

## **President's Message**

*June 18, 2015*

Author Irving Stone spent a lifetime studying greatness, including people such as Vincent Van Gogh, Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. When asked what common thread ran through the lives of the exceptional people he has studied, he replied "They are beaten over the head, knocked down, vilified and for years they get nowhere. But every time they're knocked down they stand up. You cannot destroy these people. And at the end of their lives they've accomplished some modest part of what they set out to do."

This too is the story of the Metis people. We were beaten over the head when we were called nothing more than half-breeds suggesting we were not quite a people. We were knocked down by the federal government when they failed to keep their promise to protect us and supply an inheritance for our children. We were vilified when they referred to Metis as "dangerous classes" needing to be civilized and assimilated during the residential school era. We fought for over 140 years before the Supreme Court ruled and agreed with us that the federal government has indeed failed to keep their promise made in 1870 when the Metis helped bring Manitoba into Confederation. Every time someone tries to knock us down we stand up again. The Metis people cannot be destroyed.

Our patience and perseverance is winning out. By now you have heard about our 50 year struggle to seek justice for the Summerberry Trappers. I was honored by these Trappers to negotiate on their behalf for the loss of their trapping rights on the Summerberry Marsh. This fight lasted 50 years! We never gave up. We never surrendered. We succeeded in securing an inheritance for these trappers and their immediate beneficiaries from Manitoba Hydro. These trappers and their families have expressed their thanks and appreciation for the hard work we have done on their behalf. I also want to commend Scott Thomson, CEO of Manitoba Hydro, and his team for working with me and my team to settle and right this historic wrong. Having good leaders who also understands the value of righting a wrong to negotiate with on the other side, we are able to settle matters quickly and amicably for the betterment of those we serve.

I also want to recognize the struggle and perseverance of our First Nations friends who are finally getting the opportunity to turn their page regarding the attempted cultural genocide they faced through the Indian Residential Schools. I hope they will receive healing and reconciliation through the recommendations for action that the Truth and Reconciliation have made to the federal government.

However, the Metis have not yet received their opportunity to turn the page on the abuse and hurt we have suffered through the residential school system. During that dark time of Canada's history, the federal and provincial government shirked their responsibility for the Metis people. They played football with our children and our families. They tossed us back and forth – each pointing at the other as being responsible for the Metis people and we suffered atrociously because of it. Our children were separated from families and forced to attend residential day schools. Here they suffered physical, sexual, emotional and cultural abuse. That is absolutely unacceptable!

There was truly no Metis agenda attached to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but they did recognize that the Metis and others have been left out of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement in call to action number 29. Here the Commission has called upon the federal government to quickly address and resolve the outstanding legal claim we and others have.

Then there is the 60s Scoop where First Nation and Metis children were forcibly and needlessly removed from their families and communities. The federal government is being accused of initiating this practice, and they may very well be the prime catalyst for the 60s Scoop, but in Manitoba it was the provincial government who stole our Metis children. At the time, the government of Canada did not publicly acknowledge its jurisdiction and responsibility for the Metis. It was the government of Manitoba that took our Metis children from their families and from the Manitoba Metis Community. The Manitoba government cannot escape accountability for the harm inflicted on the Metis children of our province. Children were not only stripped of their family and identity but were often subject to intolerance and violence.

Since 1986 the Manitoba Metis Federation has reunited approximately a 100 Metis families through our Lost Moccasins initiative. We have no idea how many children are out there and lost. The absence of adequate information and lack of funding resources has restricted the search and rescue of our children who were wrongly taken from their homes.

Make no mistake. The Manitoba Metis Federation will not let these injustices slide. We will keep pushing. Already in regards to the residential schools there are class action lawsuits that are being prepared by individuals who were affected by that blatant attempt at cultural genocide and the abuse suffered at the hands of those who were supposed to care for them.

May it be said of the Metis people and its leadership that we did not give up, that we could not be silenced and that in the end, we accomplished what we set out to do.

In closing I offer my hopes for our Metis people who are sick and shut in. I also offer my prayers for those who have departed and my condolences to their family, friends and neighbours. My best wishes to all.

Meeqwetch,