

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

### EULOGY FOR RENE FUMOLEAU

August 12, 2019

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. It is my privilege to commemorate Father Rene Fumoleau who passed away peacefully on his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday here in Yellowknife on August 6<sup>th</sup>. Rene was born in Chantonnay, France. He came to Canada in 1953 as an Oblate priest to Radeyli Ko. He also served in Deline and Fort Liard before moving to Yellowknife in 1970. Rene retired to Lutselk'e in 1994, and then returned to Yellowknife in 2015.

Rene's groundbreaking archival research about Treaties 8 and 11 published in 1975 in his book, *As Long as This Land Shall Last*, changed the course of history for the Northwest Territories. He also made films about the struggle for self-determination for the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories: *I was Born Here*, in 1987; and *Dene Nation*, in 1979.

He was an accomplished photographer, poet, and storyteller, a true renaissance man. His legacy documents a critical period of social, culture, and political transition. Rene spent years identifying the people and places in the over 15,000 photos he took.

Rene also undertook extensive work to educate southerners and build solidarity for Indigenous rights through his annual Denendeh Seminars in the 1980s.

On a personal note, my first job in the Northwest Territories was with the Dene Nation, where I met Rene in 1986. He was that little French guy who was always taking photos at Dene Assemblies and leadership meetings. Our bond grew when we had an opportunity to visit him in France with his family in 1991. We remember those long dinners filled with laughter and deep conversations about life, love, and purpose. Rene became part of our family in Yellowknife, and we named our son after him.

Rene was totally fearless, independent but compassionate. Let's face it. He had issues with authority and hierarchy. Years before anyone had defined colonization, Rene was promoting the concept and truly lived it. He found joy in the simplest things in life. Good friends, family, food, and the natural world. Rene shunned recognition and accolades. He would usually bring gifts for everyone at his birthday dinners. He should all inspire us to the path of social justice and service.

Rene is survived by his brother, Marcel; nieces, nephews, and their children in France; as well as many, many friends. Rene appreciated the care and love shown at Avens and the Jimmy Erasmus Seniors Home in Behchoko. I wish to especially recognize and thank Aggie Brockman and Terry Woolf, who cared for Rene in his final years.

There will be a celebration of Rene's life on Friday, August 30<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00 p.m. at the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Willideh site of Yellowknife River. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.