



René Fumoleau

AUGUST 6, 1926 - AUGUST 6, 2019

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Father René passed away peacefully at the Avens Centre on his 93rd birthday. René was respected and beloved for his insight and compassion. His books, photographs, films and stories reflected his ability to see

the beauty in everything and his passion for justice.

René was born in Vendee, France. After his ordination as a priest he was sent by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) in 1953 to Rádeyǫ̀ Kò (Fort Good Hope), NWT. He also served in Déljne and Fort Liard before moving to Yellowknife in 1970. René retired to Łutselk'e in 1994 and then returned to Yellowknife in 2015.

René's groundbreaking archival research about Treaties 8 and 11 resulted in *As Long As This Land Shall Last*, a 1975 critically-acclaimed study which continues to influence academics and treaty litigation. He continued to bring attention to the struggle for self-determination in his films, *I Was Born Here*, in 1977 and *Dene Nation* in 1979.

René's thought-provoking stories and poetry in *The Secret* and *Here I Sit* challenge readers to love and action. They formed the basis for his appearances at storytelling events across Canada and his CD, *They Gave Me a Chance*.

René was renowned for his photography of Denendeh and its people, which he shared in two books *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration* published in 1984, and *Way Down North, Dene Life – Dene Land* in 2010.

René donated 15,000 slides and photographs to the NWT Archives as a cultural gift to the people of the Northwest Territories. They are a record of life in

Denendeh through a period of social, cultural, and political transition. For many NWT residents, they are the only images of their parents and grandparents. René spent years identifying the people and places, adding value to the collection.

His efforts to educate southerners included his annual Denendeh Seminars in the 1980s. They exposed participants to the annual Dene assemblies and to small community life.

In 2011, Northwords NWT awarded René the Northern Lights Award for his lifetime of outstanding contribution to northern writing. He received a Government of the Northwest Territories Minister's Cultural Circle award in 2014.

He was invited to the 50th anniversary of the Déljne Co-op store in recognition of his prime part in starting the first cooperative in an NWT Dene community. He maintained a lively and thoughtful correspondence with scores of family members, friends and acquaintances.

As René's life and times evolved, so did his means of transportation. During the 1950s René travelled hundreds of miles by dogteam to visit remote camps and traplines. He said he would like to be remembered for having good dogs. He purchased one of the first snow machines in the NWT. Later in Yellowknife you could easily recognize René as he got around on his scooter or in his little blue and yellow truck. In later years, he lived for his almost-daily walks.

René is survived by his brother, Marcel, nieces, nephews and their children in France, as well as many, many friends. René appreciated the care and love shown at Avens and the Jimmy Erasmus Seniors Home in Behchokò .

Everyone is invited to a visitation on Friday, August 9 between 5 and 8 pm at the McKenna Funeral Home in Yellowknife. Details of the celebration of René's life to come soon. Donations can be made to the charity of your choice.