



Frederick William Erasmus

December 24, 1919 - November 5, 2006



FRED ERASMUS died peacefully in his sleep, November 5, 2006, after a brief stay at Stanton Territorial Hospital in Yellowknife, NT. Fred was born in Fort Rae (Behchoko) NT, December 24, 1919 to Robert and Mary Erasmus. Fred was a grandson of Treaty 6 Interpreter and Palliser Expedition Guide, Peter Erasmus.

Fred loved to be in the bush and hunted, trapped and fished on the land from Fort Rae to the Barrenlands, and other areas in Denendeh. Fred enjoyed carpentry and worked for Ivor Johnson on many of the old landmarks of Yellowknife, including the Gerry Murphy Arena, Akaitcho Hall, and the original St. Patrick High School. He worked for many years in maintenance (DPW) for Indian Affairs, hosted the popular CBC radio show, Gather 'Round, and worked as a Dene language interpreter. He also worked in the far North, including at Cambridge Bay and Pond Inlet; for the American Army at Norman Wells with his brother, Peter; and for the infamous bush pilot, Chuck MacAvoy and his brother. Fred was very happy when MacAvoy's plane was finally located in recent years.

Fred grew up in Fort Rae and was witness to major life style changes in Denendeh. He lived in the era when few non-Dene lived in the North and the Dene lived by traditional government, off the land, gathering at community sites during certain times of the year. He remembered the arrival of the first airplane in Fort Rae, and his Dad delivering mail to Edmonton by dogteam. Fred, himself, kept a team of dogs until the 1960's. He often commented how dogs are more reliable than skidoos and would always find their way home for you, even in a blizzard.

Fred was a survivor of Indian Residential School. He attended school at Fort Resolution for a few years, until he engineered his escape by sneaking a letter out to his Dad via a friend living in Fort Resolution.

Fred first moved to Yellowknife in 1940. He lived at Prosperous Lake (Cassidy Point) where he worked in mining with his brother-in-law. Later he returned to Fort Rae to marry Florence Smith. In 1949, Fred and Florence settled in Yellowknife, mainly so that their children would not have to leave home to attend school. They had 13 children, losing one daughter, Bertha, in infancy to double pneumonia. Florence pre-deceased Fred in 2002.

Fred was very independent and lived on his own, in his home on Latham Island, until his passing. After suffering a major stroke in 1999, he refused to accept his doctor's prognosis of never walking again. He fully regained the use of his legs and resumed his usual activities, including hunting.

Fred lived his life to the fullest and enjoyed spending time with his large family and friends. He was natural storyteller. His stories included Dene and Cree legends, and other stories that would often leave his children and others having to figure out the moral and how it applied to their lives. He strongly believed in traditional Dene and Cree values and the importance of passing them on to future generations. He had a great sense of humour and loved to tease people and make them laugh. Fred had many other talents and interests including traveling, jigging, fiddling, watching boxing, cooking, and teaching traditional ways. Fred was a regular attendee at the Calgary Stampede, while visiting his sister, Florence. He was optimistic, and believed that things should be done well with a positive attitude.

He understood many Dene languages and spoke French, English and Dogrib fluently. He predicted the weather accurately using traditional Dene knowledge, passed on from his mother. He was very proud of his Dene and Cree Ancestry, and passed on his knowledge to his children. He respected his Elders and he lived by their wisdom. He actively participated in Dene politics and was a strong advocate of self-governance. He was very concerned about the environment, especially the decline of the caribou and advocated responsible management on their behalf to Chiefs and Council, wildlife officials, friends and family.

Fred is survived by one sister: Florence Chrestensen; Children: Georges (Sandra), Roy (Leone), Violet (Norman), Bill (Reanna), Ron, Margaret, Guy (Eileen), Marilyn (Pat), Joanne (John), Jeannette (Marc), Sean (Trish), and Shannon McLeod (Warren); Grandchildren: Kristen, Roy Jr. (Lila), Che, Lonny, Jamie (Denecho), Sarah, Cody, Skyler, Laurie-Ann, Lila, Rainer, Wesley, Shayla, Dustin, Pascal, William, Sikiya, Danya, Carter, Sam and Cooper; Great grandchildren: Brandon, Darian, Keeweetin and Tahkota; and many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

