

# Francois Paulette

Buffalo Hunter, Activist, Respected Elder,  
Hereditary Leader, Dancer, Family Man  
Traditionalist, Spiritualist



Northwest  
Territories Education, Culture and Employment



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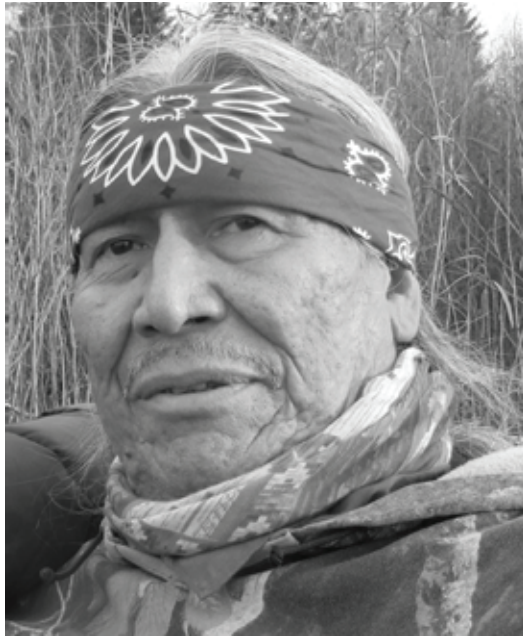
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# ***Francois Paulette***

To Francois—a huge thanks for sharing your story. We know that all the readers will find it interesting and compelling.



**Photo credit:** *Meagan Wohlberg (edited)*

**Photo credit front cover:** *Garth Lenz*

**Photo credit back cover:** *Bill Weaver, Across Borders Media—Francois with Smith's Landing First Nations flag at the 2013 healing walk, Fort McMurray*



**“In our language we don’t have a word for climate change. We just say ‘strange things are happening’.”**

**Francois in “Tipping Point” 2011. The film shows the results of new research about tar sands pollution and its health effects. How local people reach a tipping point—to actively fight for their health and rights.**

**Photo credit: *tippingpointdoc.ca***



**Paddling with Kate and William — Duchess and Duke of Cambridge — when they visited Blachford Lake in 2011.**

**Photo credit: *www.dailymail.co.uk***

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**Francois with his brothers, sons, and nephews at the site of his late father's cabin on a hill at Leland Lake, east of the Slave River.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*



**The Slave River flows from Lake Athabasca to Great Slave Lake. The Peace and Athabasca Rivers flow into the Slave River at Lake Athabasca. All form part of the Mackenzie River basin.**

*Map credit: adapted from World Wildlife Fund map*

# ***Birthplace and Homeland***

Francois came into this world on April 25, 1949. He was born on the land near Fort Fitzgerald, on the banks of the Slave River, in northern Alberta. He has seven brothers and four sisters.

The Paulette name comes from the Peace River area. Francois' father is Johnny Paulette, a leader and chief. His grandfather was also a chief.

Francois' ancestors on his father's side are Chipewyan and Iroquois. The Iroquois guided the fur trade in northern Alberta in the late 1700s and 1800s. Their leader's name was Paulette.

Francois' Chipewyan mother also comes from a leadership and traditional background. Her large extended family includes people in Lutselk'e and Uranium City.

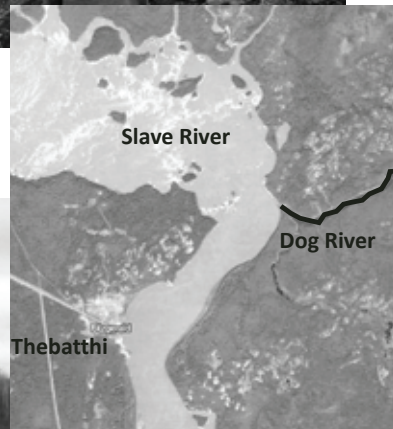




**Fishing at the Dog River.**

**At a sacred site on the Slave River.**

*Photo credits: Meagan Wohlberg*





## ***Francois' homeland***

Francois' homeland is the Slave and Dog Rivers. It is many square miles of land and water, and the plants and animals that live there. It is the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Chipewyan people. It is self-sufficiency and interconnectedness.

Francois' first language is Denesuline. In that language, Fort Fitzgerald is called Thebatthi. It means "head of the rapids."

When Francois was young, Thebatthi was a thriving community. There was a Hudson's Bay store and warehouse, church, school, RCMP, hotel, cafe, sawmill, and a very busy dock and water transport business.

People were "quite well off". They had summer jobs. In the fall, they had enough supplies for the trapping season. Many left before freeze-up, going up the Dog River, with the dogs running along the shore. They usually gathered again at Thebatthi for Christmas.

## *Sharing a Story*

“Before the Peace River dam, this river was a powerful river. The spring breakup—you could see the strength and the power in the river. The way God made it to be. The ice was thick. And you could see the ice—six, seven feet thick.”

“... this one spring it was a sight to see. The ice started to break up. And it’s now this power, immense power, of ice breaking, you could just hear it all night.”

“... Three teams of dogs were on the other side. And they just happened to make it there and the ice started to move. And these three teams of dogs started to cross the river while the ice is moving on the river. All the sleds had a canoe tied under the sled. And all their supplies were in there.”

“... The whole community was here looking at this event unfolding. They could see the dogs going up the ice. And when the ice separated they stopped. And as soon as the ice came together they moved again. Now they had to cross this way.”

## ***Admiring Tradition***

“Sometimes the ice jam would go ... like a huge building. And the dogs just moved around that. That was an incredible sight.”

“... Now when they got to the shore, it must have been open maybe 30 feet from the shore. They would all jump in—leader first—and they would swim to the shore. Pull the boat up. The sleigh, it floated.”

“... The dogs would just pull the sleigh out and to their home. That was amazing. And they’re dragging the sleigh in the mud. Effortlessly pulling the sleigh with all the supplies.”

“... That left quite an impression in my young mind. The team and the man had to be like one. Their whole survival, there couldn’t be any mistakes made. So that was quite a sight. And that was the kind of strength and power that people had. And the dogs and the animals that served them.”

“So I admired those days. That was a time before, when people still had control of their lives. And before the move.”



**Barge construction at Fort Fitzgerald docks mid 1900s.**

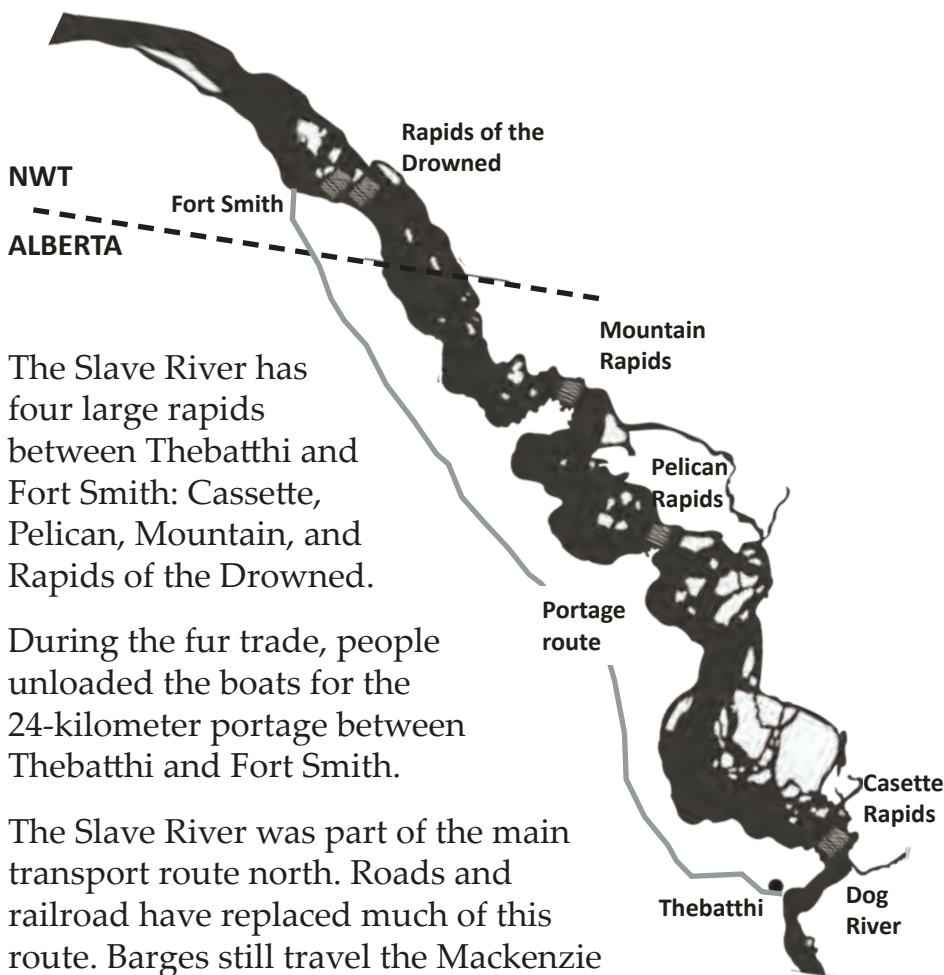
**Photo credit:** *NWT Archives/Edmonton Air Museum Committee Collection/N-1979-003: 0006*

**Fitz dock present day.**

**Photo credit:** *Jesse Plowman*



**The rapids at Thebatthi are named after a cassette — a light, waterproof box used to store the fur traders’ pay. A canoe with a ‘full’ cassette on board tipped over in the rapids. Before that people called the rapids Portage of The Little Rock, Portage d’Embarass, and Dog Rapids.**



The Slave River has four large rapids between Thebatthi and Fort Smith: Cassette, Pelican, Mountain, and Rapids of the Drowned.

During the fur trade, people unloaded the boats for the 24-kilometer portage between Thebatthi and Fort Smith.

The Slave River was part of the main transport route north. Roads and railroad have replaced much of this route. Barges still travel the Mackenzie River and parts of Great Slave Lake.

**Map credit:** Town of Fort Smith (edited)



**Smith's Landing First Nation war canoe race team at Paddlefest on the Slave River.**

**Photo credit:** *Francois Paulette*



**White pelicans in Slave River rapids.**

**Photo credit:** <http://i.imgur.com/xcYer.jpg>

**Wood bison.**

**Photo credit:** *NWT Parks*





Today many people still use the Slave River for transport and recreation. The rapids offer some of the best whitewater in the world for kayak and canoe paddlers. The local canoe club sponsors an annual Slave River Paddlefest.

The Slave River rapids have the most northern nesting sites for the white pelican. During egg season, people discourage aircraft flying low and other human invasions near nesting sites.

The Slave River also forms part of the east boundary of Wood Buffalo National Park.



**Map credit:**  
*environmentandsociety.org*



**Treaty 8 map.**

**Photo credit:** *Fort Nelson First Nation*



**Logo for Smith's Landing First Nation.**

**Photo credit:** [www.daair.gov.nt.ca/\\_live/pages/wpPages/Smith\\_Landing\\_FN.aspx](http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/_live/pages/wpPages/Smith_Landing_FN.aspx) (edited)

## ***Treaty 8—Peace and Friendship***

Fort Fitzgerald is part of Treaty 8. In treaty documents, it is called Smith's Landing.

In 1899, Cree, Beaver, and Chipewyan signed Treaty 8 at various places and times. They live in what is today parts of northern Alberta, north-eastern BC, southern NWT, and north-western Saskatchewan.

Francois says of the treaties, "These were peace and friendship treaties. Where the Europeans can live side by side with us, without interfering with our lifestyle."

"Simple as that. ... we could maintain our right to self-government ... we could co-exist, in a very interdependent way."

**Treaty 8 talks at Fort Vermillion, 1899.**

**Photo credit:** *Wikipedia*





**Holy Angels Residential School in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta 1960s.**

**Photo credit:** *Saskatchewan Archival Information Network*



**Fort Chipewyan to Thebatthi is about 150 km along the Slave River — the distance that Francois wanted to walk to get home.**

**Map credit:** *www.greatcanadianrivers.com (edited)*

# ***School Days***

Francois first went to residential school when he was six years old. He says, "... the church stole me away from my parents. And I went to Fort Chip Holy Angels residential school."

He continues, "... I was so homesick. I missed my land, my family, my other siblings. ... I was beginning to lose my language. To adopt another way of praying."

Francois suggested to his older brother that they escape. He wanted to follow the frozen Athabasca River and walk home.

When the boat came to pick him up for the start of his fourth year at Holy Angels, Francois ran away. People searched for hours. He hid in the bushes until after dark.



**Francois with his wife, two sons, grandchildren, and mother at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal presentation.**

**Photo credit:** *Francois Paulette*



Francois finally stood up when his father called, "Come out from where you are hiding. The boat has gone back. And I'm not sending you back there. Your older brother and your young brother are here. You're not going back. I will never send you back there again. So wherever you are please come out of your hiding. You must be hungry by now."

After three years at Holy Angels residential school, Francois never went back.

He sums it up this way. "That was the place that I was sent to without my consent. I was forced to go there. Instead of teaching me all the right things, that's where I learned to be a revolutionary."

## ***Sharing a Story***

“One day I found a dime. It was shining in the sun. There it was—10 cents. And I picked it up. What am I going to do with this 10 cents? And I’m thinking, thinking, thinking. Well I can go to the store and buy a pop or a chocolate bar or some gum.”

“And I thought nope, I’m going to buy myself a comic. A Superman comic. They had just come out. And I’d seen them in Fort Smith.”

“The only way I’m going to get to Fort Smith was to walk. It is 16 miles from here. I never told anybody, not even my brothers.”

“That morning I did my chores, got the water, got the firewood. My little packsack. Put a piece of bannock in there and a small bottle of water. And I took off to Fort Smith walking. I was eight years old.”

“I walk and run, walk and run.”

“I arrived in Fort Smith—around 11 o’clock in the morning. ... I walked into Bender’s store. And right straight to the comics.”

## ***Determination***

“And there was Superman comic. I pick it up. I couldn’t see over the shelf. I put the comic down and I put my 10 cents down.”

“And the store clerk says, ‘11 cents’. And my heart just sank. I didn’t have 11 cents. ... So I took the comic and put it back. Just as I was putting it back the store clerk says, ‘You can have that for 10 cents.’ ”

“And all in one motion I take the comic and put the dime back on the table, and took off out of that store.”

“All the way back to Fitzgerald. Walking and running, walking and running. I come home and I hid that comic. My father, nobody didn’t know where I was.”

“... I remember having that comic for maybe a couple of days. And somebody borrowed it. It must have gone all over town.”



**Fort Smith in 1975.**

**Photo credit:** *NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1995-002: 1840*

## ***The big move to Fort Smith***

In 1959, the federal government started to move people from Thebatthi to Fort Smith.

Francois explains, "The Department of Indian Affairs moved us from our traditional homeland to Fort Smith. ... My father was the chief here then. I think again my father was not given much choice. Because there was talk of building the hydro. So they might as well get rid of the people, move all the people."

"After the government moved us it all fell apart. We were moved to Fort Smith. And our houses here were burned or taken apart. That was another time that was destructive. First I was moved to go to Fort Chip. Second I was moved to go to Fort Smith. Uprooted."



**Francois with his brother Joe Paulette on his trapline.**

**Photo credit:** *Francois Paulette*



In Fort Smith, Francois and his family adapted to a new lifestyle. People had lived a traditional lifestyle and now they are dependent. More people turned to alcohol. It changed the way people lived. It tore families apart.

Francois is a determined young person. He bought a bicycle so he could return to his traditional hunting grounds. When he was 14, he registered at the school but he did not attend. Instead he returned to his homeland and went hunting.

He hid his packsack and the rabbits and chickens in the bush. After school he told his father "I'm going hunting." And then he picked up the packsack, and the rabbits and chickens.

About a month later the principal came to see his father. The truth came out. "I'm not going to school. I don't like going to school. I miss hunting."



**Aerial view of Akaitcho Hall and Sir John Franklin High School in Yellowknife 1958.**

**Photo credit:** *NWT Archives/Henry Busse fonds/N-1979-052: 4107*

## ***More residential school***

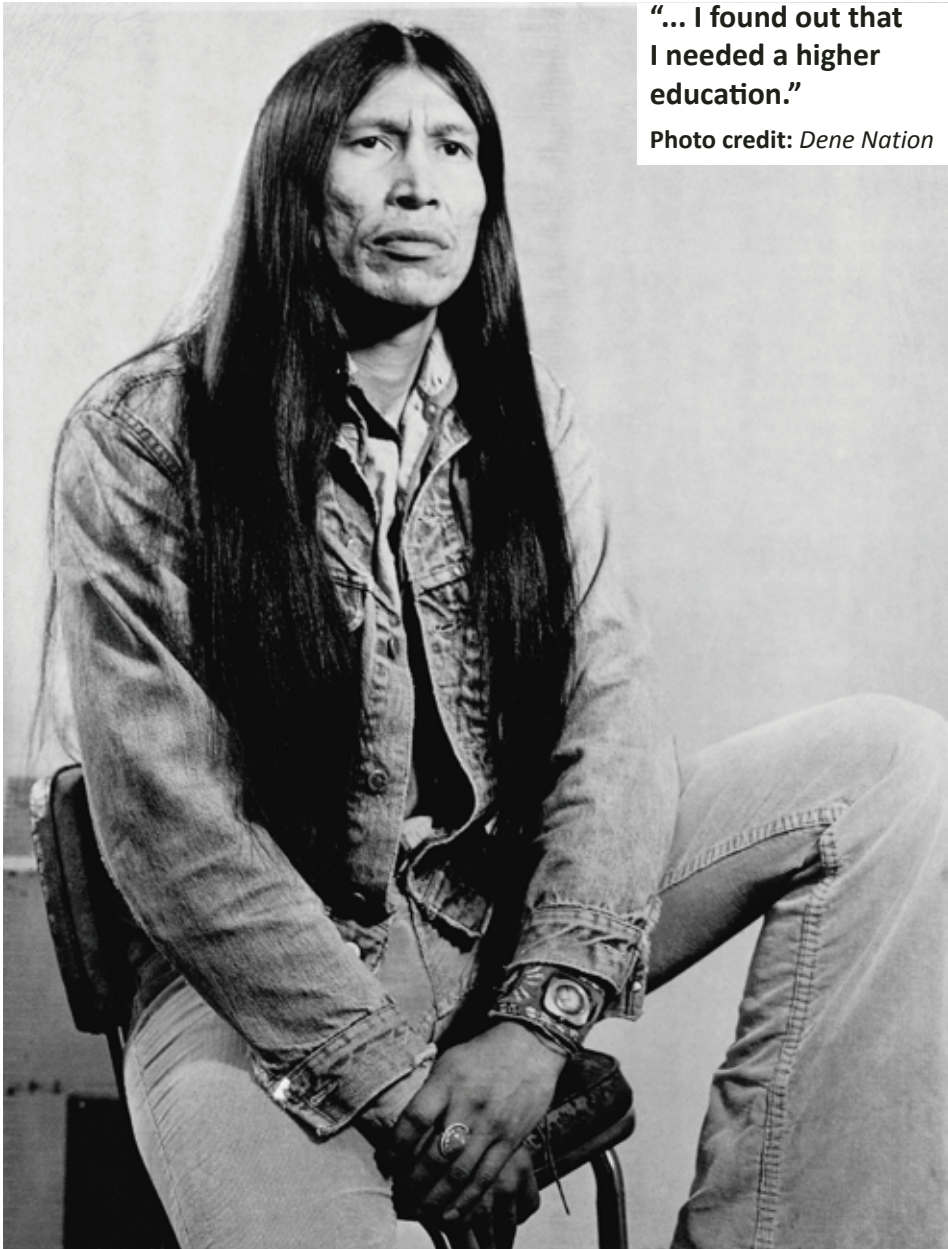
The principal in Fort Smith suggested that Francois go to school in Yellowknife. To stay at Akaitcho Hall and go to Sir John Franklin High School.

Francois says, "I reluctantly went to Sir John, Akaitcho Hall. That was another residential school. I just came out of a residential school a few years ago."

"... Back to other rules, dressing up in white shirt and tie. That didn't really attract me. It was strict. Not as bad as Fort Chip. But still strict. No culture."

"... You could speak your language. By then people were afraid to speak their language.

"... By the time I was in grade 9, I quit school. And I thought that was what I needed was grade 9. I can find a job."



**“... I found out that  
I needed a higher  
education.”**

**Photo credit: *Dene Nation***

## ***Getting a Job with Grade 9***

After grade 9, Francois worked at various jobs, in various places. When Pine Point opened, he was slashing and cutting the survey lines. He tried commercial fishing. He worked in forestry, fighting forest fires. He worked for the power commission.

Francois says of these times, "I wasn't really going anywhere. I was just ... working for someone else. Construction work. Shovelling, nailing, shovelling."

"... I realized I needed something better than grade 9. By then it was going into the late 60s. ... My hair was starting to grow long."

A former teacher encouraged Francois. "Why don't you go back to school. You have a lot of things to do yet. You can pick up your English, your vocabulary. Read newspapers."

Francois admits that ever since then he reads newspapers.





**Handgames at the Dene National Assembly in Fort Good Hope, 1980.**

*Photo credit: NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1995-002: 6627*



**Handgames at treaty days  
in Fort Smith.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*



## ***Finishing high school***

Francois went back to Akaitcho Hall to finish high school. But now he's two years behind.

He thinks back to that time. "If I'm going to get ahead here, I need to get down to the books. And get rid of my revolutionary hair. So I cut my own hair. I took all my hair out. And I went to the books. I had to discipline myself. ... I had good marks that year."

As a senior student, Francois sat across from Prime Minister Trudeau during a brunch at Akaitcho Hall. Trudeau asked Francois, "Young man, what are you going to do in the future." Francois answered, "I'm going to be the chief of my band by the time I'm 24."

Francois graduated from high school in 1971. He got a job as an architectural draftsman. He worked for the territorial government.

"1971. In those days it was difficult years. I am talking about lifestyle. People were starting to drink. And I got into that. I was dysfunctional. Though in my mind I know that alcohol is not part of our history, not part of our tradition."

## ***Sharing a Story***

“1967. These bureaucrats came to the north and stepped off the plane in Yellowknife. Forty of them. They were now going to run the territories.”

“... People were going out to the airport to celebrate. And I remember wondering, ‘why are the people going out to the airport to celebrate these 40 bureaucrats coming up here. When we already have our chief and council in place.’ I was already thinking like that.”

...

“... I remember going to my first meeting at 19. It was in Fort Rae. My grandfather asked me to go on the bus. There were lots of elders. The number one subject was treaties—Treaty 8 and Treaty 11.”

## ***Early Politics***

“... In ‘69 the White Paper. The objective was to assimilate Indians, to make them become part of the Canadian society. Forget your past, forget your drums, forget your life. That was the turning point for Indigenous people in Canada and I was just 19 years old.”

...

“... It’s shaming eh ... it’s the whole colonial impact. So, 1969 was when the Indian Brotherhood started. ... That was the beginning of the Dene organizing as a unit.”

# Community News



Fort Smith

## New Chief Elected

Native Press 1972

The Indian People of Fort Smith now have a Chief. Mr. Francois Paulette was elected Chief on April 28, when James Wah-shee went to Fort Smith to have a meeting with the Band Councils.

James Wah-shee said that a Chief had been elected by the Band Council before many times. The Band Council then decided to elect one right away. Fred



Francois Paulette



Keviselie, Hans Ragnar Mathisen — a Sámi artist from Norway — made this sketch when he met Francois during the World Council of Indigenous Peoples first general assembly at Port Alberni, BC October 1975.

# ***Youngest Chief***

In 1971, Francois' work as a draftsman took him to Lutselk'e. He held a community meeting to talk about a building. The hall was packed with people. Everyone spoke Denesuline.

A young man came through the front door. He came up to Francois and handed him a piece of paper. The telegram said, "Francois you are now chief of the Fitz Smith Indian Band. Come home."

This was a big turning point in Francois' life. With his government job he had a good salary and other benefits. As chief, he has no money, no office, no phones. But people supported him, especially the elders. And it's in his blood to be chief, like his father and grandfather before him.

He became the youngest chief and worked with the Indian Brotherhood (later called the Dene Nation). And "returned to the trapping lifestyle," mixed with lots of politics. He was chief until 1980.



**Francois speaking at the Dene National Assembly in Tulita, 1978.**

**Photo credit:** *NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1995-002: 1627*



**Dene Chiefs at Indian Brotherhood National Assembly, early 1970s.**

**Photo credit:** *Dene Nation History*

**When the Supreme Court ruled on the Paulette case, Francois was in a political science class at the University of Lethbridge. “I remember arguing with my professor because he said we wouldn’t win. Then the ruling came out, and the whole class was applauding.”**

## ***Paulette case***

In 1972 the Dene chiefs filed a caveat. This was a formal warning notice that the Dene claim 450,000 square miles of land in the NWT. They argued in court that the Dene did not surrender their land or Aboriginal rights when they signed Treaty 8 and Treaty 11.

Supreme Court Justice Morrow heard the case in 1972 and 1973. "He travelled the Mackenzie Valley. It is unprecedented what he did. He went to communities, sat in halls. Some had no lights. Sometimes just outside, sometimes in a tent. Listening to testimonies of the treaties."

Justice Morrow ruled that the chiefs established a case for claiming Aboriginal rights to the land. His decision changed the relationship between the federal government and the Dene. It helped to open the door for land claim negotiations.





**Aerial view present day Thebatthi.**

**Photo credit:** *karljohnston.com*

**“At the end of 74-75 I left behind my habit of alcohol and drugs and gambling. And I never looked back.”**



**Cemetery at Fort Fitzgerald.**

**Photo credit:** *George Lessard*

## ***Return to Thebatthi***

In 1977 when he was chief, Francois went to Geneva to talk about indigenous rights. He was there with leaders from South America, Central America, United States, and other leaders from Canada. This was the start of talks for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Francois and others from the north told the world about their land, their languages, and the treaties. They talked about deciding their own destiny.

Francois remembers, “I was talking there. And something happened. While I was talking, something triggered. That I was talking, but I wasn’t living it.”

“It wasn’t too long after that—I resigned as the chief. And I came back here, back to my roots, back to my way of life. To restore what was taken away, to go back to the laws according to tradition. And I was determined.”



**Francois with his  
daughter Siku.**

**Photo credit:**  
*Francois Paulette*



**Francois at  
a healing  
walk.**

**Photo credit:**  
*Northern  
Journal*

Francois and his wife Lesley talked about this. They decided that if they want their children to live a clean lifestyle, with no alcohol and drugs, and go buffalo and moose hunting, set rabbit snares, follow a traditional lifestyle—they need to be at Thebatthi.

They lived in a 14 X 16 tent for over a year. When they first moved back in the summer, they paddled to the Dog River for fresh drinking water.

In December Lesley was pregnant with their first child. The house was not done. The winter was very cold. Francois was not chief any more and he had to go and make money.

He asked Lesley, “Do you want to move to town?” She said that she’d stay. Francois had to leave her there to cope, in the cold weather. And she coped very well. They moved into the house in the fall. Their first son was born just before that.

“I remember moving in, wow, it was huge. We didn’t know what to do with all the space. So we camped in front of the stove here for three weeks. We were so accustomed to small space, we slept right here. After a while we moved to the second floor.”

## *Sharing a Story*

“When they surveyed this community, the Department of Indian Affairs set land aside, for the use of Indians. They called it for use of Indians in those days. And I put my house on that property ... just in case the Alberta government or federal government came after me, I was protected.”

“And sure enough the Alberta government came here, landed here with their helicopter. First it was two guys. I was building this house. They announced who they were and they said, ‘Do you have a building permit?’ I said, ‘No I don’t have a building permit.’ They said, ‘You need a building permit.’ ”

“I said, ‘I don’t need a building permit because I’m not under your jurisdiction. I’m on land set aside for the use of Indians. So, no building permit.’ ”

“They came back a second time. Landed in a helicopter. Three guys now. By this time the house was just about finished.”

## ***Land Set Aside for Indians***

“They said, ‘We need to tax you.’ I said, ‘I’m immune from taxation. My house is located on ground set aside for the use Indians.’ ”

“... You should do your homework before you come here. I can’t be taxed. I did all this research to back up what I’m saying. So they left.”

“They came back a third time, this time with a bigger helicopter and five of them. They said, ‘How many trees did you cut down to build this house?’ ”

“I said, ‘You really want to know, I cut 112 trees exactly.’ And he said, ‘We’re going to have to charge you a stumpage fee for every tree you cut down.’ I said, ‘How much would that be?’ He said, ‘\$12 a tree.’ ”

“I looked at this man and I said, ‘If you made those trees, I would pay you. But I know, you know, you didn’t make those trees. God made those trees and I already thanked him. So end of discussion.’ ”

“They left. They never came back again.”





**Francois and Lesley.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*



**Fort Fitzgerald river bank in the moonlight.**

*Photo credit: karljohnston.com*



## ***A great hardship***

Francois and Lesley went through a great hardship when they lost one of their boys. Francois recalls the birth. "That was quite the blessing. To experience this life coming forth, right in our own home, on a buffalo hide. My wife was very perceptive." Lesley knew that "... something was going to happen to this child, that he would not be with us very long."

Francois continues. "11 ½ months later he passed on. But in his 11 ½ months this boy showed us all the necessary things that we needed, to be much stronger, to be at peace, to accept birth and dying. To understand that's what we're here for. And I remember."

"We miss that young man. My wife I know more than me. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think of him. ... the grieving, I've stopped that. I don't live in the past with him. He's here with us all the time. So that was another moment that changed and made us stronger, tougher people."

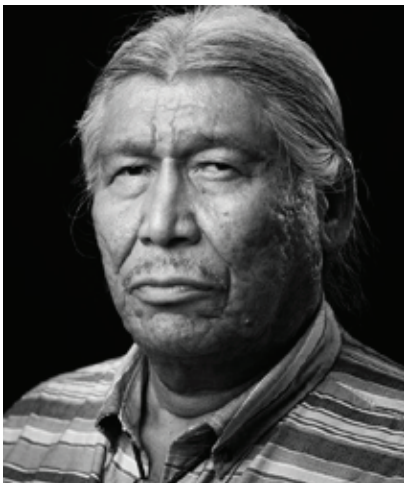


**Left: Teaching at Dechinta, the bush university at Blachford Lake. The course is Dene Chanie — The Path We Walk — a holistic approach to leadership as service to your community and people.**

**Middle: Speaking at the Citizen's Forum on Water Rights and Water Protection in Yellowknife.**

**Right: Speaking at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in Fort Smith.**

*Photo credits: Northern News Services Ltd.*



**At the 2013 Peoples' Arctic conference, Francois and 14 other indigenous representatives signed a joint statement rejecting oil development in the Arctic.**

*Photo credit: Greenpeace UK Facebook*

**"The women are closest to the land—we need them to become our leaders. And as men, we are servants and protectors of Mother Earth. Only in this harmony will we find balance."**

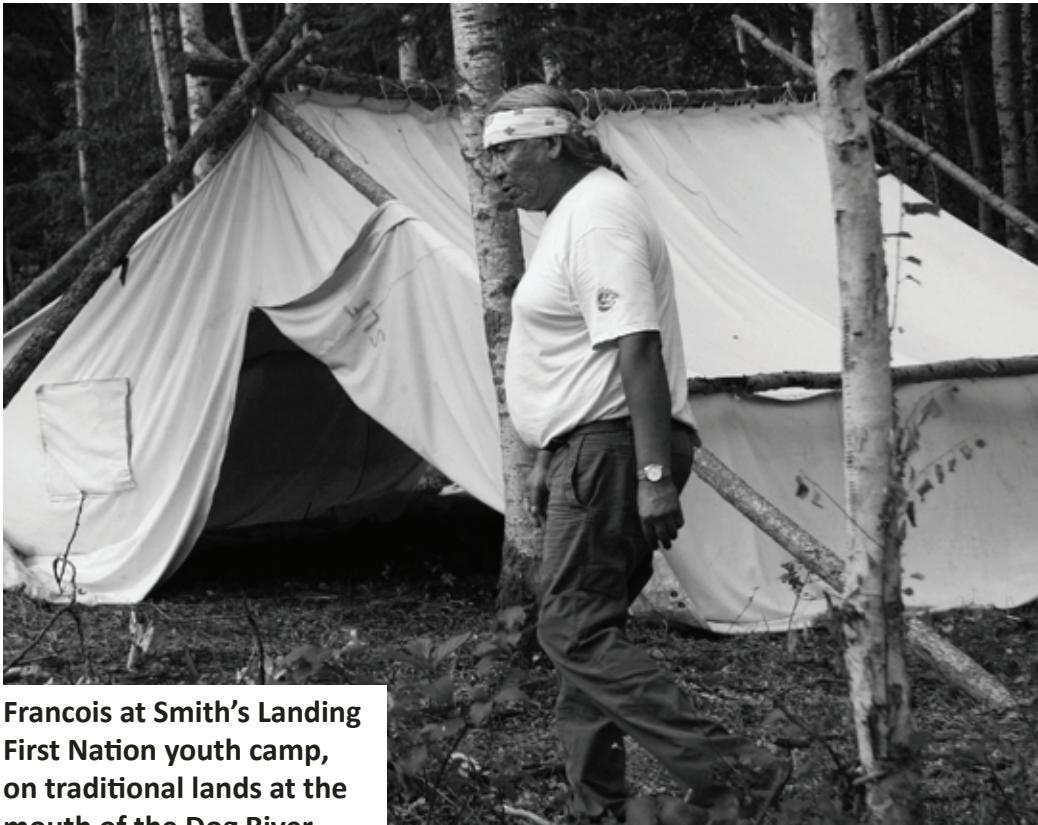
# ***Activist and Teacher***

As an activist and teacher, Francois is involved with many issues. These issues generally relate to Aboriginal and treaty rights, spiritualism, healing from colonial oppression, and keeping “mother earth the way it’s intended to be.”

He gets involved in many ways: talks, conferences, rallies, Idle No More round dances, films, teaching, formal hearings. He has training in cross-cultural awareness and negotiating. He does research and studies history—he knows his stuff.

And he does this all over the world: Canada, US, Norway, Denmark, Australia, South America.

He takes every opportunity to share his wisdom and point of view. He is determined.

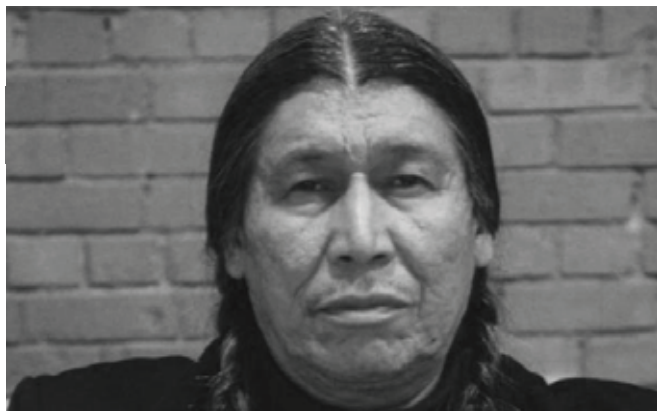


**Francois at Smith's Landing  
First Nation youth camp,  
on traditional lands at the  
mouth of the Dog River.**

**Photo credit:** *Northern Journal,  
Meagan Wohlberg*

**Honour of the Crown — a  
2001 documentary film  
about the Smith's Landing  
First Nation fight for their  
treaty rights.**

**Photo credit:** *cinemapolitica.org*



# ***Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement***

On May 6, 2000, Smith's Landing First Nation (SLFN) signed their final Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement. Francois was the chief negotiator. His brother Jerry was chief.

Under the agreement, today's governments fulfil some long-standing promises made under Treaty 8.

- Alberta provided 7,600 ha (19,000 acres) of unoccupied crown land and \$3.2 million.
- Canada provided about 1,000 ha (2500 acres) of land within Wood Buffalo National Park and \$28 million.

SLFN people see this as the beginning of a new phase to help build a better future. They now have the resources to build human capacity, to help deal with traditional issues, and health and education.



**Francois in Copenhagen during a climate change conference, 2009. People protested at the Canadian embassy to oppose the tar sands.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*



**Francois speaking for the third time at Statoil's AGM in Norway.**

*Photo credit: Michael Sandelson/The Foreigner*

**"When you speak for a third time, something is wrong." ...**

**"The Canadian government has dismantled environmental protection legislation. Why is it that the people from Norway put up with Statoil in our country?"**



## ***Tar sands and climate change***

Francois' homeland is downstream of the tar sands. He opposes tar sands development—the damage to the land, air, and water; the lack of informed consent of Aboriginal peoples.

As with other issues, Francois gets involved in many ways, in many places.

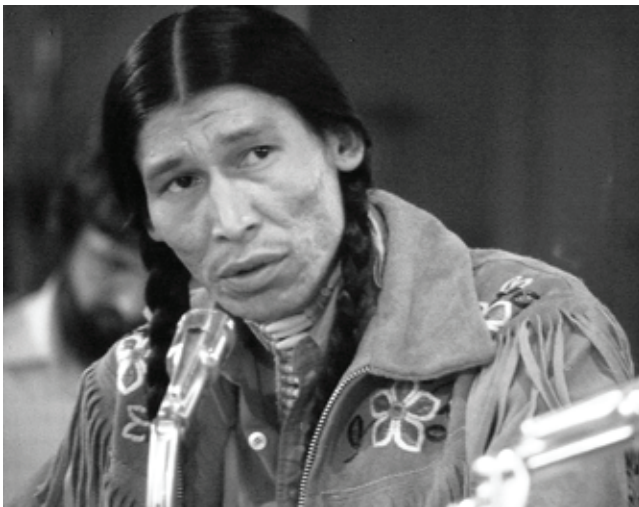
In 2009, he spoke at a climate conference in Copenhagen. He said, “It is like an alcoholic that is addicted to oil and money. ... Here a family of people from around the world are intervening, telling this alcoholic, ‘There is a huge problem, stop what you are doing—if you don’t correct your problem you’re in effect killing yourself and your family.’ ... But of course the alcoholic has a choice whether to abstain or continue his bad habit.”





**Francois in Salt Lake City, Utah at Idle No More demonstration against tar sands development.**

**Photo credit:** *wagingnonviolence.org*



**Francois speaking at the Berger Inquiry in Fort Simpson.**

**Photo credit:** *Berger Inquiry Education Resource Archive photo gallery*

## ***Pipelines***

For many years, Francois has been part of the talk about pipelines. In the early 1970s, the Paulette case helped to stop pipeline development down the Mackenzie Valley. In 1975-76, he participated in the Berger Inquiry.

Justice Berger held hearings in every community along the Mackenzie Valley, to hear what the local people think about a pipeline. After the hearings, Berger recommended a 10-year moratorium, to settle land claims.

Today, Francois gives his opinions about other pipeline proposals. In particular, those connected with the tar sands.

He says, “When people want to talk about it, they can’t. ... You don’t have any say. So it’s quite different. The rules have changed considerably.”



**Francois at National Energy Board hearings 1981.**

**Photo credit top:** *NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1998-051: 1880*

**Photo credit bottom:** *NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1998-051: 1883*



## ***Hydro development***

As chief and as an activist, Francois has fought to prevent hydro development on the Slave River.

In the late 1970s when he was chief, the Alberta government had a grand scheme to build a hydro dam on the Slave River.

Francois recalls, "This divided the community, even indigenous people. The ones that wanted money and the ones that wanted to keep the traditions. ... In the end we won out. The Alberta government left here. ... That was a major victory for the land, for the water."

The 2000 Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement has changed things. Smith's Landing First Nation now controls land on both sides of the river.

Francois explains, "For any future hydro development they have to come to us. And so far the people do not want to see a hydro in the foreseeable future. And that's just fine by me and for my children."





**"See the land, see the beauty, see life, feel life. Talk to the land, talk to the water. But always be thankful."**

**Photo credit:** *Francois Paulette*

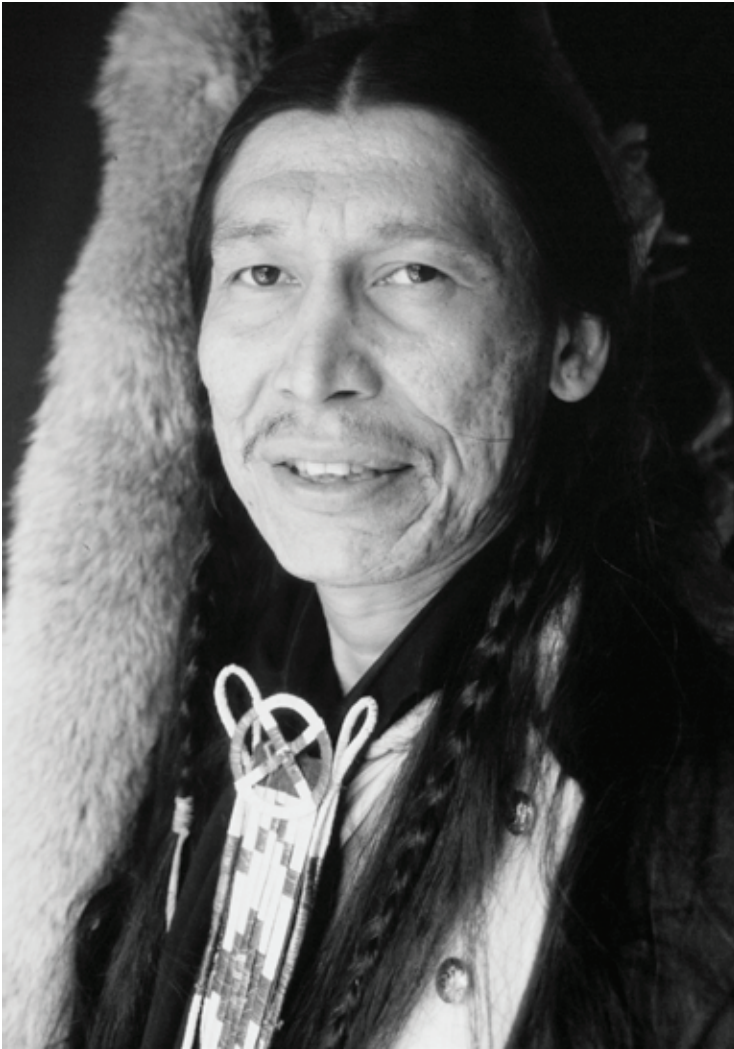


# ***Back at Home***

Francois reads about many different things: science fiction, other cultures and religions, history of Indigenous people around the world, spirituality, current events, historical journals, conservation.

Francois loves opera and Nana Mouskouri. He saw Pavarotti live in Vancouver. He is a competitive dancer and won a championship in 2002. He spends time with his children and grandchildren, and his community. He chops fire wood and fills the woodbox; he's a buffalo hunter. He trades meat for vegetables from a neighbour's garden.

"You can travel the land, you can walk. You can get in a canoe and paddle or motor up the river. ... Pick medicine ... pick cranberries ... get a moose. Make an offering, to say thank you – we're going to use you in a good way, food and medicine. And that for me is real living. Not to talk about it, just to live it."



**Francois as Matonabee. In 1986 he played the main role for the stage play in Yellowknife. Before he took the role, Francois helped to re-write the script, to get the history and traditions right.**

*Photo credit: NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services  
fonds/G-1995-001: 4282*

# ***Glossary***

**unprecedented:** something happens for the first time ever.

**surrender:** to hand something over, give up, give in.

**testimonies:** statements people make about what they know to be true; evidence or proof.

**negotiation:** to talk about things; to bargain and make a deal.

**land claim:** a legal agreement between an Aboriginal group and public government. To recognize Aboriginal rights to land and other things, including treaty rights.

**treaties:** legal agreements between the British crown and Aboriginal groups in Canada, to live in 'peace and friendship'. Between 1871 and 1921, they signed 11 treaties. The crown and later the federal government still have much work to do, to honour the treaties.

**ludicrous:** foolish, stupid, ridiculous.

**determined:** believe something strongly and act on it.



**Francois at Dene National Assembly, 2013.**

Photo credit: *Francois Paulette Facebook*



**Francois and his son at the Dene National Assembly in Fort Smith, July 1991.**

Photo credit: *NWT Archives/Rene Fumoleau fonds/N-1995-002: 10662*

## ***Discussion Questions***

1. What did you learn about Francois Paulette from this story? What did you know before you read the story?
2. Many times Francois says he is determined. What does it mean to be determined? Can you name three things that Francois is determined about?
3. Are you determined about anything? If yes, what things? If no, why not?
4. Francois' homeland is part of Treaty 8. Is your community part of a treaty? If yes, which one? If no, what is the closest treaty to your community?
5. Francois has strong opinions about many issues. Do you share any of his opinions? Why or why not?
6. On the last page of the story, Francois describes what 'real living' is for him. What does 'real living' mean to you?



**Francois with members of Sami parliament in Norway.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*

**Francois calling a moose at a Teacher Education Program culture camp.**

*Photo credit: Scott Lough/Northern Journal (edited)*



# *Information Sources*

- Personal interview with Francois Paulette February 2013, and follow-up
- Francois Paulette Facebook and blog posts
- February 2011 article by Helena Katz <http://lifeasahuman.com/2011/home-living/lifestyle/return-to-fort-fitzgerald-clinging-to-survival/>
- Dechinta <http://dechinta.ca/programs/short-courses/>



**Francois speaks about water quality at a panel discussion in Edmonton.**

**They discuss “Downstream” — a documentary about Aboriginal people who live downstream of the tar sands.**

**Photo credit: *Metro news***





**Hand games at treaty days in Fort Smith.**

*Photo credit: Francois Paulette*

**Francois with Clara Hughes promoting the proposed Thaidene Nene protected area near Lutselk'e.**

*Photo credit: Meagan Wohlberg/  
Northern Journal*



