

Ni'NOXSOLA

Elders in Residence Program
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools

Sheila Buchanan
Red River Wheelers

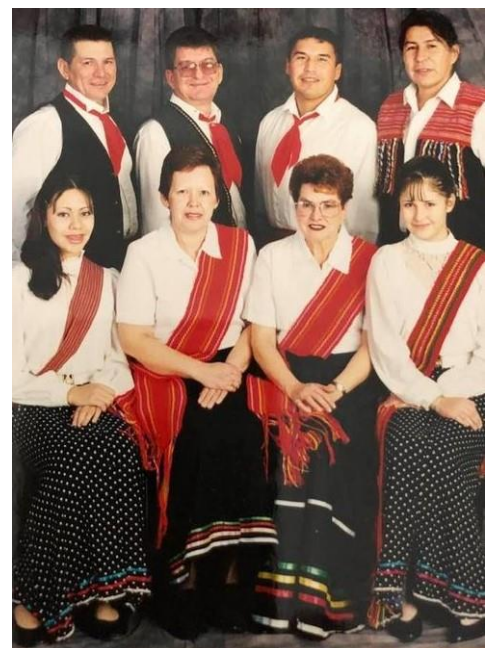


A few years ago, I belonged to a Metis dance group. Our group was called the Red River wheelers. Our group performed at a lot of different functions. We were hired at Metis functions and they would provide us with accommodation. This was only if we were out of town. Sometimes it would be for a weekend if it was out of town. We got a lot of out-of-town gigs, as far as Ottawa or Vancouver. We were from Edmonton. All out flights would be paid. It was good practice for us to be able to dance and it was something we really enjoyed.

We also taught the Red River jig to schools in different communities. It kept us busy, but it was difficult to squeeze it in at times due to our job commitments. They would work around our schedule because they felt it was important for the kids to learn the dances. We taught them different dances which were considered Metis. The dances were the Duck Dance, Reel of Four, Reel of Eight, Virginia Reel and Drops of Brandy. The Metis dances are prominent in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They do not want the kids to lose all their culture.

The Cree/Michif language is not practiced today as it was when I was growing up. It was always spoken at home. The dances were also practiced all the time. The old timers did not want their children to outgrow their culture. If we didn't have music playing, my grandma would hum a diddlee diddlee dum tune and tell us to dance and she would correct us if we didn't dance properly. Our group had different age groups. We had two young girls who were 13 years old. The oldest was in her 70's.

I am attaching a photo of our group, but the 75-year-old dancer is absent. We had to have extra dancers in case one could not make it. The group had to have eight people in order to do most of the dances. Normally four men and four females. If that was not possible, then two women would have to fill in and one would dance the male part. You had to be experienced to be able to pull it off because the moves could be confusing, because the men had different roles in the dances. It was fun and great to be able to show our dances to the audience and each dance was explained as to how and why the dance was given such a name. The audience was always captive and appeared to enjoy our performance as much as we did doing it.



Sheila Buchanan (Kookum)