

To the
Royal Commission
on
Aboriginal Peoples
of
Canada

My life in the Sahtu

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June, 1993

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, as part of its research mandate, requested a series of life histories of aboriginal peoples across Canada. This life history is my contribution. I will write about three generations of the history of my people in the Northwest Territories.

We have to understand that aboriginal people from different areas of Canada are a little bit different from each other in their culture, law and lifestyle. Therefore, I will only write about the aboriginal people in the far north. I am 71 years old and my dad lived to be 83. My grandfather was born in 1850; he lived to 89. So, I will concentrate on my grandfather's lifestyle from 1850 - 1930.

During that period, aboriginal people here were really on their own. Nobody bothered them to start with. They lived according to their own laws, culture and language which was their inherent right. In the year 1850 my grandfather, Mr. Paul Blondin, lived in the Sahtu area, which is near Great Bear Lake. Paul's lifestyle should give the readers an idea of what life was like at that time.

These early aboriginal people created a lifestyle of their own. Just like anybody else in the world, they molded their lifestyle to fit what they were doing in those days. Non-aboriginal Canadians did not know aboriginal people very well from the beginning. Therefore I will write more about the beginning.

We have good information (archeological findings) going as far back as 30,000 years ago, so it's not hard to write about 1850 and what it looked like when the first white people arrived here. Europeans arrived here late. All aboriginal people were unusual in the eyes of Canadian people and their government. Everything the aboriginal people did or said was completely different from the non-aboriginal people. We really have to understand that. It's the main reason the government has so many problems dealing with aboriginal people. The aboriginal people are very stubborn. They cannot say to the government, "Okay, we will do what you say and we will change our manner." They just cannot say that.

So around 1850, a few first traders arrived, just a few. They had things to trade for wild fur. The traders had what the native people needed, such as matches, axes and so on. They attracted the native people. But, the traders had a lot of problems bringing in merchandise to the country because they had to bring it in too far. Therefore, native people were always short of what they wanted even though they had fur to trade. So the traders of the early days tried to get all the fur, as much as possible, and they'd do anything in the beginning to cheat the aboriginal people.

Around 1850, the first traders' activities didn't change the lifestyle of the aboriginal people much - just a bit, because hunting had to change some. They had to hunt and trap fur-bearing animals to trade for what they wanted. Other than that, they still lived the way they were, according to their culture.

At the start, when I said that the aboriginal people were unusual, I meant that all people on earth had to start somewhere and that most nations had power of some kind in their area to use to make better lives for themselves. The Dene aboriginal people here in the north are no different. In the past, all people depended on some power, either on governmental power, industry or invention, something important to their lives. The Dene people's lifestyle was based on what I call medicine power, which they depended on and used. It's hard to explain where they acquired the power in the beginning. Medicine power is too complicated to explain in these modern times. But medicine power is an important issue since all the aboriginal people depended on it and their lifestyle was shaped by it.

When the world was new, everything the Dene people did came from medicine power.

Some elders' stories say that medicine power was a loan from the creator. Some say that all the animals and human beings were one family: they talked together and they had no problem understanding one another. The elders' say medicine power existed then and was used by human beings and animals.

Storytellers teach us the history of medicine power, but it is hard to understand. Sometime later, human beings separated from the animals, but medicine power still stayed with the people. From the stories, it is hard to know how many years ago this was. It is a mystery.

You couldn't own medicine just because you wanted it. It's difficult to explain but there was a system on who should own these powers. Maybe the creator or someone else with strong supernatural power ran the system and that is why not everyone could own the power. Some young people tried to own medicine power, but most failed. Some people stayed alone in the bush for 10 to 40 years trying to own power, because almost everybody craved it. Yet most of them failed to own anything. That's how hard it was to own medicine power. Only a few could have it. But some individuals were lucky; they were born with all kinds of medicine power.

When the world was new, some of those people were very powerful and could run a whole nation. It all depended on who owned the powers. Some of the medicine men or women were good people who helped their people and protected them from others. There were really strong medicine people who could do almost anything. They could help the poor and the sick. They could also settle disputes and could stop a group war. They could kill more game and fish than anybody and could feed people year round. That is why people depended on them.

On the bad side of medicine power, some of the medicine men were not using the power to help people, for which it was meant. Instead, they abused people with bad medicine power and, sometimes, they even killed people with their power. They became murderers and frightened people. Some of them took things from weak people. The

power is invisible so it is hard to track down who is actually doing those bad things with it. So people lived in fear and depended on the good medicine people to protect them. There are a lot of legends and stories about people's work with medicine powers, the good and bad things that came with it, and that is why all aboriginal people believed that medicine powers existed. A lot of elders knew what was done with these powers, and that is why they believed in it.

I'll write a short story about Paul Blondin and what happened when he was forced into a conflict with medicine power and almost lost his life. This should give us an idea about how medicine power worked. Paul was young at that time and came from a very large family. His dad had died and his mother remarried. Paul had a lot of brothers and sisters. Paul had one sister who was older. His stepdad had children of his own too, so there were a lot of children in one tent. They lived on the shore of Great Bear Lake, which is one of the largest lakes in the world and the largest lake entirely within Canada. It has an area of 12,275 square miles (31,792 sq km) and is about 200 miles (320 km) long and between 25 and 120 miles (40-190 km) wide.

Every summer a group of young people would go the far end of the lake to get some caribou for hides and dry meat. The trip took long because the lake was stormy and the birch bark canoes were small. Anyway, Paul joined the group to go on a hunting trip. After many weeks of travelling, they arrived at the destination where they had to go inland to find the caribou. Soon they had killed some and were fooling around one morning when Paul announced that he was disturbed by a vision he had during the night. "My life is in danger, so I want to stay two nights alone and I will come back and explain," he told his friend. Paul then took off and camped alone. There, he made medicine.

Paul owned Eagle medicine, that was his best. The eagle came over to Paul and started to communicate. Paul told the eagle, "My life is in danger, I want you to find out what's going on."

And the eagle said, "Stay here, I will look into this for you." The eagle came back and told Paul, "You are right, your life is in danger. Back at your home two people who had a quarrel are fighting with their medicine power. One is your stepdad. Since they are equal they can't kill each other, so they are trying to kill each other's children. Already, on both sides, children are dying.

"How is my older sister?" Paul asked.

"She's still alive," the eagle said. "But medicine power could reach you soon and you will be in trouble if you don't have proper medicine to protect yourself. You could die."

Paul told the eagle, "You are to protect me, maybe together we can find something to save me."

So the eagle and Paul made medicine. In order to do this, they had to look into the two medicine men fighting each other 200 miles away. Medicine power is supernatural. In seconds you could travel anywhere you want. The eagle found out that the two people lacked power in certain areas. The eagle explained to Paul that they had power for the eagle's nest, but not for the bottom of it. "But you have the power for the bottom of the nest and you could stay down there until they finish fighting. Nothing would happen to you since they do not have that power for that. You would be safe."

Paul said, "Okay, that's what we will do, but if you could go back and bring my older sister's spirit here, we could both stay there and nobody could touch us." So the eagle went off and in no time he brought the woman's spirit over and Paul and his sister stayed at the bottom of the nest for two nights. Then the eagle came and said, "Everything is over, you are safe." And the eagle took the woman's spirit back to its body and they were saved. Both people lived a long life.

Now you see how this medicine power worked. If Paul didn't have eagle medicine, he would have been dead with the other members of his family. That is why aboriginal people of that period believed it was important to own medicine power. Everything was based on medicine power in that time.

In our history there is a story about one particular person, whose name was Yamoria, meaning person who travelled around the earth. He was a very powerful medicine man who overrode everybody, yet he was a good person who wanted to help everybody. He came around when the world was new, when a lot of people owned strong medicine power. Some were good and tried to help, some were bad and only abused people. And there were a lot of large animals in the country that the people had problems with. This Yamoria was so powerful he could do anything. We talk about miracles happening in history; Yamoria performed so many he became a legend. Storytellers talk about how he only did good things to help the people. The early missionaries here said this Yamoria came from the creator to help. Yamoria was a person who made laws for the aboriginal people of the future.

Yamoria's law read like this:

1. Share all big game you kill.
2. Share fish if you catch more than you need.
3. Help elders with wood and other heavy work.

4. Help sick people in need - such as bringing wood, hunting and fishing - or gather for support.
5. If the head of the family dies, everybody is to help the widow and children with everything they need.
6. Love thy neighbour strongly.
7. Orphans are to go to the closest kin of the one who dies or, by agreement, to another close kin.
8. Leaders of the tribe should help travellers if they have hard times far from their homeland.

These eight branches are one law. Sharing is the umbrella to all branches.

Law number two: Do not run around when elders are eating, sit still until they are finished. The story behind this law happened at the time an elder could not control his medicine when he was visiting. Small children were running around him while he was eating, and he accidentally swallowed a child's spirit. The child got sick and died. In time, lots of children started to die. So one medicine man investigated into why so many children were dying and he found out that this old man had swallowed the spirit of children. The people confronted the old man, and he admitted it and said he was scared to report it. So four medicine men extinguished all his medicine power so he couldn't do that again. The same medicine people created the law saying it's the parents' responsibility to teach children not to run around when elders are eating, to keep it from happening again.

Law number three: Do not run around and laugh loudly when it gets dark; everybody should sleep when daylight is gone. The story behind this took place in Fort Franklin, NWT. The settlement is very old, it has been there for thousands of years. Some young people were playing all night, yelling and laughing. One young girl in her teens fell to the ground and got sick. They brought her inside and called for a medicine man. After he sang awhile he told the people the girl was pierced by an arrow from the evil ghost called Old Man Yodiglin. The medicine man then said the arrow was still sticking out of her chest for him to see. "I will pull the arrow out and show you, it will be visible to you all," he said. After a quick motion towards the girl he was holding an arrow covered with blood. "This is the arrow of Yodiglin, I cannot extinguish the arrow, I am not strong enough so I will send it back to the owner." With a strong stroke, he sent the arrow into the night air. The ghost was an evil ghost and he could do what he had done again. He did not like the girl, because she made too much noise during the night. It is the parents' responsibility to teach their children not to laugh in the night, to sleep when it gets dark, because the ghost could do it again. That is the story behind law number three.

Law number four: Be polite, don't anger anybody, love each other. This is a very important law for individuals to behave accordingly, if everyone is going to live well together. If you do not behave or you make someone mad by talking, you could be making fun of a medicine man who could kill you almost right away. That is why that law was made. All parents should teach their children that law right from when a child is able to talk.

Law number five: Young girls are not to make fun of young males or even older men, especially strangers. Girls should behave well, they should be very polite towards males. You never know who you are talking to. Maybe he is a medicine man, maybe he's not.

Some medicine men were proud and did not like people making fun of them. So they were dangerous to some individuals and it is a mother's responsibility to teach her daughter every day, until she is married. Some mothers were very strict because they didn't want their daughters to be killed by a bad-tempered medicine man. They wouldn't let their daughters out of their sight. It was a good way for that time period. Law number six: Love your neighbours and do not harm anyone by your voice or actions. Do not hurt anyone with your medicine powers. Parents wanted their children who had it to use medicine power only for a good cause.

Law number seven: All elders are to tell stories about the past every day. The reason for that is stories were used to shape behaviour and attitude towards a good life. Hearing all the history of their nation - the good and the bad things they did and the mistakes they made - helped people to learn. Hearing about great medicine men did a lot of good to inspire the people as well as make them a caring people.

Law number eight: Be happy at all times because mother earth will take care of you.

These eight laws are the main principles the aboriginal people lived by. Thanks to the great Yamoria and other medicine people, the law worked well and helped keep people in line at that period of time. These laws existed long before the white people came. So, we've had a short definition of medicine power and the Dene law. We will continue with Dene lifestyle from 1850 and into the future.

When I say everything was based on medicine power, it was just that. That's the way the aboriginal people of the north governed themselves. That is why it is so hard to deal with them at the present time. Take, for example, the land. They see the land differently from everybody. To them the land represents a creation of the creator, that is why they have a lot of spiritual culture. That is why some elders pray to the sun, because it is a creation of the creator. Some elders carry a drum at all times because it is used to pray with. The elders would drum and sing spiritual songs which they knew from the past, and the group would face the sun in the middle of the day. After they sang, the elders preached about the creations of the creator, and gave thanks. They would say that the creation of the land by the creator represents a mother feeding her

children, so our mother land is feeding us. We should thank the creator for that favour.

Some elders would thank the creator for other benefits, and so on. They had a lot of spiritual and cultural attachments to the land. Sometimes in their travels, they would come across high land where they could see land far away. An elder would do a prayer service to the land they saw. They thanked the creator for everything they got.

Further down, I will touch on how aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people look at the land. There's a big difference. This spirituality attached to the land will help the reader understand why aboriginal people are different in thinking from other Canadians.

In regard to aboriginal health in 1850, for some reason our people lived long lives. Their medicine was medicine power. Anytime anybody got sick people would seek a medicine person to look at the patient. They did not live a clean life, by today's standards. They had no soap but used other substances to clean themselves a little, which was not much. Another issue was what they ate, their diet. They dug plant roots out and ate them sometimes, but not much, this is what the bears ate. Another food was berries of all kinds. Beyond that, their diet was straight meat and fish. However, we used plants from the land for medicine.

So it's not much to talk about, not a clean living or good food, yet almost everybody lived a long time. Most of them lived to be a hundred years old. Why, I don't know. One of the benefits on the aboriginal people's side was in the early days they didn't have a lot of diseases. So if people died young it would be from childbirth or by accident. If people got sick they were laughed at. People were surprised if a person died young. They didn't live in good houses, maybe only good hunters or strong medicine people had a good tent made of thick hide. Poor people lived almost outside. Yet everybody enjoyed a long life.

One good thing was daily exercise, they had a lot of that. Their lifestyle fit into it. Following another law to live by, children older than three years old were made to run around their tent three times when they went outside in the morning. It made them feel good and not feel like going back to sleep. For older people, in the morning before they even ate, they went in the bush to get wood for fire. Then they started to cook breakfast. There was a lot of exercise in daily work. To visit the fish nets you had to paddle very hard and in hunting you had to pack every thing on your back. In the winter time it was harder. You had to get more wood to keep warm and if you hunted either caribou or moose and if the game ran away on you, you had to chase the animal through the snow until you caught it. That's a lot of exercise, and it probably helped them to live long.

Another health law is how to eat. In the summer when it is hot, don't drink too much water or eat fat, only eat fat when the weather is cold. That is the best I can do on health.

The lifestyle of aboriginal people soon changed a bit. The first traders arrived in the north and in time they got more provisions to trade because transportation in the south was improving. Good hunters and trappers wanted to get more hardware and cloth for their families. People were always seeking new areas for trapping where there was plenty of fur. They didn't trap and hunt in one area all the time because they didn't feel right cleaning out a large area of land for fur and game.

The aboriginal people kept moving all over their land. They didn't stay in proper communities before the white people came. That is why aboriginal people love the land so much. In time the land became part of their minds. They didn't build cabins, possibly because they didn't stay long enough to build a cabin. They owned what they carried with them. But even though they were poor, all the Dene were happy people because their law read that way. Also elders' storytelling urged them to be happy. Anywhere there was a group, there was laughter and you could hear their happy songs every day. It was their culture to be that way at that time. When they moved from one place to another some of those people, like Paul Blondin, moved as far as 200-300 miles. That is very far, when you have to paddle your birch bark canoe and walk packing all you own. It's a lot of work but that's what they did in those days.

Before the white people came they didn't move as much. Most of the time they stayed on a good fish lake and moved around a bit for big game. It was the arrival of the first traders that changed their life a bit, and moved from one place to another steady. The fur trade pushed them around and they liked seeing new land all the time. They liked to hunt and trap in new areas. In some places people hadn't hunted for two or three years. The animals increased and they had the chance to catch a lot of fur.

I said the lifestyle of the aboriginal people was based on medicine power. So, I will have to touch on medicine power here and there as I write because a lot of individuals used medicine power to live by. If they owned it, they used it. When the world was new, things were much better. Everything was clean, life was good. So when mother earth got older, things were not the same. You don't have to be smart to see the changes when mother earth gets old. At the present time we have a lot of changes, like pollution all over the world. So we don't feel right, we feel that mother earth is getting old. With regard to medicine power, it is attached to mother earth and all the animals, birds, fish, the air, the weather, and so on. So if mother earth is getting old and weak, medicine power also is getting old and weak. Soon it will be all gone. That is why elders keep saying when the world was new, medicine power was very strong and it is true that according to legend some of these medicine owners could do almost anything.

Around 1860 more outside fur traders came, and so did the first missionaries. The native people saw the priests as strong medicine beings, because of the way they dressed and preached. They had great respect for the priests and listened to them. In

time, most of the native people reacted to the priests' teachings. Some of them, like the commandment to love thy neighbour, already existed in Dene law.

As I said before, only a few people owned medicine power. Everybody wanted to own it but they couldn't, because of control by a high power elsewhere. So almost all the local people didn't own medicine power and the very poor always depended on others for help. First they depended on great medicine people, and when traders and missionaries arrived they saw that they were powerful, so they started to depend on them. That is why the first missionaries had no problems in converting these poor people.

It was not only Paul Blondin who moved around in this big land. According to the land claims report, the Dene people used 450,000 square miles of land. That is a big area with not that many people to cover it. They had a lot of room to travel all over the country. People often met somewhere and spent some time together. The different tribes were not far apart, but were a little bit different in culture and language. That's because before the white people came, they didn't travel as much and they had poor communications. Therefore, 100 miles away they were complete strangers, just like other nations. Their culture is similar but their language is different.

In the NWT there are six different tribes and languages. These are Chipewyan, Dogrib, Slavey, Beaver, Rabbitskin, Gwich'in (Loucheux) and Inuktitut. Their laws are similar to one another, so they respected each other and shared whatever they had. When a large number of people met on the land the first thing they did was have a feast and a tea dance. That represents a friendship and peace with one another. Sometimes people traded cloth to make friends and remember each other.

Moving around in the winter time mostly depended on where the food was. The caribou migration worked like power to move people because poor people needed food, especially in cold weather. Because the caribou travel in big herds, sometimes a big crowd of people could feed on caribou for two months. The caribou were the best resources they had. They got dry meat and hide, thread from sinew. So caribou herds attracted a lot of people.

When tribes met, they also had hand games. They are very challenging. A group of people sits on each side, facing one another. When there are a lot of people, 20 can sit on one side and play. On one side, each person has an object in his hand. On the opposite side only one person guesses which hand holds the object for all the 20 people.

Of course he will miss some and he will guess some too. They keep track by having a lot of sticks. Twenty people would play and have 35 sticks to keep track. So if the person misses, it would cost him one stick, and so on. If all 35 sticks are won on one side, that side wins the game. It's a lot of fun for everyone. So that's what happened when people met different tribes.

When the world was new and medicine power was very strong, some medicine people even used their medicine power to win the hand games. They even used that power to have a tea dance. Different medicine people used power for different things.

Paul spent most of his life in the Great Bear Lake area and was around all of Bear Lake to Fort Norman, which was a Hudson's Bay Company trading post. It's 90 miles from Great Bear Lake to Fort Norman and if you're on the north side of the lake, it's another 100 miles. That's a long way if you have to walk and paddle. But that's the way life was and they enjoyed doing hard travelling.

The Great Bear Lake people travelled to the trading post in December, for Easter, in the early part of July, and in the fall. That's a lot of canoeing and walking. The equipment they had at the time was almost nothing compared to today. A well-to-do person, meaning a good trapper and hunter, usually owned one very small birch bark canoe and five dogs. In the winter they used the dogs for pulling toboggans and during the summer dogs are used for packing. That was how they moved around. That is why there are big trails on the shoreline of Great Bear Lake. When moving in summer, men would paddle on the lake. Their canoes would be packed with blankets and tents plus other stuff and the women and the children would walk along the shore.

They were so poor in those days but they didn't know of a better life yet. They were coming towards modern life. But today they still don't live a good modern life. Some power is holding them back. Later on in this story, I will write about it.

When the first white people came into the country, they had a lot of problems to deal with. Every trader, missionary and the early Royal Canadian Mounted Police had to own canoes and dog teams. They also hired a good family to help out with daily chores, to visit nets, clean house, get water, haul wood, make clothes, etc. The hired man was usually a good worker and hunter. He had to work hard to feed his family as well as the trader's family. Usually around a community there are no game or fish, so he had to travel 100 miles to get fish for the families and for dog food. In order to feed many people he had to hunt a lot. The hired hunter did not get proper wages but got cloth once a year and some tea and flour, that is all. Yet some worked for the traders as a servant for as long as 30 years. At the end he left with the clothes on his back. When the first traders and missionaries came the native people really helped them to stay alive in this cold country, according to their law.

Development in regard to shipping goods up north was late because it was very far to travel. For instance, when Lake Athabasca was receiving tea, flour, blankets and so on, the Great Bear Lake people did not get these products. Traders had to establish posts in the north to start with. They established a trading post on the bank of the Mackenzie River called Fort Providence, then down the river to Fort Simpson, Fort Wrigley, Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope, Arctic Red River, Fort McPherson and Aklavik. This covers

all the trading post down the Mackenzie to the Arctic Ocean. The traders were mostly Hudson's Bay Company people. Later private companies joined in the trading business.

The HBC established a system for transportation on the route by river. They built a flat bottom York boat, as it was called. It was about 45 feet long and needed eight people to paddle against the strong Mackenzie River, sometimes using a sail if the wind was blowing in the right direction. In the beginning one boat was used for only one trading post. As a result 10 of these boats were along the Mackenzie River. The people from the HBC paid the Dene to work all summer for one small box of tobacco, tea, powder and bullets for their guns. That's about all they worked for. They paddled so hard that their hands were blistered and they did not eat well. The Mackenzie is not a fish river and they mostly ate dry meat and dried fish. Sometimes they killed a moose if they saw one swimming across the river.

Because the HBC was involved with the native people right from the start, they recognized who had medicine power. Some individuals would kill a lot of game and fur animals while others couldn't do the same, and that was because they were using medicine power. The HBC recognized these people. They were successful in all kinds of ways. The HBC used only medicine people. Not all of them were really strong medicine people but they owned a certain amount of medicine power.

I will write some short stories about these people with medicine power. One time, some people were on the shore of Great Slave Lake during stormy weather. They could not go anywhere because of the big waves, but they were able to set their nets and also have a good rest. There were a lot of fish in that lake so they ate well. Some of the older leaders of each boat talked among themselves and then said that since they were going to spend a lot of time there, whoever wanted to do something to help others could come forward.

One leader mentioned that there were a few young people who slept too long and held up the people when they started off in the morning. One individual stood up and said, "I have medicine for sleeping. I will sing out loud and when I make a sign, push these individuals in front of me." So the medicine man started to sing and when he made the sign, the leaders pushed the individuals in front of the medicine man. He rubbed their eyes with medicine, pronouncing words. After he was finished he said that should help them not to sleep too long from now on.

Another leader asked, "How about the people who get tired too quickly?" One man stood up and said, "I have medicine for tired people as well as for sore arms and legs." So he went into his bag and took out some herbal medicine and heated it in some water. Then he started to sing and the people came forward to see him. He rubbed the medicine on them so they wouldn't get tired and also to remove any pain they had. Medicine persons have helped a lot of people.

Then one elder said, "How about food, we've been eating only fish. How about some fresh meat?" One individual stood up and said, "I have caribou medicine and I will see if I can get one of them to help us." So he started to sing and while he was still singing a big bull caribou came running on the shoreline towards them. They killed the caribou for fresh meat.

Another elder asked if anybody had medicine power to stop a storm so they could go on. One medicine man said, "I will give it a try." So he started to sing in medicine world language. All of a sudden the storm stopped. One of the elders screamed at the medicine man to see if he could make the wind blow behind them so they could sail. So he started to sing, pronouncing medicine words. Soon the wind started blow behind them. Everybody was excited and got ready to leave, since they had a chance to sail instead of paddling. It happened only on one occasion.

There are a lot of stories of the boat people travelling. This one is about an individual called Lelewa from Fort Good Hope. One time, his people travelled up the river and came out on Great Slave Lake, and there was no wind at all. The lake was really calm and they landed on a small island to make dinner. It was evening, when everybody was tired from paddling against the current all day. Their hands were blistered from all the hard paddling. After the meal they were having a little rest, when Lelewa noticed that his young brother was suffering from blisters on his hands. He wondered how to make the skin tough and stop the pain and bleeding. Lelewa watched his brother and said, "I don't like to see my brother suffering like this. He's just a small little thing." As Lelewa was talking, the wind behind them started to blow. Everybody got excited and ran to their boats and put up their sails. They sailed all the way across Great Slave Lake and up the Slave River and did not stop until they reached Fort Smith. They didn't have to paddle at all, thanks to Lelewa and his medicine power.

One time, a man stopped at Fort Norman as he was going up the river and while he was there, he picked up a nice looking woman to go with him in the boat. The people did not say anything to him because everybody minded their own business. So the man took the woman with him camping for the night. In the morning, the man found out that the woman was gone. She ran away. The man went down the shoreline for about a mile, then he went into the bush, which was full of thick bushes and willows. He found her soon but she was afraid and started to run away. He grabbed a small willow and struck her with it a couple of times and told her that if she ran away again, her life would be finished. She understood the medicine power behind her discovery so she never did it again. The medicine man knew exactly where to find the woman and that's why she was found so quickly.

This is another violent story which happened upriver from Fort Smith. The people in that area were on a portage, hauling stuff on their backs for the Hudson's Bay Company. The people were Cree and Chipewyan and others of those groups, and almost all behaved pretty well. They stopped to make lunch and the workers were

provided with flour, which they made into pancakes. Alongside the huge fire everybody cooked their own pancakes, but there were too many people to do that all at once. There was this big Chipewyan individual who was showing off. He thought he was a strong man. He wanted to cook his pancakes but there was no room for him and he had to wait. Instead, he moved the pancakes that belonged to someone from Great Bear Lake whose name was Ahah. He put Ahah's pancakes to the side and placed his on the fire to cook. When Ahah returned he found his pancakes to the side and he removed the big Chip's pancakes and started to cook his again. The big Chip noticed this and approached Ahah. Ahah got up and then they both started to fight and in no time the big Chip was thrown to the ground. The crowd cheered and laughed. Ahah tripped him, the big Chip came at him again and this time Ahah threw him to the ground more roughly. The crowd cheered loud and caught the attention of the HBC leader who separated the fighters. He told the big Chip man that he caused trouble all the time and that he was to make his own fire to cook his pancakes. The HBC leader said he was going to fire him and make him walk to his country if he didn't behave. And Ahah told the big Chip, "If I have to fight you again, I will throw you in the river and you will never come out of it alive." The big Chip didn't say anything because he was scared. He now knew that Ahah had medicine power.

Now I will go back to Paul Blondin. Paul worked on a boat crew for two summers. Paul was at the right age so he fit quite well in this group. He also lived within the Dene law so he got along with people anywhere he went. Paul was a small-time medicine man who used his medicine power when he needed it. Lelewa was Paul's friend. They chummed around together and were the same age.

One time, the boat crew was waiting for freight. While they waited the people fished and set rabbit snares to get fresh food. Other than that they had little recreation of any kind. This was in a Chipewyan community and the people got along pretty well with the boat crew even though they were strangers. Every summer, like anywhere else, the trappers and hunters came from all over because of the trading post. The boat crew lived in about five large tipis close to the old Chipewyan community and there was a steady demand to play hand games. But the people told the boat crew not to play with the old man because he was a great medicine man, especially in hand games. The old man was persistent and he came every day to tease the boat crew about how scared they were of him.

Finally the boat crew gave in to the old man. Paul and his friends said they couldn't allow that person to make fun of them. They decided to see how strong his medicine was. Paul was not afraid because he had medicine power for hand games too. They saw the old man the next morning and demanded to play a hand game. The old man was happy and called call the people to come over and bring the drums. They started to play and right away the old man's side started to win steadily. The people were poor in those days so they didn't gamble much but a couple of boxes of matches, small chunks of chewing tobacco or other small items. Paul told Lelewa he was going to

guess the old man the next time and Lelewa told him to go ahead and find out how strong the old man was. The old man accepted Paul's challenge. The old man came out as usual, making all kinds of actions such as blowing ashes from the fire in the centre of the tipi. The old man thought Paul would guess wrong as he sang hand games songs, but Paul's medicine was stronger than the old man's. Paul guessed the old man and won. The old man lost heavily for the first time and he did not come over to bug them anymore. Paul proved his medicine power for hand games was strong, but he used it only three times in his life.

Paul got married to a woman from the Mackenzie River and joined the Mountain Dene. Paul lived with the Mountain for six years. Their lifestyle was a bit different from the lowland people. On the west side of the Mackenzie River are the Rocky Mountains' northern range. Here they are called the Mackenzie Mountains. The mountains are part of the Mountain Dene lifestyle all the way up the river to the Arctic coast. The lifestyle is the same although the people are from different places.

Fort Norman has Mountain Dene and every summer and winter they would go into the mountains to seek big game for food. They would always go to the post to trade their furs, dry meat and moose hides. The trading post was very important to the Dene even though the traders cheated them. They had nowhere else to go to get what they needed. The Mountain Dene lifestyle was pretty tough compared to the lowland people. There were no fish in the mountains so they moved all the time. If they stayed in an area too long, they would clean it out of big game. They worked very hard to survive before the white people came. At that time, they used bows and arrows to kill moose and caribou and that must have been hard because even with guns it's hard. In Paul's time, they used the muzzle-loader gun. These Mountain people were great medicine people and followed the Dene law every day.

The Mountain Dene in the area of Fort Norman had to travel 70 miles to reach the mountain. They started off with dog packs in the middle of summer when the flies were really bad. The large families had to pack their babies on a mother pack. Fathers also carried a baby. And the older children had to pack their baby brothers or sisters. Other people also carried small children who couldn't walk.

There is a story about one woman with twin baby boys who packed her boys on each side of her dog's pack. They were facing each other with the mother holding the dog by a leash and with a baby on her back. This was quite common to see on the 70 miles to the mountain range. There was usually no game because it was too close to Fort Norman and was already hunted out. The people hunted rabbits. And there were no fish so before they got big game they had a hard time feeding themselves. They were hungry before the big hunt many times and it was a tough start.

As I mentioned before, Fort Norman had a trading post on the bank of the Mackenzie River and this is where a great number of people met four times a year to hold a feast and drum dances. After the gatherings the people went hunting.

The Mountain Dene moved around. The route to the Ross River trading post in the Yukon was about 800 miles by river - down the Mackenzie, onto the Keele River going across the mountains, down the river to Pelly Crossing, onto Ross River, then on to the post.

Ross River Post was important to the Mountain Dene. Eight hundred miles is a long way to pack babies on your back with the country full of flies to eat you up. During May the group usually moved to the border of the Yukon. This high level of land is about 5,000 feet above sea level and contains land like prairie country, with meadows and not many trees except a lot of willows. On this flat area there are a lot of moose and woodland caribou, plus other big game that like to go to that high area in the summer. And that is why the Mountain aboriginal people went there every summer.

They also used the big Peel River, which flows into the Mackenzie about 100 miles above Fort Norman. They travelled the Peel River in moose-skin boats they built themselves. One moose-skin boat was big enough for two families. To make a big one you needed 10 moose skins. In the early days when the population was large the Dene used to land at Fort Norman with 12 moose-skin boats. That meant they needed 120 moose skins to make the boats. That's a lot of hides but they could take the hides off the boat frames, soak them and tan them again. Sometimes they gave the hides to people who needed them.

When they were ready to run down the Peel River, they loaded everything they had, including the dogs. The dogs couldn't run alongside the river because there are a lot of cliffs. The river is swift and they usually took 10 days to get to Fort Norman, arriving around June 20 when hunters and trappers gathered to have a feast and drum dances. The people went home to their own country and the Mountain Dene would get ready to start off towards the Mackenzie mountain range again. They travelled about half way and hunted there to make a lot of dry meat and tan hides to trade at the trading post for the supplies they needed for the winter.

They would come down the Peel River again in the fall and trade their meat and tanned hides so they could go back by dog team. This time they trapped and hunted until Christmas time, then they came back to trade their furs at Fort Norman. At Christmas time, there was a big gathering of people from the regions, because it was the only place that had a big trading post. The feasts lasted for a week. The Mountain Dene then headed back to the mountains to spend the rest of the winter, until May, and then went back down the Peel River. They moved around and it was a lot of work, especially travelling with big game.

At the beginning of the century when gold was discovered in the Yukon territory, the Mountain Dene were attracted to the Whitehorse area where the rush was on. They were trading for merchandise that was not in the Fort Norman area, like the new 30-30 repeater rifle and a lot of other things. Some Mountain Dene spent 15 years in the Yukon without coming back to Fort Norman. The Mountain people made history in this northern country. They brought news from outside the country and were very strong medicine people, and there were prophets from a different country that predicted the future. They were very important people from Fort Norman and they were very strong medicine people. They followed the Dene law like others but a few were out of line and had problems - but we will go back to Paul Blondin's lifestyle.

Paul married a girl from the Mackenzie River and spent five years with the Mountain people. He was very young and could fit anywhere. When you killed moose maybe five miles from camp and had to pack everything in on your back, it was a hard life. Paul was well-respected no matter where he went because he had medicine powers to settle disputes. Sometimes a strong medicine person was to blame for someone's death but couldn't be confronted because people were too scared that the murderer had stronger medicine powers. Paul was handy settling disputes with medicine power and he was not afraid of anyone because he was not afraid of being killed while he was still young. Paul could never refuse anyone.

One time the head of a large family died and there were a lot of small children in the family. The widow cried and yelled, accusing a person for her husband's death. Paul felt pity for the widow and set up a meeting. Paul confronted the person. "I know who you are! I heard of you and what you have done in the past. But nobody has ever confronted you because they were afraid of your medicine powers, which is a gift to us Dene, to use for a good cause, to help each other, not to murder her husband. I believe her! I am speaking to you on her behalf! Next time you do this to anyone in the country, no matter where you are, I will travel to you and confront you as my personal enemy! I will make your life short. You will never see mother earth again and a lot of people will hate you, me as well! Nobody will miss you because you are a bad person. Remember, I don't want to hear from you again as long as you live!" The meeting ended. Nobody said anything about Paul's strong talk. But the bad person never made anyone die again, so with that kind of medicine, Paul possessed a lot and had great respect from the people.

Life in the mountains was very exciting if you killed several moose, sheep or woodland caribou. You could spend a long time in one place, having tea dances, a feast, hand games. The people were happy in those days. Sometimes they made a lot of dry meat and built a cache up on two big trees, making a platform so the wolves and the bears couldn't get the food. The drymeat was stored so that next time they came down the river, they could stop and pick up their meat again.

Paul already had a teenage son whose name was Edward, who had to pick up the dry meat at the cache about a half mile from the river. Edward and another boy grabbed their rifles and ran to the cache of meat to see if everything was okay. Grizzly bears were bad for that sometimes. They would try to chew through the timber to get the meat down. Edward and his friend ran towards the cache of meat. When they came to a hill overlooking the cache they saw a grizzly bear getting at the meat. Right away, the bear ran toward them. Edward put a shell into his gun immediately, aimed and shot at the bear. He just rolled around, came up again and ran toward them. Edward shot again and the same thing happened. With the third shot, the bear was closer. He shot the bear and looked for more shells. Edward found that he had lost his shells through a hole in his pocket. For the first time Edward got worried and looked around.

His friend had run away. His dad, Paul, was running toward him and said, "Let me do it." The grizzly ran toward them and it was really close. Paul knelt and took aim. Edward thought his dad's gun was jammed because he was not shooting. Bang! The grizzly bear fell right in front of them. Paul said, "This is the way to shoot! What's the matter with you?" He yelled at Edward and gave hell to Edward's friend for running away. That's one incident. Paul had medicine power to shoot a gun and he very seldom missed anything when he shot.

Another incident happened at the Peel River where the head of the river branches out three ways. People made moose-skin boats at the different sections of the river and jammed one another. Further down the river, at the juncture with the Mackenzie, there was a place to wait for each other and travel together to Fort Norman. One spring Paul was among one of those parties. One morning there was excitement outside. Paul told his wife, "Go outside and see what is the matter." His wife came back and said, "Paul, a little girl swallowed a rabbit bone and it's stuck in her throat! She's choking, that's what's the matter. Her mother's running all over to get some medicine people to help, but none of them can help."

"Paul!" his wife yelled. "When I was very young you told me if anyone choked on a bone you could do something about it. I will never forget what you said later: 'I was only trying to impress the girls.' But if you can do something, now is the time to do it!"

Paul's wife stopped there. "Let me out," Paul said. Once he was outside, Paul yelled as loud as he could, "What's the matter? We just came back from a hard winter, we are supposed to be happy. Do I hear crying? What's the matter?" As soon as Paul yelled, the bone that was stuck in the girl's throat shot out and the girl could breathe normally again. After a while she was okay. Paul had the gift of medicine power and always helped out when he could.

By this time it was about 1915. More white people had joined the trading business and a lot of white trappers had come from the south. Paul had planned to spend some time in the lowlands, perhaps in the Mackenzie valley, to trap for fur. In the mountains you work very hard just to eat and there is not much fur, like marten, mink, lynx, beaver and muskrat. The demand for fur was important to the people because they needed money to buy what they wanted. For the next five years Paul and his son lived and

trapped in the valley about 100 miles from Fort Norman, around Blackwater Lake. Edward could trap by this time; he became a good trapper at a young age. He listened good to his dad.

About this time two RCMPs came to the settlement and obtained a big piece of land to build their houses on. The transfer of land was not known to the aboriginal people. They never believed in somebody owning any land. The RCMP transferred a large piece of land for themselves. The HBC and the first missionaries all did the same thing.

They got land for nothing and received big sections later, which would affect the aboriginal people in the future, but not at this time when everything was just starting. There were all kinds of white people building cabins all over the country. Nobody talked to the Dene. Anyone was really free to do whatever they wanted and nobody bothered anyone about it.

When the RCMP first came, the Dene feared them. They thought they were great medicine people and could shoot people, because they were wearing guns. They wore guns not to hunt, but only to shoot people, so the people were scared of the RCMP. They never bothered anybody but they enforced the Canadian law. There was nothing in the country to commit a crime over, except to steal someone's fur, or possibly wife-beating far in the bush. But nobody reported anything because nobody spoke English and they would also shoot animals or birds out of season. The RCMP didn't bother them, perhaps because they were too poor to bother with.

With the first missionaries it was a bit different. The first missionaries' general plan was to convert the Indians, whom they called pagans. Everything the Dene did at the start was bad and the missionaries preached about it in church. They looked at medicine power and told the Indians that medicine power was witchcraft and the work of the devil. The Dene were very confused by what the first missionaries accused them of, that how they lived was bad. The Dene looked at medicine power as a great gift from the creator and they had survived by it. It really benefitted them in the past. And now the priests were saying that it was the work of the devil. But they had seen some good medicine people, who helped the poor and sick people, and they also saw all kinds of miracles with medicine power in order to help people.

There are legends and stories about the power of medicine. A special medicine person could talk to caribou hundreds of miles away and tell them to come because the people were hungry. Some of them would talk to a raven to look into the future. That's just part of it; they did all kinds of things to help the poor people, so the Dene always looked at medicine power as a real power. It's a great source of information to talk about things that ordinary people don't know of, and it would have been great education for people if the medicine people could have taught what they knew about medicine power. But they never talked about medicine power because they claimed it was a secret. When the world was new it was called super power. Medicine power was much stronger then. Legends are told of great medicine people in the past, such as

Yamoria, his brother Yamoga, Edzo, Akaitcho and a lot of other medicine people that we have legends of.

They had information on how the earth rotates and how it works. They also knew about the sun, the stars, and other planets in space. They had power for all animals, birds, and insects. They couldn't name everything although one person could own all of this medicine. Yamoria was one. They talked about the creator long before the white people came. They talked about a creator with great power who created everything for us. This is where their religion came from. Some of these good elders claimed they got some songs from the creator and they took great care of the songs so they could pass them on from generation to generation. This is where the Holy Drum song that the Dene still use today came from. In this regard, the Dene already had experience in the true religion when the first missionaries came. That is why the missionaries had no difficulty converting the Indians to the Roman Catholic church.

The Dene were really confused when the early priests said our way was the devil's way.

The Indians were always very poor and depended on somebody they recognized, like the early priests, whom they saw as a great source of power. In no time almost everybody reacted to the early priests' preaching and became very religious.

Consequently, a lot of good elders switched from storytelling to preaching what the priests preached. According to Dene history, good leaders became prophets in different areas. The aboriginal people used them to look into the future, as well as to see into the spirit world, which ordinary people cannot do.

When the world was new, a lot of strong medicine people had the power to look into the future as well as look into the spirit world. They could even see the spirit of a person before a man or woman was born, or even after a person died. They could see where the spirit went. The strong medicine people used their power to look into the unknown world and told about it sometimes. Some of these people used all kinds of animal power to communicate with them and get help to look into the unknown world for information that would affect the living. That is why strong medicine people were special.

The Dene had knowledge to look into the unknown world in the past. So when the early priests came and started to preach about their church, their talk was not new to Dene knowledge. As a result, when the priest talked about the bible it was not new to the Dene. It was a different way of explaining the power of the creator. The Dene believed it was just another way to look into the unknown world. They already had experience in that area so as time went on, the Dene really became religious to the Roman Catholic church. When they heard of individuals who saw holy people and talked about them in their visions, they believed that the power of the creator wanted to communicate through this individual.

According to the information of the past, some Dene people travelled very far to see these prophets. There were a couple of prophets living in the Yukon and one really strong prophet in the Beaver tribe of B.C. who carried an unknown thick book. A lot of people visited the prophets from far away, and there were a few from Alberta and the NWT. The Dene themselves preached to their relatives and this is how they transferred to the Roman Catholic church in the early days.

At the time, groups of people travelled and prayed all the time. They already learned how to pray in their own language. In the evening and on Sundays, they would come together in one tent to pray and sing religious songs. The elders' custom is to talk to their people, to be good citizens, so this religious talk was what they had done in the past. This was between 1915 and 1921, when the Dene were still living according to their culture and law, with a bit of change but not much because most of the Dene spent their time in the bush. Nobody bothered them so they still lived as usual when travelling in groups. They had leaders to decide for them and elders still maintained their daily teachings to young people. Paul Blondin was a leader of groups because of his unusual medicine power to settle disputes, as mentioned previously.

When people gathered in Fort Norman, they talked about where they would hunt and trap because they did not go back to the same places. They looked for different spots and talked amongst themselves, planning where they were going to go for the coming winter and which groups were planning to go to a new area. Each group had their own leader at that time. Medicine power was getting weaker. It was not as good or as strong as when the world was new, but a few people still possessed power. So the group leader was the one who looked after the group in the bush and made decisions if problems arose.

The leaders and the elders would be responsible for telling daily stories and for talking to young people about being good. There were no legal punishments yet for when a person hurt someone fighting or hit his wife. The leader would just talk strongly to the person and that would be about all. There were no crimes like today; the people still lived in the bush. They didn't plan far ahead. It was a great day if a person killed a moose. They shared the moose. Everybody gathered for a big feast and the hunter had a great story to tell about how he out-thought the moose and killed it.

It was about that time that bad health began coming their way. More people started to come north from the south. They brought in new diseases that the native people were helpless against. Since there were no doctors or any kind of health care, a lot of people died. Wherever they went was their home, therefore they buried the people right there. So the Dene have grave sites all over the bush, and that's very important to the Dene people at the present time.

Private companies sometime lease a big area of land or buy land, and Dene cemeteries are owned by others. They are against that but there isn't much they can do. Another

thing is building a dam for energy and causing flooding to Dene cemeteries. That's a great loss to them because it's their way to believe in their relatives of the past. Their spirits are dwelling where they are buried.

So at that time Dene still went all over the country to trap and hunt. So back to Paul who trapped in the Blackwater Lake area for about five years.

Edward Blondin was getting to be a young man and a good trapper and hunter. He and Paul caught a lot of fur, since it's a good area for fur. Every Christmas and Easter time they went to Fort Norman to trade. The second winter when Paul arrived at Fort Norman to trade all their fur, the townspeople advised that if he and the boy Edward could make the long trip to Fort Ross River, Yukon to trade their fur and obtain the first new guns, 30-30 repeater rifles, the trip would be worthwhile. So Paul decided to go. Because it's very far and through mountains, he tried to get people to go with him. He found eight people with families who decided to make the journey.

So they started off from Fort Norman. Everybody knew the country. They travelled very slowly since they had to stop for two or three days to hunt and dry some meat. They ate well and the dogs got rest. By the time they reached Ross Post, after travelling one and a half months, it was well into April. Paul knew that people still used medicine power to gamble. He had a friend in Fort Norman who had a strong power to play games. Paul had begged him to come with him. He even gave him some fur to bring along, because he would be handy in a hand game. His name was Kenny.

So when they arrived at Ross Post it was like the people there were relatives. Some of the people there were intermarrying with Fort Norman Mountain Dene. So they helped each other and shared. They knew each other pretty well because they were there almost every year to trade. And at that time the whole Yukon Territory was in the peak of prosperity from the gold rush. People from the south were doing business. There were also a lot of private fur buyers in the Yukon. Therefore, fur had a good price because buyers were competing with each other. So the native people from Yukon also benefitted from the gold rush. They bartered with a lot of fur traders in the country. That way they got good prices for their fur. Not only fur, they sold meat too, and they got money on the side for that. They also had the chance to sell homemade clothes such as mukluks, moccasins, mitts decorated with beads, jackets made with moose and caribou skin and decorated with beads, and a lot of other sewing, including kids' clothes. Some native families in the Yukon were doing well at that time.

So there was this travelling group of about 60 people, 30 dog teams, because it was a lot of fun for them to travel all over Yukon, visit settlements and have tea dances and play hand games, and also play poker with cards, which they learned from this gold rush. At that time there was still medicine power among the native people. The Ross Post people warned the Fort Norman group not to play hand games or poker games with these travelling groups because they used medicine power, and they won a lot from people as they travelled. One day all these travelling people came into Ross Post.

They were very happy people since they had money in their pockets. So after they had a good meal from the community, the leader started to talk about what was happening elsewhere.

Soon this strong speaker of this travelling group was saying, "It would be a good idea to have a good hand game. It is the custom of all the aboriginal people. Whenever we meet each other we have a tea dance and a hand game. We heard a Fort Norman group is here. Who is the leader of that group? I would like a word with him." Paul Blondin stood and said, "I act as leader for this group. There are not many of us, only eight adults." And the opposite leader said, "We would like a hand game. When the white people meet each other they have a drink of whisky for friendship and good peace of mind. But we aboriginal people don't drink whisky, that is not our custom. When we meet we have a tea dance and a hand game, that is our custom. So my friend, how about a hand game?"

Paul's answer was hard for him since he was told not to play with these people. Paul said, "We don't know how to play hand games. Besides, there are only eight of us. I'm sorry to say that we cannot play a hand game." The leader said with a loud voice, "My friend, I think you are lying to me. All aboriginal people know how to play the hand games. I think you are scared of me. I ask you once more, would you like to play a hand game?" Paul was a little angry because the man was making fun of him in front of a big crowd. Paul told the man that he hadn't been afraid of anybody in his life. Then he said, "If you want to play hand game we will give it a try." They started to yell, they were so happy. They were going to play a hand game. Soon they started.

It was only the eight of them on one side since Ross Post people didn't want to play against this strong group. Right at the start the Fort Norman group started to lose heavily. The travelling group got special people to guess, people who were very good at that, and they had three special persons who didn't seem to lose. That way in two games they won 30 times. Soon the Fort Norman people would have nothing to pay. Paul recognized that the travellers were using medicine power in the game. He knew these three persons who stayed to the last were using medicine power. Paul decided his people couldn't wait any longer. They had to use medicine power. If they're using power against us, we can use what we've got. We don't know if it's stronger, but we will try, Paul thought.

Paul had medicine power in a hand game to guess people and his friend Kenny had power in the actual hand game. So Paul approached his friend Kenny and said, "My friend, we're going to lose everything in one hour. We won't be able to get back where we came from if we don't do something. I can guess with my medicine power. I don't know if it will work, but I will give it a try. You, my friend, have a wife and son to think of, so you have to play the hand game. Use your medicine power to play. Maybe between the two of us we can do something. How about it?" Paul asked his friend.

Kenny said, "I can't play, but I can have my 12-year-old boy play. I could give him my medicine power to play. It might work." Paul said, "Then we'll do it that way." Paul was happy when Kenny said that.

So the game kept on. When the three special people stayed to the last again, Paul stood up and said, "I will guess you, so do your best," and Paul clapped his hands. Paul guessed to the right. All three of them just about fell to the ground. Paul got all of three people with one shot, for that night nobody would miss the objects in their hands again. Because they were using medicine power to play and Paul used stronger medicine power to guess, it killed their medicine power to guess. So they could never play with power again.

So when the Fort Norman group started to play, Kenny pushed his son, only 12 years old, to play. They could never guess the kid so he revived the game and they started to play over again. They won a great deal with two more games on their side. They won all that they lost and won a lot more on top of that. The tribal group played two more times but they lost. Paul didn't guess again but told the person to guess them to the right all the time. Paul said, "They can't put their object to the left tonight." So the travelling group stopped winning and lost heavily. After they played hand games for three hours the leader of the travelling group said, "We feel the hand game is over for now." Paul, with his temper rising, said to the leader, "I think I heard you say you want to quit. When I said we didn't want to play, you put us in a situation where we couldn't say no, so we played with you. When I knelt down to play with you, my plan was to play for three days and nights with you. But you play only three hours and you want to quit. I think you are scared of me."

It was Paul's turn to make a fool of the man now. The leader of the travelling group stood up and said, "My friend I admit I am scared of you. When you got those three persons with one shot, I knew we were finished." So the two leaders shook hands and forgot about the hand game and the travelling group put up a big feast and tea dance. So in that game people used medicine power to play. Paul used medicine power only when he had to.

Soon they were on their way back to Fort Norman. At the head of the Peel River they got enough moose to build a moose-skin boat. That's how Paul came back in the spring. They trapped and hunted around Blackwater again all winter and Edward Blondin got to marry a girl from Great Bear Lake, the daughter of Karkeye, another famous trapper. Edward trapped with his dad another year in the Blackwater Lake area. The next year Paul trapped close to Blackwater, but Edward went to Great Bear Lake to stay with Karkeye for the winter.

Paul had tough luck that winter. Just when trapping season opened and he was ready to trap, his wife got sick. He got ready to travel across the country to Fort Norman, where some of his wife's relations were still living. It took about one week to bring his

wife to Fort Norman. The people shared a lot in those days. They help Paul with everything - a place to stay, wood. Everybody brought food for them since the woman was sick.

Strange things happened to the woman. She was sick but didn't die right away. They stayed all winter and she began to preach to the people about the creator, saying she saw three angels in her vision and that they talked to her and told her what to preach to the people. People were drawn to her because they recognized she had been a good woman all her life. That was why she was being rewarded in her last days.

One time an angel appeared to her again and offered three wishes. If she wanted any of the wishes they would be granted. She said she only wanted to see her son Edward Blondin once more before she died, and asked if she could help him even after she died.

She didn't desire to live any longer. She knew she was going to a good place so let the creator do what he wanted with her. She was a holy woman. A lot of people benefitted from her preaching; people travelled from far away to listen to her. Her wishes were fulfilled. She saw her son in July and died shortly after that.

It just about that time, 1921, that more people came in from the south. Some private traders came in. A lot of them built cabins in good trapping areas. Some stayed in settlements beside the HBC, so it gave the Dene the opportunity to barter their fur with different traders, to sell their fur at a higher price. The RCMP and the Roman Catholic mission had been there for quite some time. The RCMP were not doing too much, just watching over the native people. It was later that they got busier, when more new laws came.

The missionaries were the ones who were busy, converting the Indians. They knew that the Dene were poor, and it was getting worse around 1920, because too much sickness got around now and more people were dying. So the missionaries did more funeral services and preached more about death. It scared the people since they were in a period of changing lifestyle. So the Dene really moved quickly toward the Roman Catholic church.

Later on I will explain more about the changing spirituality. It was about this time that the federal government started to approach the aboriginal people of the north.

As I said before, communication was very poor at that time. The Dene didn't know what was going on elsewhere so when big news happened, it scared them. Communication got a little better when more people travelled on the Mackenzie River and brought in outside news. But the Dene in the north were not really interested in what was going on elsewhere. They were interested in only what was going on where they lived. The Dene didn't think about issues going on elsewhere as if they could later affect them. They didn't think that way.

The Dene of the area around Norman Wells knew that oil was seeping to the surface. They could see that it was no good for them. It spoiled the water and animals kept away from there. The Dene brought a small container of oil to a priest and he shipped it south because the Dene did not know what it was. Later, people from outside investigated the place and discovered the oil.

There were problems about ownership of the land. Anybody could see that the Dene owned the land since they were the first ones there. So the federal government tried to make a hasty agreement with the aboriginal people from the north. They wanted to give them a treaty, the same as all over the south, and put them on reserves. The native people had heard about the treaty agreements in the south. But they never saw one. The government tried to get people together in Fort Norman to give them a treaty but too many Dene were scattered all over the land. The government was in a hurry so they just tried to make an agreement with whoever was in Fort Norman. The leader of the Dene, who had been a leader in the past, knew what he was talking about when it came to land. When the government agent remarked that the government wanted to offer its services to help the people and take care of them in exchange for land that needed to be developed to make money, the Dene leader knew what the government was talking about. Although there was poor communication they had an interpreter, so they understood each other.

It was 1921 and the oil discovery was made in 1920. There was one day of talk in Fort Norman about Treaty 11. The leader of the Dene made a strong speech saying they loved the land, that it's everybody's mother because it feeds us all. The land belongs to everybody, he said. Everybody has to share and everything on it we share. We live on this land like brother and sister and love each other. As long as the sun shines and the big river runs, you will keep your word and we will take the \$5. So the Indian agent had the church help them make the agreement. The government made a lot of promises, saying the Dene could keep going on the land as they always did. Nobody would stop them. The government would never try to stop them from killing animals and birds.

The government also said they needed to recognize a leader. One head leader would be a chief and other people could be councillors. That was the first time the Dene heard about this kind of leader. But everything was done in a hurry so they agreed to do it that way. In three days the treaty agreement was over. The Dene didn't know how to read and write. The government made a long complicated document and had all the chiefs from different regions put their X on it, which represented a signature. And in that document it says that the Dene yield to the Dominion of Canada their rights and all the land except for one square mile per five persons. The document has very little of what Dene leaders said, so the whole agreement was just to cheat the Indians out of their rights and land title. With the Dene not being educated in the same way, the government agents did just about what they wanted to with them. So that is how Treaty 11 came about.

From the start the Dene were not excited about the treaty but they expected the government to help them. It didn't for the next 20 years. It just handed out the \$5, that is about all. But because the Dene were poor and never had things, they didn't miss anything. They kept on with what they were doing.

For the next few years Paul stayed with Edward Blondin, moving from one place to another to trap and hunt. The aboriginal people started to change their lifestyle more and more. They suffered more and poverty because too many people started to get sick. It was 1925 when Paul and Edward were doing the spring hunt for beaver and muskrat that Paul had a bad vision. One morning they were on the edge of a big lake and it was flooded. It was raining a lot, plus it was foggy. They were paddling in this flooded area among a lot of willows and Paul said, "Let's find dry land and camp. There's no use hunting anymore in this weather." So they found some dry land under a big tree. They made a fire and ate and went to sleep.

Later Edward woke up and his dad was sitting by the fire so he got up to ask what the matter was. Paul said he had a bad dream. "Sometime this summer something bad will happen with medicine power," he told his son. "I saw two strong medicine people quarrelling and trying to kill each other with their medicine power. One of them threatened that all medicine people would follow him if he died. This could override the power of all medicine people in the whole Mackenzie valley so I asked the eagle to save me but he could not do it. The power was too strong, but I begged the eagle to save you. You will pull through if anything happens this summer."

With a worried look he told his son, "Let's rush home and then go to Fort Franklin. Maybe I can get help there." So that is what they did. The ice on Great Bear Lake was good but they put boots on the dogs' feet to protect them from sharp needles. They used runners underneath the homemade sleigh so in no time they got to Fort Franklin. There was no problem with the people there; everybody was happy, but Paul was worried. He wanted to put some medicine people together and try to look into the future to see if there was a problem, but nobody paid attention to him. A tea dance was going on. Soon everybody was ready to go to Fort Norman to sell their fur. When they landed at Fort Norman there was no problem with people's health. Soon people started getting ready for a big feast and tea dance.

The conflict with medicine power started there. The year before a well-to-do salesman for the Hudson Bay Company who travelled in the Bear Lake area died after he quarrelled with a strong medicine person named Onzie. They blamed Onzie for the death of Salee, the salesman for the Hudson's Bay Company who came from Fort Good Hope. This news spread all over the country and reached Salee's father, who lived close to Arctic Red River.

In Fort Norman the big feast started and everybody shared all the good food. The feast started with three chiefs and some elders making speeches. It was a long time since the food was ready and people were hungry and getting tired. The talk finished and they were ready to eat when from one end of the crowd an old man started to yell. Nobody ever saw that man. They didn't know who he was, a stranger. "I want to talk," he said. The head chief told him to make it short because people were hungry.

"My name is Polee and I come from below Fort Good Hope," he said. "I have travelled up the river for one month with my wife, pulling a small canoe. I arrived here last night, in time to have a feast with you, but I have bad news. I wanted to get it off my chest. I am a person who doesn't talk behind someone's back. I confront a person. That is how I like it. Last fall my son Salee died in Bear Lake. They say a man by the name of Onzie is responsible for my son's death and I want to know if this is true. Is there a man here with the name Onzie? I want to talk to him."

Onzie stood up. He was a powerful medicine person who had no fear of anyone. Polee asked, "Is it true that you have killed my son with your medicine power?" "Yes," Onzie said. He explained. "Our great medicine people made laws for us. All parents are to teach their children well so they can live good lives. I see that you didn't teach your boy at all. He started to quarrel with me and landed in the grave in no time. If you had taught him right he would be alive today. So I would blame you for the death of your son." Polee was really mad. This man he had never seen in his life insulted him in public. Polee said, "So you like to kill people, why don't you kill me? Then you will have killed a man."

The quarrel got really heated. They could not stop yelling at each other. The people started screaming for them to stop but they could not. At the end they said openly that they would kill each other. Polee said, "It doesn't matter what you do, you will die before me." Onzie said, "If I go, all medicine people will go with me." This was when all aboriginal people recognized that medicine power was very dangerous if it got out of hand. All the people there got worried and scared. Some were crying already. It was something that nobody could do anything about.

For three days nothing happened but on the fourth day Onzie died during the night. And in the evening Polee died also. From then on the flu epidemic started hitting everybody. Medicine people started to die off. Paul Blondin was sick for only two hours before he died. He foresaw this conflict of medicine power a month ahead of time but the power was too strong to overcome, so he died with the rest of the people.

It was a terrible epidemic. People died every day. There was no help from anywhere. Where was the government who made promises in Treaty 11 in 1921? People went to Fort Norman from Fort Franklin. Half of them never came back. Most of the elders died there. So that was the flu of 1925 that people have never forgotten. This epidemic spread through the whole Mackenzie valley from Fort Smith to Aklavik. All

the communities lost their elders and medicine people. From then on the people of the Dene Nation were never the same, because they lost the medicine people they always depended on and they lost the elders. They were poor and sad and leaderless.

They started to depend on the traders and deeply in a spiritual way they depended on the church. They became more religiously devoted, as Roman Catholics. They learned how to pray and sing hymns. You could hear people say the rosary every morning and evening. With their story-telling culture, people started to preach religion along with the priest of that area to make the church strong.

But I want readers to know that medicine existed in the early days, which people depended on for everything. Conflicts with medicine power extinguished it in the northern country forever. It never came back. It is believed that it will never come back, so life goes on.

The lifestyle of the Dene is changing a bit faster now so I will start writing about Edward Blondin's life. Edward was born around 1890. He was the only son of Paul Blondin. When Paul died in 1928 in the flu epidemic, Edward was around 35 years old. He followed in his father's footsteps. Edward was similar to Paul. His attitude was about the same. He was a leader for a group, a storyteller, a good speaker and a religious person. He was good at gathering people to pray on Sunday and he sang a lot of prayer songs. Edward was a small type of medicine man too. He owned only one or two medicines and his medicine told him how long he was going to live. That is why Edward feared no one.

The period from 1928 was a very bad time. Edward was about 40 years old already. He was married and had two boys and several girls by then. That period was really tough for all the aboriginal people of the north. You only saw federal government agents travel around once in the summertime, passing out the treaty payments and making promises they didn't follow. So you might as well say there was no government. The RCMP were only there to protect the Canadian law, which Dene didn't know at that time. There was no help of any kind, from any place at all. Since there were no doctors or nurses or health care, sickness in the north was going sky high. Tuberculosis was possibly the worse disease because it spread all over the people and didn't go away. A lot of times a whole family would get wiped out. There was a lot of suffering and mourning among the northern Dene people. They kept searching for medicine power, which once they benefitted from, but they had lost all medicine people in the flu epidemic. There were hardly any medicine people left, so the Dene didn't know where to go for help.

They only had the church and the priest to go to for help. But priests are not doctors. They couldn't help the sick people but could say a lot about what would happen after you died. That is when the church and its priests got really strong, because all the poor Dene really depended on them. That was all they had left and the early priests

took advantage of that and tried to change the people. They were told to forget about their use of medicine power. The priests preached their own ways. Anyway, the Dene started to get really religious at that time. People went to church regularly, morning and evening.

About that time some prospectors from Ontario flew to Great Bear Lake to prospect. They found uranium ore on the shore, which caused a great excitement of that time. It was 1930 when a lot of outside people started coming to Great Bear Lake, either by plane or in makeshift boats they made themselves. Some formed a company and developed a starting point of a mine right on the shore of Great Bear Lake, which they called Eldorado Mine. It started to produce the first uranium ore in the north. Transportation in the north was poor so the mining company started to build their own boats, all wooden ones to start with. They had to ship the ore far into the south to a refinery, a place called Port Hope, Ontario. They had to use a water route to ship the ore out and it's a long way. You have to go all across Great Bear Lake, 200 miles, and then go down the Bear River. There are eight miles of rapids. They had to make the portage there on a 10-mile gravel road with company trucks. From there, there were another 40 miles to go by riverboat before reaching the Mackenzie River. Then they used the Hudson's Bay Company sternwheeler all the way to Waterway, Alberta. And from there they used the train to the outside world.

They didn't hire Indians, maybe because they lacked education or skill. Usually Dene sat around for something good to come their way. But that development helped some native people to pilot riverboats 90 miles from Bear River to Great Bear Lake, and also around Eldorado Mine. Some people came north for minerals like the Hudson's Bay Company came for fur. Other people came to buy fur and run stores of their own near the mine. They even had a restaurant there. So a lot of the native people from the surrounding area moved near Eldorado Mine.

They even established a town they called Cameron Bay. The native people were able to sell wild meat and fish to the mine and Cameron Bay people, and they could also sell things such as moccasins and other materials. Some even were lucky enough to work for a short time cutting line for staking land.

So Edward got involved in work for a short time. He piloted a river boat for two summers and after that he moved to Cameron Bay to trap and sell meat. Sickneses such as TB were still with the Dene. Edward's small children were dying of TB until he wondered if any would be left. He met with the area bishop who ran a small boarding school in Fort Providence, where Edward's two boys were in school. Edward gave the bishop \$200 to send his two boys by plane to Cameron Bay. By the fall of 1933 the boys were back after three years in school.

The Eldorado Mine and Cameron Bay attracted Dogrib people from far away Fort Rae, which is 400 miles south of Cameron Bay. But the aboriginal people are like that. Poverty and sickness were everywhere but they pretended everything was okay and acted happy all the time, according to their law. They prayed together and had feasts together. The different tribes of Dogrib and Slavey people made a good pair to have fun together. The caribou migration helped the people much in the winter. They had a lot of meat, help from mother earth, so they ate well in the cold winter. It was just about that time that a great depression descended on Canada, but the aboriginal people in the NWT didn't know the difference. Their lifestyle seemed to be the same as it had been in the past.

That's because they were poor and maybe the lifestyle couldn't get much worse than it already was. They lived off the land in the past and they still did. The stores didn't sell meat or fish then, they sold flour, sugar, rolled oats and rice. That was about all the food in the stores.

That period between 1930 to 1940 was possibly the hardest time to live better. Everything was against the Dene people living better. One of the major problems was sickness. Sometimes there was so much TB in one family that the people couldn't hunt, fish or trap properly, and there was no medical care yet. Another problem was that fur prices were so low. Everything was cheap but fur was too low. Marten was \$5, fox was \$3, mink was \$4, beaver was \$10 and muskrat was 50 cents.

Edward lost the rest of his children in that period and his wife died in 1938, all from TB. I was the eldest son and the only child to survive. Almost all the Dene lost half their children to TB. It was terrible, yet no government help came. They made promises at treaty time, but didn't keep them. They should have kept their promises because they came from the treaty agreements, in which the Dene people lost a lot of their rights and land in false parts of the treaties. They found that out later, but it was too late to change things around. It will write about this problem again.

In 1939 the second world war started in Europe. Since Dene people weren't educated and didn't speak English, most didn't believe there was a war going on. It made no difference to them anyway. They were busy daily trying to stay alive. After Edward's wife died he stayed single for three years and got married again. He still had me, the oldest son.

Regarding development in the north, the Eldorado Mine and Cameron Bay in Great Bear Lake died down because the price of minerals like silver was so low. There was no gold there anyway and the transportation was not good enough. So when the war broke out everything closed down at Great Bear Lake. In fact, there was just one small store in the whole Great Bear Lake area to serve the people there. The Imperial Oil company had been operating since 1920, but in a small way, just to serve the northern

people. There was no big development and people didn't use oil to heat their houses yet. So Imperial Oil didn't do much, they had no place to sell the oil.

But in 1942 a new kind of development came to the Norman Wells area. Japan declared war on the USA. The Americans feared that maybe Japan would come there via Alaska. They had no oil in Alaska then. So the USA made a deal with Canada to get oil from Norman Wells. The plan was to build a 600-mile pipeline to Whitehorse, Yukon. The operation was on. For four years it was the biggest development in the NWT. The USA brought about 10,000 military and civilian people to do the work.

In the NWT at that time a lot of mines and other developments closed down because of the war. Some mines in Yellowknife were closed. A lot of people looking for jobs got involved in the Canol project in Norman Wells. So there were a lot of people from all over. For the first time Indians in that area got short-term jobs with the Canol project. After four years, the war had just about ended. Things quieted down and soon the north was back as before, waiting for something to happen.

So the war was over. Edward and his boy worked on the Canol project for two years for a survey company, which determined the right-of-way to Whitehorse. Edward had bad luck with his health. He had just got remarried. While cutting line for the survey company, Edward got sick and begged the manager to fly in an army doctor by helicopter. They brought a doctor in and after he examined Edward he told me, just a boy then, that Edward was too sick to even talk. The doctor told me that my dad might not even make it to morning. His lungs were filling up with really thick yellow pus. When his lungs were full of that pus he would die because he wouldn't be able to breathe.

The doctor told me that if he wanted to tell my dad he was dying it was up to me. "He is your dad, he is not my dad." With that the doctor took off. "I'll come back in the morning; he will be dead by then," he said as he left. I didn't know what to do. He heated some water and tried to communicate with his dad, to make him sip the hot water. I was able to hear a little bit of what Edward said. George told him everything the doctor said. Edward said, "Why didn't he tell me everything instead of you?" So Edward told me to just sit and wait. "I have medicine power on moose so I will try to communicate with my medicine." After mumbling some kind of outside-world song, he finished.

Edward tried to smile but he was too sick. He said, "I got good news for you, my boy. I called my medicine Moose and he came around. I told him to help me and Moose claimed that my spirit has been departed from me for a few days. But Moose said he could look for my spirit and try to get it back. The medicine Moose got Edward's spirit back and returned it to Edward's body. Moose said, "You will be okay now, don't worry." Edward told Moose to look into our lives, "me and my boy." Moose did that and reported: "Don't worry about George. He will be alive after all of your people are

dead. George will live a long time, and Edward too. You will live a long time yet with this woman you just married. You will have several children and you will see them get married. And you will have your grandchildren, so don't worry." Edward lived 89 years and died of old age.

See how good his personal medicine power was. He said to me, "This doctor is professional but my medicine is true for myself." So the next morning the doctor came around and was really excited. He said he didn't know what happened but my dad was going to live. In four days, Edward went back to work. So that was a close call for Edward. If he didn't have that medicine power that's where he would be buried. So as I was saying, after the Canol project was over, things got quiet in the NWT again.

By about 1943 I was a young man. So what I will do is put Edward and me together in the story from 1943 on, because we both witnessed the real change that took place in the Dene people of the NWT. But first I would like to express the medicine power again.

I will write three or four short stories on medicine power to show that it had power and some individuals have used it to help themselves and other people. This power existed for a long time, right from the beginning. Nobody knows how long that is. Storytellers say medicine was there when animals and birds and humans were all together and talked to each other. So medicine power existed then for animals to own. They communicated with people who owned the same kind of medicine power to help each other. If it is true, storytellers are talking about millions of years ago when human beings were not fully developed as humans yet.

Paul's and Edward's periods of life were when the medicine power was getting weak. There was hardly any medicine after 1928, a bit, but not worth talking about. So medicine power would be non-existent in my lifespan. It is all gone. I want to express this power because from 1944 there will be no medicine power to talk about.

There was a new kind of development going on in the NWT. Up to 1944, the Dene made a living from the land. They moved all over the land. The second world war was just about over and the federal government was planning to develop the resources of the north. To do that, the government had to improve transportation with boats and airplanes. So the government came out with a lot of steel riverboats on the Mackenzie River and pushed for more development of oil and minerals. Slowly it happened, and the Dene people got some short-term jobs. Bigger planes helped a lot by having people flying back and forth to help in developing the north.

Next the federal government started to concentrate on the general health of the Dene. To develop the north they needed healthy people. By this time about half the Dene had died of disease. The government put in a lot of money and many doctors and nurses to do the work to improve the health of the Dene people. It was very hard to impose

professional people on the Dene and order them around. They even had the RCMP to help push them around. The Dene did not speak English and didn't understand how diseases work.

TB was the one the government worked on most. To start with they had several planes to fly doctors and nurses around. They had portable x-ray machines to use on everybody in the north - and a lot of them had TB. They should have been in hospitals but there was no hospital in the north. So the government started building hospitals in Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, Yellowknife, Fort Rae, Fort Simpson, and Aklavik. All the TB patients had to be shipped there or to the south, and this was new to the Dene. Therefore a lot of Dene didn't want to go. That is when the RCMP took a hand to force them on the plane. There were pitiful scenes. At the start people were just pulled away to the hospital, wives from husbands, husbands from wives, children from parents. There were a lot of split families and starvation developed.

In a period of five or six years, the Dene's health got a little better. TB and starvation were brought under control. The government had a lot of power so it helped on other issues, such as housing and welfare. At that time most of the Dene in the communities were living in tents and were very poor. The Health department said that in order to stay healthy, these people needed good houses. So they pushed the government to build houses for the Dene people in the Mackenzie valley. Housing was new to the Dene. They didn't know how to pay rent so they started off with free housing, but later on they paid. Still later, working people paid as much as \$300 to \$500 in rent per month. So they found ways to deal with housing.

Another issue was education. The government said that in order to know about sickness and take care of yourselves you have to have education. So they started building nursing stations and community schools. At the same time the government started to make policy and laws for communities and established a body besides the band - either a hamlet, village, town or settlement. It controlled the local government. The band dealt with the Dene and the hamlet dealt with everybody, Metis and non-aboriginal people living in the community. So that was the starting point of government policy here, and it was all new to the Dene way of life.

One of the policies put into place that affected them was that every child had to go to school. That forced the Dene to stay in communities. They no longer could move around so much in the bush to harvest the land for food and fur to buy what they needed. For the first time the Dene were faced with the need for money. When the children started going to school it changed everything for each Dene family. This kind of life and its needs were new to the Dene. In the past they used food from the land and fur to buy things. They couldn't do that living in a community. Then the children started to change very quickly. They spoke English, even at home, which confused the parents and affected each family. This problem grew all over the communities. It seems that education started to extinguish a lot of Dene culture and law. That is where

the lifestyle started to change and it hasn't stopped to the present time. It will go on into the future.

When the Dene were forced to stay in communities, it gave rise to the problem of making money there. But there were no paying jobs to do. Just about that time social benefits such as welfare and family allowance were established throughout Canada. That really helped the people, but receiving money from the government, especially welfare, really changed a lot of people's attitudes about being independent, as they had been in the past. It affected their pride to get money for nothing, yet they couldn't refuse to take welfare because of their children. The children changed so fast they started to eat a lot of store food, which costs a lot of money. Plus they wanted to have good clothes, which were very expensive. The cost of living went up steadily.

One of the problems the Dene faced was they couldn't handle money. They didn't know the value of money. Therefore they spent it too fast and most of the time the family didn't have any. Small children cried for money. Children are power. So because of money the lifestyle of the Dene changed some more. In the long run some of the lowest types of Dene became dependent on this welfare system. Soon some of the people didn't want to go trapping or work at all, but just stay idle in the community so they could get welfare. They never used to be that way. Even if they were poor they used to work hard for all they got.

So the Dene started to lose a lot of their culture. The new things imposed on the Dene had to change them, things like education, welfare, housing and laws to run the community. They're to blame. We need all these things, but on the other hand they extinguished the Dene culture, such as Dene languages, the Dene system of parents teaching their children. Dene law, which was important to the people, was replaced by modern law. And there are a lot of small parts of the culture that are gone with the change. So at the start the change of lifestyle improved things for Dene, and it began to extinguish the culture. The Dene really got brainwashed and confused. They let things go too far. Later in that period the Dene woke up and started to ask why things went the way they did. Their children didn't listen to them anymore, and so on.

Edward Blondin died around 1970. So I lived in the peak of the Dene lifestyle. I came to Yellowknife around 1949 because there was no school around Great Bear Lake. I tried to live like a non-aboriginal person but found it difficult to learn how to live in a city when I had just come from the bush. I worked in a mine as a labourer, so I sort of transferred to that kind of city life. I put all my children into modern schools, so they also lost their culture and language.

Regarding trapping and hunting, a few Dene still do it, but not well, because you have to go too far to find wildlife and the family has to stay in the community, so you have to rush back and forth all the time. You can't hunt and trap well that way. What really affects everybody in the north is the continuation of very high prices. Everything that

you need to eat or wear is expensive. So is transportation, and so on. Even big companies are affected by high costs. They can't develop minerals and oil because it's too expensive to do it. Therefore no development, and few jobs in the north. It is a bit better for people who have a steady job because wages go up with costs. People with no job, they are the ones who have a hard time. So the change of lifestyle goes on.

Around 1956 there was still a policy that a treaty Dene was not allowed to drink alcohol. Then the government, possibly after meetings among themselves behind closed doors, decide to let the Dene drink alcohol. We don't know why government did that. There is possibly a catch to it. If all Dene started to drink, the government would make a lot of money from the sale of liquor. And at the same time the government could control the Dene better, because alcohol would make them less independent and they would always depend on the government. Possibly that is the reason the government decided to give alcohol to the Dene people around 1956. All of a sudden Dene could drink alcohol, go to the bar, and so on. You can imagine what that did to all the Dene population. All the Dene started to drink, young and old. It affected all families for the next 30 years. There was no control and it created a lot of problems everywhere. People started to die from alcohol, suicide developed, and the crime rate went sky high.

Around 1970 to 1985 alcohol consumption started to go down because the NWT started having a lot of meetings regarding alcohol. Small treatment houses for alcohol counselling were set up. So a lot of people, after they went through a very hard time because of alcohol, quit drinking. People learned the hard way.

By around 1970, some of the young Dene were educated. Some of these young people started to look into where we came from. Where do the Dene stand with Canada? They looked into the history of the Dene people and how the government handled Treaty 8 and Treaty 11.

In southern Canada the treaties were already signed, but the treaty issue was completely new to the Dene people in the NWT. The first approach by the federal government was on July 13, 1899 at Fort Chipewyan. After a bit of difficulty a bishop helped the government agent and the people there signed the treaty. The government made a lot of promises. Indians could keep hunting and fishing as they always had in the past. Next was Fort Smith the same summer. They passed the treaty with no problem. Later came Fort Resolution. It was harder there because people didn't trust the government very much. There were negotiations back and forth for two days. The bishop really helped the agent and the Dene made him sign a paper saying the government would never interfere with their way of life and that if they got sick the government would help, and other promises. So they finally agreed. That was the year 1900. That was as far as the treaty got for a while.

On July 20, 1920 in Fort Resolution there was a bit of a problem with the treaty. The chief and councillors boycotted the treaty payment because the government broke its promise and started to make game laws, saying there would be a closed season here and there. There was a lot of argument for two days. The bishop came down again to help the agent.

In 1919 some RCMP made a trip to Fort Providence and Fort Rae. The Indians were in poor condition. There was a lot of flu so a lot of people died. A lot of people also died of starvation. So preparation was made to pass Treaty 11 in Fort Rae. The government used the poverty and sickness issue to get what they wanted. They said, "If you take treaty we will feed you and get a doctor to help you when you are sick." The government put a strong emphasis on this problem to get the people to agree.

The first gush of oil discovery in Norman Wells was August 25, 1920. The government wanted the treaty to include the Dene of this area of the Mackenzie valley. A boundary was marked between treaties 8 and 11. The discovery of oil hastened the preparation of the treaty, and the boundary was a poor sketch on the map, but the government wanted to make it stick. A lot of planning had gone into the important document regarding extinguishing rights and securing land from the aboriginal people, who believed the land was still theirs. All this preparation by the government was done without Dene knowledge of what was going on. It was really false action on the part of the government.

The treaty party arrived in Fort Providence on June 24, 1921. Bishop Breynat was part of the party.

The treaty party arrived in Fort Providence on an HBC stern wheeler called the *SS Mackenzie River* on June 24, 1921. On June 25, after a lot of talk by the government agent, Victor Lafferty of Fort Providence answered as did the people of Fort Resolution. "We will take treaty only if we can still hunt all over the land. This is our land. It will still belong to us even if we take the \$5." The agreement was to live together in peace. After three days the treaty was passed. Not once did the treaty party ask the interpreter to translate the wording that would go into the written version. That is why the Dene didn't know about it. The treaty was signed on June 27, 1921. The treaty party travelled down the Mackenzie River to Fort Simpson. It arrived on July 8.

All this time Bishop Breynat travelled to help the treaty party with its promises. The Dene didn't want to be put on a small reserve like their brothers in the south, and the agent said the government would never do that. "You would be free and we would help you with anything you need, and we would help you when you got sick." The treaty was finally signed on July 12, 1921.

The treaty party went down the Mackenzie River to the next settlement, which is Fort Wrigley. It was a really small community of only 78 Slavey Dene. It took only one

day to deal with the treaty. The government really was hasty in making the most important agreement of that time in the north. The people were scared. They were talked into signing the treaty but they didn't know what it was. One individual was in the bush then but later his X appeared on the document. So it shows that some of the Xs representing signatures were forged by the agent.

The next town was Fort Norman, which is 200 miles from Fort Wrigley. Fort Norman seemed to be an important settlement at that time because of the discovery of oil. Early newspaper reports from Edmonton said Fort Norman had been selected as the capital of the territory. High-level people were interested in planning business ventures for themselves in Fort Norman.

On April 18, 1921, nine white people from Vancouver arrived in Fort Norman. They heard the government was going to sell land in the area where oil was found. They said the government would sell four square miles of land for \$1,240. The news also said two white prospectors arrived in Edmonton and forecast a great rush to the Norman area to buy land. They said as many as 5,000 people would be involved. In June, 1921, members of the Imperial Oil company flew from Fort Simpson to Norman in three hours and 10 minutes. That was the first plane the people saw. The company got drilling rights, and the government must have received a lot of money from leases or sales of land around the Norman area.

To the Dene, the government sold land which didn't belong to them and then turned around and gave money to the Indians for treaty benefits, saying that showed the government's good heart. The Dene saw the government's acts as hypocrisy, so there was a lot of conflict in this area, over how the government treated the Treaty 11 Dene of the north. We will get back to this later.

The treaty process started with the arrival of the treaty party on July 15, 1921. There were 208 Dene. A lot of people were all over the bush, as far as 200 miles away. Not even half of the native people who belonged to that area were present. Yet the agent wanted to make a big issue out of the treaty. The Dene were scared at the start. The agent kept after them and promised a lot. The government would protect them and help them and look after them when they got sick, kept saying the same thing up the river. The bishop really helped the agent since the native people had great respect for the bishop. They gave in and took treaty. All parties including the Dene agreed that as long as the Mackenzie River flows and the sun comes around, they would never break their promise.

The treaty party kept going down the river. The next town was Fort Good Hope, 150 miles away. The bishop was still with them. That was July 19, 1921. After a lot of talk back and forth they passed the treaty. Next was Arctic Red River, where the party arrived on July 26. They started to negotiate the next day. One chief, Julianne Andre, said, "This is our land, we were born here. It is our land and no one will take it from us." The treaty agent, the bishop and the Hudson's Bay Company all said nobody

would take the land away from them. "You can always do whatever you want." After a long time they agreed to pass the treaty.

The next community was Fort McPherson. There the people were scared that these white people would put them on a reserve. They argued about what to do, but on July 28 the treaty was passed.

That was as far as the treaty party travelled. Then they went back up the river. But there was still one town to visit, Fort Rae, located at the north end of Great Slave Lake. So they boarded a Hudson's Bay Company boat to Fort Rae. It was August 22, 1921. It was the same as with the other communities. The Dogrib had no desire to take the treaty if the government made laws for game. The chief said, "If you make a closed season, what will we eat? We will starve." The agent gave some gifts to the chief so the people would take treaty, such as tea, flour, salt, bacon, a fish net. Only enough for a few people, because Fort Rae had lots of people. So with these gifts for some but not others, people started to argue more among each other. The agent had the help of bishop, priest and the Hudson's Bay Company. They tried to convince the Dogrib that the treaty would be good for them: "We could protect you." After many days of negotiations, Chief Monfwi was finally convinced. If a holy man said something, he must be right, so they took the treaty. The document and map were given to Monfwi. It is believed to have been lost or burned when he died.

Of all the speeches that the chiefs in the Mackenzie valley made, none were put on paper for future use. If some were, they didn't survive. But not one chief said anything regarding giving away the land. All the treaty agreements were about living in peace together in the future. We will get back to the treaty again.

Now I will explain the lifestyle of Dene people from 1950 to 1990. The lifestyle of everybody in the Mackenzie valley changed the same way, because things were imposed on them. The lifestyle of the Dene in 1950 was pretty mixed up. I would not say that the Dene were better off with all the free services they were getting, such as family allowance, old age pension, medical, dental, housing, welfare, education. With all these free services you would think that things would be better. But they weren't - they created so many problems everywhere. It is hard to write about.

People have changed so much in a short time that hardly any large group wants to trap and hunt and use the land as their ancestors did. A lot of factors are to blame for the change in people's attitudes. The Education department is to blame for pushing all Dene to stay in communities. The welfare department is to blame for people not wanting to work and trap, and so on. Another big problem is alcoholism. The Dene never experienced it before. The period when the alcohol problem was at its peak was around 1955 to 1975. After that it decreased a bit.

Edward Blondin became old in that period. He was too stubborn to change. He kept on going into the bush all the time. He got a pension but he didn't wait for his pension

cheque like other people did. When it was time to be in the bush, sometimes he would be away for two or three months. His pension cheques would pile up in the post office.

And he had money from the fur he killed, so he lived well until he died of old age in 1975. He was not excited by all the new things that came along. He liked his life the way it was. Some elders and middle-aged people were the same as Edward - not a lot, but a few. Not only did the young people change, the old people changed too. Because they got a pension, most of them lived on that.

The elders do have a lot of problems with money. Money is new to Dene people. Everybody has a hard time making ends meet. Teenagers, even smaller children, cry out for money. And Dene elders believe in sharing. Therefore, they give most of their money to the grandchildren. All the Dene have problems with handling money, so in the communities there are a lot of problems. There is no end in sight to most of them. People are in poverty all the time. They've been having problems from getting things imposed on Dene life since 1940. It's been 53 years now but problems are still coming from the change of lifestyle. It is difficult to say, but this is true for my life in that 50-year period.

I lived differently than Edward after I went to school. Also there was general change for the Dene in the north. I was born in 1921. I went to school in Fort Providence for three years, just long enough to learn to speak English. Yet I had enough self-learning to write a book that was published in 1989. The title is *When the World was New*. I was elected as chief in Fort Franklin in that difficult period when you got conflict from all directions. There were conflicts with your own people because they all had problems living in a community and starting to live a new way.

I lived at Great Bear Lake from 1930 to 1947. I trapped and hunted and moved all over that area, like everybody did. I listened to my dad, Edward, so I became a good hunter and trapper in time and lived according to the Dene law and culture.

Around 1942, when I had a couple of children of my own, I got worried because I thought in the future the northern country would change and possibly the lifestyle of the Dene people would change also. Children would need education so my concern was the education of my children.

At that time in the Great Bear Lake area, nothing was developed yet. No school or hospital. So I told my dad that I would change my life for my kids. I would go to a big town where there was a school and a hospital available. My dad really didn't like that because he thought nothing would change us. Dene should live like their ancestors, always. But after arguing about it, Edward said I could go.

So I travelled 400 miles to Yellowknife with my dog team and tried to live like the white people. I found a job in a mine and set up so my children could go to school. It is very hard for a Dene arriving from the bush to start living like a white man.

Everything is new. One of the problems was I didn't know how to handle money, so it was hard to live payday to payday. My culture, especially sharing, conflicted really strongly with that kind of new life. Anyway, I lived in the city and in time learned the hard way. And I taught myself, read a lot of news and tried to write more.

There were many problems regarding Dene life around Fort Rae, which is the biggest Dene community in the Mackenzie valley; around Yellowknife; in Snowdrift, about 100 miles from the capital city; and in other communities. There were not many jobs available. It was very difficult for the Dene people. Soon almost everybody had to go on welfare.

In time a lot of small organizations started to form and to create meetings. One was a small group of Dene from Fort Rae and other communities. By this time a lot of young people were getting educated. This group was searching for something to do. They looked up the history of the Dene. And they looked into Treaty 8 and Treaty 11. There they found out that the federal agents didn't deal fairly with the aboriginal people of the north. Therefore, they looked into the treaties more and more. They found out that treaties 8 and 11 cannot be legal, as the government claimed. The law says that the treaties are legal only when both parties understand and agree. The Dene didn't understand. The government didn't take the time to make the Indians understand what they were signing. By 1973, the treaties were considered fakes in the eyes of the Dene people of the Mackenzie valley. The wording says the Dene "cede, release, surrender and yield." That is not legal because the Dene didn't know anything about that wording. Treaty 8 and Treaty 11 could not legally terminate Dene land rights. The Indian people did not understand or agree to the terms appearing in the written version of the treaties. Only the mutually understood promises relating to wildlife, annuities, relief and friendship became legally effective commitments.

In general, they were peace treaties. That was what the Dene understood. On March 24, 1973, 16 Dene chiefs in the NWT claimed an interest in an area comprising some 400,000 square miles of land in the western portion of the Territories and presented a caveat for registration under the land act. In September, after nearly six months of legal procedures in the Supreme Court of the NWT, Justice William G. Morrow announced his ruling. Judge Morrow believed that the aboriginal people still owned the land and could file a caveat to protect the right to land. The caveat was legal under the Land Titles Act. Morrow said he believed what the community elders said they thought the treaties were, a friendship agreement so Dene could live better in the future.

The caveat held for a while so the federal government ordered a Supreme Court ruling. The court said the NWT couldn't file a caveat on any crown land in Canada, so that is as far as the caveat went. But it did spark a lot of action. The federal government agreed that the Dene could have land claim discussions. The process was to straighten

out the old treaties and come out with a new modern one. So even though the Dene had signed a treaty now they had a chance to negotiate a new one.

It was the small groups of young Dene who started the movement toward modern land claim settlements. So the Dene started to come together to form an organization. First it was small. They called it the Indian Brotherhood. They elected a president and two vice-presidents. They came out with a lot of staff and an office in Yellowknife to work from. They arranged budgets for every year. Sometimes they would be as much as \$500,000.

So the starting point was in late 1973. The Indian Brotherhood had meetings almost daily. At least once a month they brought chiefs and councillors from every community to headquarters to have meetings on Dene rights. Also the organization came out with a general assembly every July to bring all the chiefs, councillors, young people and some elders together. Sometimes they brought in as many as 1,000 people. That took a lot of money. Sometimes it came to \$200,000 or \$300,000 to pay for an assembly. After a time the organization called itself the Dene Nation. That was the name they used from 1975 on.

My life has changed a lot. But my life is just an example of how all Dene my age have changed. Everyone was pushed into communities. Therefore, the problems are the same for everybody. That is why the lifestyles of people who lived far apart changed at the same time.

The Dene lifestyle continued to change around 1973. Most of the young people were partly educated and pretty wild. Many had lost their language. Speaking English, alcoholism and starvation were all at a pretty high level in that period.

Regarding the use of land for harvesting game and fur, it is getting to be less of an interest because community life changed the Dene life steadily. Almost all the young people are not interested in going out on the land to make a living. They're interested in making a living on wages.

Elders now have old folks' homes to live in. Some give good service in taking care of the elders. Therefore, the elders are not the same anymore. They have lost the important tradition of telling stories daily and teaching their people daily to be good citizens. They have lost all that through the change of lifestyle that has taken place. Young people have changed so fast that now they don't have time to listen to parents or elders, so parents and elders give up on their teaching of the past. What the young people have now is an education system to steer their life for the future. Middle-aged Dene with big families are the ones who have most problems trying to live better. They struggle a lot, some beg. To start with, they never went to school so they are not educated. Also, they are not old enough to get a pension. They can't trap and hunt well because they were forced to live in a community. And they don't work because

they don't have the skill or education, so most live on welfare. They have to because they have big families.

As for myself, I worked for the Giant mine company for 11 years. I lost my wife in 1975, after which I quit and joined the Dene Nation in their work on land claims for 18 years. In attending meetings, reading reports of all kinds, and hearing a lot of smart government people, you learn a lot. It's just like a special school. I became smart enough. I've had the honour of writing for a Dene newspaper. And I wrote a book titled *When the World Was New*. So you get educated somehow if you work on a long-range political affair like land claims.

I want to explain the problem with common Dene people working on land claims. You deal with a lot of old fashioned and uneducated people who have no idea how the federal government operates and rules the country. Some also have no idea of the rights of people or about owning land. That is just a small part of the problem the Dene Nation has in getting its message across to the Dene scattered all over the north.

In general, the Dene people are that way because they have too many everyday problems of all kinds. They have to struggle with their needs all the time. There have been meetings to talk about all kinds of issues, but the needs come first. So most of the common Dene in the communities are not interested in long-range talk, such as on land claim affairs, which are complicated and hard to understand for uneducated people. For all these years, the Dene Nation has had a big problem getting community people to take interest in Dene rights so they could work properly on a long-range land claim settlement.

In the course of the land claim process there was a lot of concern about rights of the Dene people. All kinds of rights, to such things as land, language, hunting, fishing, teaching, culture, Dene law, recreation and spirituality. Work had to be done on each of the issues to define them in writing. They would be entrenched in a land claim agreement negotiated with the federal government. It took many years to work on them. On each issue the Dene had to bring in leaders from far away, talk about it, and come up with a written right. This work took a lot of time but at the end the rights were still not properly defined. The problem was that the government, most of the time, didn't agree with what the Dene came up with on rights, so at the end there were a lot of arguments.

There were a lot of negotiations with the federal government on land claims. There was steady progress. Negotiations involved a large area of land, 400,000 square miles, and all the Dene living in the Mackenzie valley. The issue attracted all kinds of general public interest, and Dene met with outside people as well.

A land claim creates a boundary all around the area. You have to come to an agreement with other people to work on a boundary because in the past hunters of both parties

used the same land. It took a lot of work because sometimes the two parties didn't agree. In some cases, it took many years.

The issue of the treaties put a lot of pressure on everybody. There were a lot of stubborn statements from the government about not agreeing with what the Dene wanted to change in the treaty agreements. The Dene wanted to change some parts of the treaties because they were not valid in the eyes of the Dene people. Some statements were put in by the government itself, who wrote up the agreements. The Dene disputed some statements but the government refused to agree.

A few issues I will name. The land, the government claims the Dene gave up for \$5 treaty service. The Dene never said anything like that; it was written by the government. The Dene people wanted a new agreement on that important land issue. After 20 years of negotiation, the government still insists that we gave away the land. So if we want land we have to beg the government to be allowed to select some in a land claim package. It is not fair in the eyes of Canadian people that the government took land away from the Dene. At least the government could make a new agreement so everybody understands how much the land is worth. They came up with a figure. The Dene are not looking for a big sum of money. Surely we didn't sell the land for \$5. We would be crazy if we did.

A lot of Canadians say the Dene people are lazy and get a lot of services free. This make a bad name for the Dene people. It is not the Dene's fault that many people are hard up. It is because the government put the Dene in that position. The government could arrange the role of land to pay for services to the Dene and show that the Dene are paying for services. I am sure that 400,000 square miles is worth billions of dollars. The way the Dene are treated doesn't look good in the public eye. The power of government controls Dene lives so they are not free as they should be. So all this dispute comes from the Dene saying, "This is our land," and the government saying, "No it isn't, it belongs to the government of Canada." There was never an agreement on who owns the land.

The extinguishment clause in the treaties says the Indians yield to the Dominion of Canada all the rights to land. This clause really took away everything from the Dene people. Dene negotiators tried to take that clause out and replace it with a fair deal so everybody would be pleased. But the federal government didn't want to change the clause. With it they could control the Dene better, so the Dene Nation had a lot of problems with the federal government. Because of the extinguishment clause, the Dene can't get some of their rights recognized. This argument with the federal government caused a lot of hard feelings across the country.

Half the people in the communities expected that land claims negotiations would be over soon and we'd get our compensation. The waiting caused a bad feeling. Nothing happened to make things better. So some of the regions got fed up.

There are five regions in the NWT. One region is the Delta, which separated from the Dene Nation in 1990 and settled its own land claim. In one year the Gwich'in hurried and settled a land claim. They just used the past agreement-in-principle negotiated by the Dene Nation and Metis Association and added things the Gwich'in needed in the package. They did hard work to get what they wanted but the government as usual was stubborn about giving in on a lot of issues. The Delta got \$75 million in compensation, and out of that they pay their portion of the land claim bill to the federal government. So they settled their land claim the best way they could. They got what they got; what they couldn't get, they didn't. That is all there is to it. They missed out on a lot but at least they are in the business of dealing with their own people's future.

The Dene Nation tried hard to hold all the people together but many people were tired of talking about land claims and wanted to settle them even if some rights were lost. In 1992, the Dene Nation expected a renewal of Canada and changes to the Canadian constitution. Possibly the aboriginal people would break through and have their rights more recognized. After that we could settle a better land claim. We would have more power and control our own lives, instead of others controlling them. So this kind of dream came about after the Delta separated and a split of the regions started to form.

The Sahtu region, next to the Delta, consists of five communities: Fort Norman, Fort Franklin, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake. This is quite a big region. The people have been in the process of settling their own land claim and separating from the Dene Nation for over a year. They haven't had a big problem. They are following the Delta land claim. They have a bit of a problem getting together with the Metis people. Another is the boundary. They have to have agreements with different people. That is still to work on. They expect to settle their land claim in the summer of 1993. (On July 9, beneficiaries votes were counted. They were overwhelming in favor of the Sahtu land claim agreement.)

Then in August 1992 the Dogrib Nation voted to settle its own land claim. They are concerned that the more they wait the more land they're losing, because there is a lot of mineral staking going on in the area. In December 1992 they met with the federal government and agreed that in 1993 they would start on the land claim.

We were hoping that the modern land claim agreement would put people together better than the old treaties of 1899 and 1921. But instead, nearly 20 years of negotiations came to a standstill and also split the Dene apart. I don't know why that is. It is the way the people talk to each other or maybe it is the government's fault. I can't say what it is.

People still have plenty of time. The government has an obligation to settle land claims and straighten out the mistakes the government made in the past. So that is the

situation land claims in the western NWT. Possibly we will end up with claims settled region by region.

Regarding Dene lifestyle, things are not getting better now. I would say everybody has problems trying to make life better, including all the white people in the north. Everybody is struggling on their own. The whole problem is that to provide for a family you need a job. If you don't have a job you are poor. There are not enough jobs for everybody. Whatever jobs are available, the white people come from the south to get them. The Indian, as usual, can't get a job, because there are none.

Another obstacle to a good lifestyle is the very high cost of living. It is something that nobody can do anything about because it is connected to the whole world's costs. So the high costs give problems to a company wanting to develop a mine or oil wells. It can't develop anything because the cost is too high to start anything. Because everything is costs so much - planes for transportation - everybody wants really high wages. Companies have to be very careful. A lot of companies have started a mine and then closed down. That is why there is no development. So no development, no jobs.

It is very hard, trying to make Dene life better. Most of the last 20 years were a bit better because the price of fur was good. All fur prices were very good and because people live in communities and don't trap as much anymore, fur-bearing animals increased all over the country. Therefore, whoever trapped could do well in a short time. So with good fur prices and a short-term job in the summer, some individuals made a good living. But in the past two or three years, things have changed for the worse. The fur prices went down very low.

There is also the issue of the leg-hold trap. It was started about 10 years ago by animal rights groups. They travelled all over the world and said cruel people made animals suffer with this leg-hold trap. So now governments are trying to stop people from using leg-hold traps. They invented a kind of trap they claim kills animals quickly. And they forced the Dene to use these new traps, but they don't work as well as the leg-hold trap. The animals are wise to these new traps. Plus if you do catch something, you have to take the animal home and thaw it to get it out of the trap. So you can't reset the trap. The Dene have no willpower to use these new traps, so a lot of them give up. They stop trapping and life gets harder for them.

One of the things that the Dene appreciate from the government is welfare assistance. Without that social help a lot of Dene would starve. Most of the Dene live on that. Another thing they benefit from is the caribou migration. We have caribou close to Fort Rae that help the Dene keep busy the work provides a lot of good meat to eat. So life is tough but life still goes on. On the whole there is no good thing coming around the corner for the Dene people.

The last issue I will touch on is the development of the constitution. It didn't work out well for the Dene people. It was just a dream after all that talk across Canada and all the aboriginal people being involved. In the end, nothing good happened for the Dene people. They are back where they were. So that is where it is. I have nothing more to say because I only write on behalf of the Dene people of the north. I don't write about things happening elsewhere.

George Blondin