holding hands in the background with other people and parties and all that rather than being unified as native people. And this was basically what his stand was.
Murray: He didn't have anything to do with political parties or governments?

Don: No, and he died doing this. I can remember it was shortly after our meeting with Thatcher and them and Malcolm had five more months to go before his retirement with the civil service and he was cut, chopped automatically. His pension was cut off completely. And I mean, that was Thatcher and Cuelenaere and them that did it. And the day that Cuelenaere had his heart attack and died, I never felt a bit sorry. The same as Thatcher.

Murray: They had their eye on Malcolm long before that meeting too probably, eh?

Don: They were deadly afraid of him, you know. Because Thatcher knew Malcolm and because Thatcher used to be with the NDP party and he disliked Malcolm even then because Malcolm was outspoken. Thatcher and them thought, "Well, you know, Malcolm, you're a halfbreed, you're an Indian, you should stay in your place. We don't give a shit what Tommy Douglas, what powers they gave you. You're still not in the government." And this really bugged their ass and you could feel it. Malcolm's got it written down in his books, in his diaries and this is why I am saying you should really try and get ahold of them because there is a lot of stuff in there. And letters, because every letter that Malcolm ever wrote, he kept carbon copies. And he's got them all. They are filed and everything else. I don't know what much more I can tell you. Other than he was a true friend. He'd help you out any way he could.

Murray: One of the things that Howard Adams mentioned was that Malcolm was dead against the Metis organization taking any money from government. Could you talk about that a bit?

Don: Well, this is exactly it. This was one of the reasons why Malcolm said no, no way. I can remember when we first formed, we never accepted any monies from anyone. I remember when we organized, we never asked no money from anyone. We either, you know, brought it out of our own pockets or when we had meetings, they passed around the hat and that. We had lunch and as long as we had gas money to get back... or if we didn't have gas or a car and that, we hitch-hiked. And that's about the way it was because it's true. Even today you see all the political parties, I mean political parties or political institutions among the native organizations and that. As soon as the government holds back money there is an upheaval. It's almost a crisis it seems, a psychological crisis within even the board of directors of the organizations. "Jeez, there is no money. What the hell are we going to do?"

Murray: And that's exactly what Malcolm foresaw was it?

Don: Exactly what Malcolm said. You know, if you have to kiss the ass to them for your own organization, there is no point in
it. Because once you start accepting funds and continuously to be dependent on government, they are going to control you. And this is what's happened.

Murray: But people didn't see that then did they, or not very many?

Don: Well, I don't know whether they didn't see it or not. I think it's more that, the old way that well, you know, if we don't accept money and if we don't get money from governments then we're going to have to do our own goddamn groundwork. And I think there are a lot of people, you know, they are very concerned, even today. I have met over the last fifteen, twenty years, I have met hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of guys coming into the organizations. They have made it up there, they have gotten up there, and as long as there is bucks involved, they are there. As soon as there is no bucks in there, I don't know what the hell they are going to do because the simple fact is that they can't seem to operate without a backing of funds. Now this was Malcolm's theory and it's true. He says, "If there is no funds," he says, "what the hell are you going to do?" you know. "We are going to have to depend on ourselves and we are going to have to start right now." And this is why he would not accept any funds from anywhere. Unless private donations, eh, from individuals.

Murray: Right.

Don: Because he said there are so many people that are so damned concerned about our own people and there are so many white people that are concerned about issues but they are never committed because they do not fully understand. And if you don't understand, you cannot be committed. There are so many people involved in our movement that are concerned. They are involved to beat all hell, but bang, the money is gone, they are gone, because they are not committed because they don't understand it.

Murray: They don't have the depth of understanding that Malcolm had.

Don: Well, it's not only depths of understanding. I think it's the commitment that comes with understanding, I think, and working and dedication. And once that hits you, you can't do anything about it. Now, whether there is money there or not, you're still around and whether you're working with the organization or not, you're always doing work on the side somewhere or something for someone, or some organizations or that. And you don't stop because you are not there. Malcolm never did.

Murray: Why do you think that it took so long for Malcolm to initiate that, or for yourself or Malcolm or any of the people who were first involved? He was here from 1947 right till 1964, and it seemed that 1964 was really the first serious effort that was made. Can you explain why it took so long?
Don: Yeah, I think it was the time and era, like he said, you know. He said, "The time is right now." Because I think everyone we really believed in, we were kind of in an old rut. Got nothing against the NDP party, the old CCF party, but the people themselves, and the socialists were depending a lot on the government to do things for them and everything else. And things were changing. Baby bonuses came in and a whole bunch of other things came in in terms of social assistance. And people were really in a state where they were accepting and not really doing anything on their own.

Murray: Do you think that Malcolm had put, did he think in 1964 that perhaps he had put too much faith in the NDP? And had decided that the government was not the answer?

Don: Yeah, because Malcolm stated that the socialists in that time, in 1964, were not the same socialists in 1944. And they became social capitalists, which probably a lot of them are today. I don't know. The old time CCFers were a hell of a lot different today than what they, you know, even in 1968 when he died. He died in 1968, eh? It was eight years ago this month he died. I believe it was. And even then he said, you know. That was his fifth heart attack. I was with him on his first heart attack that he had. I remember it was in North Battleford. Jeez, I couldn't believe it. We got there late, we danced all night after the meeting and that, we went up to the hotel room. They payed our hotel room, by the way. We stayed over late, overnight. We stayed at the Beaver I remember.

Murray: Who payed the hotel bill?

Don: The people.

Murray: Oh really.

Don: Yeah. They made up a collection and that and we used this car to come down. And it was too late Friday night to come back so we thought we'd sleep over. And we were going to go sleep across over town but the house was full. They said they already got a hotel room for us. I guess they had already planned it, I don't know. They invited us down there to the friendship centre. Gladys Johnson was president of the friendship centre then. That's my cousin.

Murray: That's North Battleford, eh?

Don: Yeah. She was a treaty Indian. Gladys, she was a Dreaver, her mother is. I was president in P.A., she was president over there and they had invited us down for the halfbreeds, like the halfbreeds wanted us to come over there and...

Murray: Was that to do with the Metis Association?
Don: Yes. Yeah.

Murray: Had you organized a local there yet?

Don: Yeah, we organized the local. We had been there once before but this was a big meeting. It was quite good. All the priests and nuns were there and Malcolm was speaking French to them and giving them shit and all for controlling the native people, you know, and jeez, it was quite a meeting. The priests were mad and blushing and...

Murray: Did they talk at all, the priests?

Don: Oh yeah, yeah. Malcolm cut them up pretty bad all the time though.

Murray: What did the native people think of that? Did that make them a little nervous?

Don: Not really. They understood. But they can't do much about it, eh. Either that or you're excommunicated or something like that. That was a great fear that the church always held over the people. Even today in a lot of centres, eh, the priests and them are still the law.

Murray: How many people were at that meeting and what happened at the meeting?

Don: There were quite a few people there. It went over pretty good. There was quite a few memberships taken and they formed their own local, their own executive and that. And as you know, there is a good movement over there today among the Metis people in North Battleford and it was originally because of Malcolm and the formation of the Metis Association then.

Murray: Who were some of the people who were first involved in North Battleford?

Don: Oh, Landry and oh, there were a lot of other people that I can remember.

Murray: Can you think of some names of people that I might be able to talk to?

Don: Oh, Bert Landry. Oh jeez, I can't remember all of them because I've been over there several times.

Murray: But Bert Landry would be one, eh?

Don: Oh yeah. Just go over and ask. Stop at the friendship centre there and stop at the Metis Society offices over there and you'll get them all.

Murray: You mentioned that at that time Malcolm had a heart attack. Can you describe that?
Don: Yeah, we were going, after the meeting, we drove over. He was pretty tired and pretty pale and we were going upstairs and I says, "I'll carry your suitcase and briefcase." "No, no, I'll carry it myself." You know, he was pretty tired; he was getting pretty old. Malcolm was 65 then, you know; he was coming 66, five more months till retirement. He said, "I can carry my own stuff up." You know, he didn't know he was getting hatcheted at the time. I think the papers were already going through. Cuelenaere and Thatcher and them dirty bastards. But anyway, we got upstairs and he put it down and he hit the bed. And he couldn't breath anymore and tried to undo his... he was too weak, he couldn't even undo his collar. I knew, you know, he had troubles because he had nitroglycerin pills anyway. And jeez, I ripped his coat open for him and I felt his pulse and it would just go prrt brrrr, and then just real slow, and it kept going like that. He couldn't breath. So I started hitting him and heart massage and that, eh, really hard. Kept going like that and he was trying to tell me his pills in his briefcase there and I didn't know what the hell he was talking about and I knew he was having a heart attack. I got on the phone and I phoned and I just told them to get a doctor over here and an ambulance right away. I just phoned the desk and they did. But in the meantime, he was able to come back a little bit and I finally got pills... never took one. I took two of them and put them underneath his tongue and he just jolted like that, you know. And the doc came in and gave him a shot. And it was an Indian doctor from India. And Malcolm really had a lot of fun with him. He said, "Yeah," he says, "you're not as strong as us Indians over here," he says. "Columbus made a mistake too, you know," and all this and that. Fifteen minutes later he was up walking around that bed, talking politics with this Indian doctor. And he should have been in the goddamn hospital. He wouldn't give up. He wouldn't go in the hospital.

Murray: He depended on himself.

Don: Yeah, and that's the way he died. He wouldn't quit.

Murray: Did you drive back right away or did you wait till the morning?

Don: No, he slept. The doctor gave him some more medications and that. I stayed up with him. He had a good sleep and that. He got up and had breakfast and I drove back.

Murray: Was that his first heart attack?

Don: No, he had a slight one before then.

Murray: How many did he have all together?

Don: I think his fifth one was the one that killed him in Calgary when he was in a wheelchair because it was later on that he was paralyzed.
Murray: The stroke paralyzed him.

Don: Yeah, this is what I heard from phoning back and talking and that with Mary and that. I didn't even know he was in Calgary. In 1968, I was up in the Territories teaching school when he died. I was at Fort Simpson. Yeah. Didn't even know. He never said anything about anything.

Murray: I'm wondering about, I want to go back to that 1964 meeting for just a minute. Do you remember, was there any hostility between the treaties and the non-treaties?

Don: There was no hostility at all, whatsoever. Because they really never had a spokesman. Malcolm was their spokesman for them.

Murray: For everyone.

Don: For everyone. Because they'd come to Malcolm, they'd get him to talk about this and talk about that and really ask questions. And Malcolm and my room upstairs, it was full all the time with different delegations and chiefs and that from all over. Malcolm knew them all.

Murray: Was John Tootoosis at that meeting?

Don: Oh, John was there but John was on the side of Thatcher and them I think because he was doing all the recordings up there. And he wouldn't let anyone have the tapes after or copies of that. Well, you know old John Tootoosis is kind of an old-time politician himself and him and Malcolm didn't see eye to eye and simply because, I guess, Malcolm called a lot of people a lot of sellouts. Old Indian sellouts and that. Which is true in any case.

Murray: But maybe he said it in situations where he shouldn't have.

Don: Yeah, but Malcolm was honest to the point of being honest openly and truthfully. He never did anything to any Indians behind their back or anywhere. He said what he had to say and what he believed. He said, "I may be wrong," he says, "but this is the way I see it. I think you're an Indian sellout to the Liberal government." And this is what he said...

Murray: Did he say this to Tootoosis?

Don: No, I'm not saying necessarily to him, but I'm saying he said this to different people. He was a very outspoken person but when he spoke, you know, he never spoke offhandedly.

Murray: He always spoke from knowledge when he spoke.

Don: He spoke of what he knew, yes. And what he learned.
Murray: What may have been some of the other things that he and Tootoosis disagreed on; because Tootoosis became fairly important in the Indian movement too, didn't he?

Don: Yeah. I don't know. I think a lot of the Indian peoples or a lot of the leaders, they learned a lot from Malcolm in how to go about it. I think Malcolm helped them initially in organizing themselves too. I know old uncle Joe Drever and Malcolm used to get along together. And old (inaudible) and my uncle, my mom's halfbrother William Joseph, he was chief at Whitefish for 27 years. Uncle Joe Dreaver, that's Gladys's dad; he is 91 or 92 now. He was chief at Mistawasis for 41 years. Malcolm knew them quite a few years.

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Don: ... a lot of the Indians went along with and they really believed in the power of the white man electing their own government and therefore they were in control.

Murray: Did he attribute that just to ignorance on the part of the people?

Don: Not only ignorance and that but...

Murray: Opportunism too.

Don: Yeah. The Indians knew that whoever was in control had the power and the say and they could do what they want to do and it was really a political threat over their head at all times. And the only way they could do away with that is by unifying. Malcolm told them time and time again but none of them would listen because they didn't have faith in their own unity. They were concerned but they were never committed because they didn't understand he said.

Murray: They always wanted to look out for number one.

Don: Right on.

Murray: To make sure for....

Don: If I do this then I won't get my welfare cheque or I won't get money for this, I won't get money for this, and you know. Well, can you blame them in that sense.

Murray: Sure, when they've been down that long.

Don: "And the only way," he said, "we're going to do it is by unifying, forming, organizing and action." And it's coming.

Murray: Right, right.

Don: It takes a long time, you know, to educate people and he
says, "Everytime you sit down, you've got to educate them."

Murray:  So you got to be talking all the time.

Don:  All the time.

Murray:  And he did that himself.

Don:  Yeah.  Whenever he had the chance.  It didn't matter where or when.  It could be in a cafe or at meetings or, it doesn't matter where it was, he was always - I remember sitting down with him and people used to come in and sit down and have coffee and away he'd go.

Murray:  Never let up.

Don:  He never let up.  And they used to listen too.

Murray:  He was a man who was respected by everyone he talked with?

Don:  Very much so.  He was a man of very great principles and...

Murray:  People recognized that.

Don:  I don't think there was a point you could run Malcolm against except he was a little forceful.

Murray:  That put people off a bit sometimes, eh?

Don:  Because he believed and he understood so well.  And he was committed, you know, to the Indian cause whether it was treaty or non-treaty.

Murray:  Did he ever talk about what the Social Credit did to the movement in Alberta?

Don:  Well, they controlled it, eh.  You know, with the native people and that.  I forget what government was in power when they first started out in 1932...

Murray:  It was the United Farmers, I think, at first and then it changed to Social Credit.

Don:  Yeah.  Well they formed the Metis Association of Alberta in December of 1932.  And they petitioned for a Royal Commission in 1933 and the Social Credit didn't come in power until 1935 or 1936 and so it used to be the old Conservative party I think, was it?

Murray:  It was the United Farmers party.

Don:  Prior to the Social Credit that held power?
Murray: Yeah.

Don: Well, whatever it was anyway...

Murray: It changed then, yeah. Social Credit came into power later.

Don: And it was under that government, the Social Credit government, that the Royal Commission was set up. And therefore the people really believed in the Social Credit party in the province.

Murray: Because they were the ones who implemented the thing.

Don: That's right. And they brought along some of the great wishes, land base.

Murray: So do you recall him saying when it was that the movement got co-opted by the Social Credit? Was it in the late thirties?

Don: It was during the thirties, yeah. It was during the whole process. It shouldn't have taken from 1933 to 1939 for land implementation of those colonies but...

Murray: Right, but that's how long it did take.

Don: But the politicians worked it that way.

Murray: Was he pretty disillusioned when he went back after he was in the air force? Did he talk about that at all?

Don: No. No, he never talked too much about... The only thing he ever mentioned really in his involvement in military is that he was a member of the last contingent of the old Northwest Canada(?). He was supposed to leave Vancouver in 1918 for Siberia and the end of the war came and so they chopped it off. They stopped at Victoria. He was a member of the last contingent that was going overseas to Siberia.

Murray: They were going to fight the Russians weren't they?

Don: Yeah, they were going to land in Siberia and go across. He was a member of that expedition.

Murray: I heard a story that his mother had found out that they were going to send him to Siberia and his mother told the NWMP that he was too young and they kicked him out.

Don: No. They never kicked him out, no.

Murray: He just was lucky.

Don: No, he was 18.

Murray: Did he talk much about being a member of that
organization?

Don: No, not too much but he'd mention it every now and then.

Murray: He thought it was funny, did he?

Don: Oh yeah, you know, thinking back when he was young and stupid, he said. (chuckles) Young and in his prime.

Murray: So he was in Vancouver when he was a member of that?

Don: I think in Victoria is when they were disbanded, yeah.

Murray: And he was in the Northwest Territories at sometime too, I think, wasn't he?

Don: Yeah, he trapped. I taught school there last year where he was. The people, some of the older people there, knew him very well. Some of the Powders and that.

Murray: Where was this?

Don: At Camsell Portage. About 24 miles from Uranium City. He had his trapline up there. He was quite a trapper. When he was young he trapped all the way...

Murray: So when he was young he was around Camsell Portage?

Don: Oh, he was all over politicizing. He knew well, you know. He travelled, learn the land and the people, he said. You know. The Yukon, the Territories, Alberta, B.C., he knew the west good. He knew his people and he knew the white people and the structure of governments and how they operated.

Murray: Did he ever talk about how he became a socialist and who influenced him in that direction?

Don: Not really, not really. I guess it was, you know, going way back. I guess it was during the time when the Communist Bolshevik revolution was, when he was young.

Murray: And there was a lot of talk about that in those days.

Don: Yeah. Oh, you want to believe it. When the peasant people kicked out the Czars and the capitalists...

Murray: That was something.

Don: The landholders and that. And this is what he brought in and instituted in Alberta.

Murray: (Inaudible)

Don: For the Royal Commission of the Metis people, for those that didn't have land.
Murray: Did he talk about land a lot? Did he see land as being important for native people?

Don: Definitely, the basis, eh. And that's the same as in the north. This is why he fought so hard for control. He said anything coming out of the north should be part and parcel of the... a certain percentage of it should remain in the north among the people. And doesn't go in the provincial coffer, the provincial treasury.

Murray: Right. What were some of the other principles that he saw the Metis Association promoting? Land was obviously a crucial one. Were there others?

Don: Well, I can always remember him saying that he knew that we'd never have the strength and the power and the military power to overthrow the government in Canada. He said we're just too small and no matter what we did, he said, there would always be thousands more coming just like it was before. He said, but economic independence and eventually our own members of parliament to ensure our rights.

Murray: Separate members of parliament. Native people, seats that would always be native people.

Don: And if the case could ever come to it, an independent nation among ourselves within our own land.

Murray: Did he see that as the north more than including all of Canada?

Don: No, he saw it all across, unification. And today we see the Native Brotherhood and the Native Council of Canada and, you know...

Murray: How did he see that in practical terms? I mean, the native people are so spread out all over Canada. How did he see the nation idea?

Don: Well, the political unity among native people. And there was another thing which he stated not too long before he died too. He said, "Within twenty years we'll have a socialist government in Canada." He says, "Whether they want it or not." "We'll have a social democratic government in Canada." He says, "We'll have two parties, a right wing and a left wing, the Conservatives and the Liberals and whoever is those capitalist pigs," as he used to call them, "will unite against the left wing." And it's coming. We see in Quebec and we're going to see it all over. We're going to see the west. Yeah.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit more about the efforts made over those two years that Malcolm was still strong enough to be active that the Metis Society was organizing? Where did Malcolm go to organize and what areas did he travel?

Don: Mainly throughout the whole north, about forty
communities, I guess. I don't think there is a community he was never in. And how many times I don't know.

Murray: He went up the west side did he? Beauval and all those places?

Don: Oh the west side, yes. We had meetings all the way up through there. Meetings in pool rooms, we had meetings in church halls, we had meetings anywhere we could.

Murray: And people responded pretty quickly to that, did they?

Don: Pretty fast. We had pretty big meetings right off the bat. Because they knew Malcolm. Malcolm had been in those communities before, you know, as a government official, as a geologist but just going along as a social - whatever he was doing for Tommy Douglas, taking a look at the people and you know, the situation and what could be done. Malcolm really believed in Tommy and I think Tommy had a lot of things, as Malcolm used to say, you know, social programs for native people. Which Malcolm had a lot of ideas himself and it's come a long ways but there is a lot more to be done.

Murray: Which were the most successful towns in terms of the organization on the west side?

Don: Towns? Gee, I don't know really.

Murray: Where were the most successful meetings held? Green Lake and Ile-a-la-Crosse...?

Don: I suppose Meadow Lake, Green Lake, Beauval we used to have good meetings. Ile-a-la-Crosse, we used to have good meetings there too. We used to have good meetings in Buffalo.

Murray: Was Buffalo harder to organize do you think than other places on the west side?

Don: No, it wasn't then in those days, you know, because all the towns did pretty well. But you know, Buffalo today, in the last couple of years, is becoming kind of a bureaucratic centre of the west side there. And with the involvement of certain local people who are actually not native but maybe married, like Freddie Thompson and that, you know. And the people respect his wife and the Hanson family and a lot of other people. It's pretty hard to....

Murray: Live there.

Don: Yeah, right. And like I say, again it's ignorance, eh. And not complete understanding of the whole social and economic thing.

Murray: Did Malcolm get up as far as Turner Lake and La Loche as well?
Don: Oh yes, he's been all over.

Murray: Michel Village and all those places?

Don: Yeah. Oh yes, I've been all the way through there too.

Murray: Did you travel with him sometimes?

Don: Yeah. I don't think there is a community I haven't been in. Oh, Cree Lake maybe, was one I haven't been in. But I know Malcolm has been in there. I was never in there.

Murray: Could you describe some of the meetings? I want to get an idea of the atmosphere of the meetings and how people felt and how Malcolm talked to people.

Don: I don't know. Usually he talked about the organization, what it stood for and what situation they were in. And he talked about something of what they understood. You know, he put in words...

Murray: What conditions they were in and...

Don: Yeah, he put their condition into words and made a picture that they understood. And then they asked, "Well, what the hell can we do?" And he said, "Well, you yourselves as one community can't do very much," but you know, "Together," the old philosophy of unity again, eh, all the time unity, he says, "We can be quite a force."

Murray: Do you think this was a new idea to people to some extent?

Don: It was, because the communities were very split. Not only that, but within each community, you had many different - even today you have your political splits and your religious splits and everything else. And there were so many things to disunite the people, mainly political parties, mainly religious. And in other situations, it was mainly ethnic. Like in Buffalo, it's definite division between the Cree and the Chip.

Murray: What role did the church play in that whole situation? Were they actively opposing you or were they pretty quiet?

Don: They were actively opposing Malcolm because Malcolm spoke out against the church. And as property landowners, it was controllers, the social controllers within the community and telling the people how to vote and when to vote and everything else. Well, you know the whole situation. It's even there today.

Murray: I remember that when Jim Sinclair went up, he seemed to make a mistake, according to some people, by attacking the church and they reacted against that. But the people didn't
seem to react against it when Malcolm did it, is that true?

Don: Yeah, that's true.

Murray: I wonder what would explain that.

Don: I don't know. Malcolm spoke in Cree to them mainly, and I think they knew him as...

Murray: Someone they trusted...

Don: And he was an older person too, you know, and a lot of the older people knew him. Therefore a lot of the older people respected and knew Malcolm. Therefore all the younger people, you know, they didn't understand their dads and that...

Murray: So he was a figure that carried authority with him.

Don: Yeah, and even the priests and nuns, Malcolm used to be very polite to them and that too, you know. Although he spoke what he had to speak.

Murray: He always treated people decently.

Don: Right. He was always a gentleman, Malcolm. And he always told them, "I say this not to hurt anybody or anything but this is the way I see it." And then he'd lay the son of a bitch on to them, you know. And then he'd always tell them at the end, "Remember, what I said here is not to hurt anyone but it's just the way I see it and the way I see the way you're living here."

Murray: He didn't attack religion as such but the political roles of the church.

Don: The institution, yeah. You know, as a controlling body.

Murray: So people didn't see him as speaking against God or against religion but against certain things about it.

Don: No, he always spoke of Manitou, don't worry. He was a wise man. He knew what he was talking about and he knew how to talk. He never missed anything.

Murray: What were the meetings like? Were people pretty cautious when they first came in and curious? Or were they pretty excited? Can you remember?

Don: No, they were the way we always are you know. Like, they themselves sit back and listen. No expression, no nothing.

Murray: You couldn't tell a thing from looking at them, could you?

Don: No. But it's when they start speaking, when you get them involved in a conversation and then the fireworks started.
Murray: Well, he would talk for a while and then the people asked him questions, is that the way it would go?

Don: That's right, right. Had it all outlined.

Murray: And he didn't mind if the priests showed up to the meetings, eh?

Don: No, no. And usually what I spoke about was local control and education and, you know, their controlling hiring teachers and all this and that. I was president of the Northern Teachers Areas Association and, you know, the two years before I came to Prince Albert I had been to every community in the north talking about this. And this is the reason...

Murray: Just informally sort of.

Don: Well, you know, every school I go to, I'll ask the principal and teachers to call the parents in and I'd talk to them.

Murray: About local control of education.

Don: "I'm a halfbreed," and you know, and all this and that. And we formed local school committees. The first time it was ever done was over at Sandy Bay when I was there and they spread it out all over. Allan Guy and those buggers, they didn't like it in La Ronge and that when I used to go over there. I used to take time off from school. I didn't give a damn. My wife was teaching, I didn't need the money. They'd get a substitute teacher in. I had an old Lincoln I used to drive around in. I used to drive all over. I remember Jimmy Durocher used to bug my ass to come in there with a big Lincoln like that, eh. But it was an old wreck, you know. It was an old '53, a customized job.

Murray: Puffing away.

Don: Yeah, right. And oh, I used to travel all over.

Murray: So you organized these school committees. What year would that have been?

Don: This was in 1962, 1963. Well actually it started in Wollaston Lake in 1960.

Murray: And these committees were, you were hoping that they would eventually go into school boards and take control of the schools.

Don: The school boards. And oh yeah, this was a beginning of our northern school boards. We fought for this a long time ago. But yet, people like Hensby and Waugh and old Harry Waugh and Hensby... well we got him run out of the country. Even
though I used the Liberal party and the priests to do it, we got him run out of there. The day that the Liberals came in power, they sent him a letter he was finished. I think he got his on April 23. I made sure Father Dar(?) saw that. I went over and saw the Bishop in The Pas. You know, you use all different kinds of things. Malcolm said, "Use anything you can use, you know," he said, "but do it diplomatically." He was smart. He did a lot of coaching to me. I learned a lot from that man, you know, over the years. Oh God.

Murray: Can you think of other present native leaders that have learned a lot from Malcolm too?

Don: Oh man, well you ask most of them? Ask Peter Dubois. Ask, I don't care who you do, Walter Gordon, Walter Deiter. Ask the chiefs in the north if they know Malcolm. They used to call him Old Lawyer. Oh yeah.

Murray: Old what?

Don: Lawyer. Because Malcolm knew his law and that. Oh hell, he wasn't only a geologist eh, and a politician, he was...

Murray: He was knowledgable in all kinds of fields.

Don: Oh God, everything. You want to see the library he had. He said, "I must have read these books ten times." It was a room about three times, four times as big as this, I guess. All three walls were covered. I mean, that's a couple of thousand books that he's read over his years. And he was always reading, always writing, always on the phone, always writing letters. He used to type with two fingers but he could really type. He said, "I never learned that, the fancy way." He had this great big old typewriter he had for about thirty years. And he got a new one and didn't know how to operate it.

Murray: Could you tell me a bit about the efforts to amalgamate the two, the southern and the northern organizations. They finally did amalgamate, over Malcolm's objections. Could you give me a bit of the history of that?

Don: Well, the way I know, and I know we talked about it before, and we knew there was organizations down south. And Malcolm always said, before we organize we must become strong in the north first, eh. Prince Albert and north and all the locals that we had formed. Because they, down there, didn't have nothing to do with the north. And he felt a lot of them were more politically inclined, you know, to go along with political parties rather than with the people's issues. This is what he wanted to do first is make a strong standhold in the north because that's where the wealth is.

Murray: Right. And that's where native people were poorest as well.
Don: Well that's why they're ripping it off right now. But I don't know if they were any poorer up there than they were down here in a lot of places. And everyone disagreed with accepting funds and that from provincial or federal governments and this was some of the policies of them down south.

Murray: What was his opinion of, and your opinion of, Joe Amyotte at that time?

Don: I don't know. He really never talked too much of Joe. He just said he was in the south and, you know, southern halfbreed, he called him. And he really never talked too much about the south.

Murray: Do you think he respected Joe or do you think he thought maybe he was tied too much to government?

Don: Well, like I said, a lot of them in the south... He never named them specifically, he always said to find out yourself. You know, he never really made that many commitments about individuals in his life. He was never like that.

Murray: He wouldn't talk about people behind their backs, sort of.

Don: But he used to warn you, you know. "Watch this group," or something like that. "Pick out the ones you think are good people, are dedicated or are they just here for a laugh," he used to say. You know, for their own pockets or that.

Murray: So he was always teaching you about how to be a leader?

Don: All the time, all the time. He was always instigating about being observant, and about other people and their reasons why they are doing things. Well, you can always sense a person out. I remember talking to Rod Bishop about that, you know, and Malcolm told Rod time and time again, "Don't go ahead." And Rod went ahead, joined forces with Howard Adams and it came out the way Malcolm said it would.

Murray: So Rod was influenced by Adams at that time then?

Don: Yeah.

Murray: More than by Malcolm?

Don: Well, I think Rod had his own little thing too, eh. The same as Malcolm said a lot of native people do, eh?

Murray: Got their own visions of grandeur.

Don: Yeah, yeah. And they forget the dedication and they go along and they perceive something of themselves in the future and what they'd never attain and they lose everything or they lose a good part of what they had in the beginning. It's that dedication; they screwed it all up.
Murray: Did Malcolm see that dedication coming from a greater depth of understanding of what the issues were, and politics, and that sort of thing?

Don: Definitely, this is what he said. He said, "A lot of them are concerned but they'll never be committed because they'll never understand. They'll go to the first person with the biggest money bag." And this is true.

Murray: In 1964/65/66, were there locals up on the east side as well? Cumberland and Creighton and places like that? Or did he get up in that area?

Don: No. Probably he went out east of P.A.

Murray: To all the towns around there, eh?

Don: Yeah. Tweedsmuir and up that way, up to La Ronge, that way, talked with people up there. Oh, they knew him in Sandy Bay also. We had a local in Sandy Bay. I don't know if we had a local in Southend at that time or not. We had a definitely good local in Sandy Bay.

Murray: Did you have one in Molanosa or...?

Don: Molanosa, I don't know. I can't remember if we had any representatives from Molanosa.

Murray: Jim Brady organized one in La Ronge, is that right?

Don: Yeah, James and Malcolm did, yeah. Yeah, they organized in La Ronge. I mean, there was a caucus in there.

Murray: Was Jim very active in organizing or...?

Don: Not that much in those latter days. He was more involved in his prospecting and other things, you know. Really, it was Malcolm that was really the...

Murray: The push.

Don: Yeah.

Murray: You knew Jim too, did you?

Don: Yeah.

Murray: Do you think that Jim was an unhappy person in those last few years? Was that partly why he didn't organize?

Don: I think so. I don't know. He seemed to be more within himself, I guess, of what I knew him. Because I only met him, you know, in those last years.

Murray: In the late years.
Don: No, I don't know too much about Jim, you know, personally. What I heard from Malcolm...

Murray: But Malcolm talked about him quite a bit, eh?

Don: Right.

Murray: I wonder would there be any records left of that original Metis Society up north?

Don: Oh, Malcolm's got them all.

Murray: They would all be with Malcolm's papers?

Don: Malcolm had copies, you know. We had all copies and Malcolm had all of them. I think he's got them all in his trunks and that, everything. Everything that was sent out, everything that was received. Oh, we got a lot of backlash from Allan Guy. They said they were going to cut off the funds of the friendship centre and all this stuff.

Murray: They forced Malcolm out?

Don: Oh, well after they hatcheted him, you see, we hired him as the executive director of the friendship centre. He made more money with the friendship centre than he did with the provincial government. (chuckles)

Murray: Is that right?

Don: Yeah, we give him a bigger salary. That really pissed off Thatcher and Cuelenaere and Allan Guy.

Murray: So that's really the reason they wanted to get rid of him because you had pissed them off by going around behind them?

Don: Yeah, well, this was after he was hatcheted, we hired him.

Murray: When was that? Was it quite soon after he got fired?

Don: It was in May. No, it was before May. He was supposed to retire on May 5 or something like that. It was in January I think he was hatcheted. Five months before he was supposed to be retired.

Murray: So he was organizing before he got fired?

Don: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Was that one of the reasons do you think they canned him from his job?

Don: Oh, it was because of his political involvement with the
native people against the Liberal party is what they thought, because they knew he was a die-hard socialist. Because he used to call them right in public, capitalists. It didn't matter to him.

Murray: Right. How was he able to organize? He was still working then when he was going up the west side and things was he? Was he still with the government?

Don: Oh yeah.

Murray: Did he do that on government time or his own time or...?

Don: No, on his own.

Murray: His own, on weekends?

Don: We used to go out weekends, holidays, evenings. Yeah, we used to do a lot of travelling. Never home, never home. That's what screwed up my life after. My wife and I broke up that year.

Murray: There was a lot of pressure on Malcolm's family too, then, wasn't there?

Don: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Did he talk about that at all?

Don: Yeah, we did. Yeah.

Murray: How did you try and resolve that? I mean, you obviously knew it was a problem but it must have been difficult to deal with.

Don: We couldn't do very much about it.

Murray: How did Malcolm's wife feel about his political activities?

Don: I don't know. Malcolm and Mary and Betty and I used to be together quite a bit. And then we used to leave them and go organizing and they used to be so pissed off. Even the age difference, you know, we used to get along so good.

Murray: The four of you.

Don: Yeah. He was more like a father to me than anything I suppose, Malcolm was. I still can see him.

Murray: Quite a striking man too, I mean to look at.

Don: Yeah, he was, very. He was okay.

Murray: Did the organization grow in numbers right up to the point where Malcolm became too sick to organize?
Don: Yeah, I think it was growing and that, and it even grew later on. I think it went down there quite a bit and I don't know what tactics - I wasn't here then and - what tactics Howard used.

Murray: I've heard people on the west side say that after Malcolm disappeared, the numbers seemed to decrease and there weren't hardly any meetings.

Don: Yeah, well, this is what I say. I don't know what tactics Howard used after to bring back the membership and that. I really don't know. It just took time again, I guess. Because once he left, there just seemed to be a cut off I guess, you know, communications - the old type of communications there always was.

Murray: One other thing you mentioned was that there were some tapes of that meeting in 1964. Tootoosis had those or...?

Don: Yeah, he's probably still got them or, probably they're with the FSI. The FSI has probably got them.

Murray: Right. Who else was at that meeting among the ministers? Was Allan Guy at that meeting too, in 1964?

Don: Oh yeah.

Murray: And Cuelenaere.

Don: And Cuelenaere.

Murray: And Steuart was there for one day.

Don: Steuart was there and, well, Thatcher came in for about twenty minutes. He had to catch a plane or something. We booed him right out of there. That's what pissed them off, too. Really gave him shit. Malcolm got up and really gave him shit. He said, "You mean to tell me you're the new premier and you've only got twenty minutes for these people whom you called the convention for for three days?"

Murray: What did Thatcher say?

Don: Nothing. He couldn't. Old Cuelenaere, "You're out of order, Mr. Norris." Everyone booed.

Murray: Everybody was on the side of Norris.

Don: Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, oh yeah. I can remember this - quite thrilled.

(End of Side B)

(End of Tape)
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