INTERVIEW WITH BILL HANSON JULY 16, 2005

Gaye Hanson

Bill Hanson is a leader and trail blazer of Cree ancestry who has worked in the field of Aboriginal economic development for many years. He is the author of *Dual Realities — Dual Strategies: The Future Paths of Aboriginal Peoples' Development* and has held workshops and delivered lectures throughout Canada. Bill is a teacher and advocate for providing options for development that take advantage of all of the benefits of mainstream society while providing effective alternatives for those Aboriginal people who choose a more traditional path.

Gaye Hanson is Bill's daughter, the second of four daughters. She is a management consultant who works in many areas of Aboriginal health, social and economic development. With degrees in nursing and public administration and a background in senior positions in the public sector, her most important learning has been from her parents who have taught her how to live and think creatively and independently.

GH: Please tell me about your background in Aboriginal Economic Development?

BH: I have always being concerned with employment, economic development and the total development of the Aboriginal people. By total development of Aboriginal people, I am referring to the efforts to regain their legitimacy and their own sense of where they fit in society. I worked for many years in Aboriginal employment and see the overlap with economic development. From economic development, comes the possibility of employment opportunities which also provides the means to improve the quality of life for everyone within the community. I worked at that for many years, and it wasn't actually until I retired from government and the institutionalized approach to Aboriginal peoples' development that I suddenly realized that the lack of recognition of the duality of Aboriginal lifestyle is our main obstacle to effective development. It never really came together until, actually until six months after I left the public service. Then I realized that this duality of lifestyles has confused us and continues to confuse us today. We'd like to put everything into little packages ..... housing, community development, education and we are experts in every one of these fields but we don't have the expertise to put them all together. That really undermines the total impact of what we are doing. It affects the quality of life, because you are going to a community as a government representative and saying "okay I want to talk about employment". I fly in there to talk about employment and I want to talk employment. The community representatives say "no, no, no, what we want to talk about is health". I say "well that is not my expertise". They say "well, why can't you, you are government, why can't you do it?" As a result, the relationship of

Gaye Hanson, President, Hanson and Associates, Whitehorse, Yukon.

trust and the credibility of the people is compromised. We have to develop the capacity to respond to where the community is and what their issues are and see how it all links into the total development of the community.

GH: From the perspective of looking back fifty years, what have we done right in Aboriginal economic development? Can you think of some bright spots that we could build from?

BH: There's no doubt that progress has been made. I mean, if we accept the fact there is over two million Aboriginal people, you know, with some degree of Aboriginality, certainly there are examples of success in practically all regions of Canada. A review of Aboriginal Business Development Webpages and other sources clearly indicates progress. But you have to look at what contributed to the success — the price of success. We have rewarded the winners who have internalized the norms of the Euro-Canadian market-oriented society. In addition to opportunities that flow from economic or business ventures, these individuals also have greater opportunities in higher education, access to technical training and employment in the private and public sectors. Provided they've got the expertise and the connections, they can make it. As a society, we continue to invest several million dollars in economic development annually across the country with little evidence that the symptoms of social, economic and psychological distress obvious in most First Nation/Aboriginal communities have been alleviated. At the same time, not recognizing these people that are taking advantage of these opportunities are not the people that are being incarcerated or spending their lives on and off social assistance. These are not the people that are suffering from of distress of all kinds and who are passing the problems on to their children. There are lots of Aboriginal people who are making it in the white man's world, or the industrial marketplace and we need to applaud that success. So, in a sense, on paper it looks good. Strategies, programs and services that are required to support people coming into the mainstream society are there. Many Aboriginal people are trained and motivated. They are drawn to urban centres and mainstream opportunities in the search for power, prestige and position. Every program possible is available at the moment, and they are all working. No question about it. We don't need to preach any more about that.

GH: Where have we fallen short of your dreams for advancement?

BH: The problem is that the success we have had only addresses part of the overall problem. The difficulty is that we're putting on a "band-aid" but it is not stopping the bleeding in the other parts of the system. So, we have to now have to shift our focus to those Aboriginal people choosing a different path and that are not responding to current programming. Don't try and apply those strategies and programs and services that are working for the culture of the Aboriginal person over to solve some of the more traditional people in the traditional communities. Right away, you will confront their goals, challenge their aspirations and make impossible demands on their capabilities. We have no right to do that. On the other side, when we have to interface with the more traditional people, probably Granny or people like that, that speak their own language. And we have to start with, okay, where are you going? Again, that is why it is important to understand the difference in the lifestyle characteristics between the change oriented and more traditional people. You go down to see Granny as she is the expert. In other words, she sees all of this coming together, housing, the health, the nutrition and other things. She can tell you how to work with the people. She is the only expert that can do that. If you don't talk to Granny, if you come in from outside and disturb the community dynamics; the traditional people pull back. They won't tell you anything except what you want to hear. They will not get involved. They just defend themselves against all outsiders. Outsiders to their lifestyle and way of seeing the world include the Aboriginal people from university that try to go back and help their people.

GH: So you are saying that there is a whole group of Aboriginal people not served by the current programs and services. Can you tell me more about that?

BH: Yes, that's right. What we are saying to traditional people both in the city and in rural and remote areas is "you will get no programs and or access development opportunities that are

well suited to you — the only option is welfare." And we are telling the families and their children every day that "you will not qualify for programs and services until you meet the norms of the modern day society." Little wonder that they say back to us "to hell with that" and they walk away because they feel that they can't do it — they cannot pay the price of giving up ties to the socio-cultural past. The traditional people are a collective, which differs from the notion of individual success. To choose acculturation, they have to break out of that, they have to cut the ties, and the thinking that goes with that, and walk away. Not everyone can do that. As a result, there are no viable options available to them. There are no options available at the more traditional end of the spectrum. Mainstream society holds back the access to any forms of rewards offered by society and release is conditional on acculturation. No acculturation — no access.

GH: And we somehow have to provide opportunities with them while they are not having to be forced into a process of acculturation. How can they stay connected to traditional values and lifestyles, and still have opportunities?

BH: On one hand, make sure that we do not dismantle programs and services for those choosing acculturation. We need to help them on the journey to where they are going — into banking, the professions — all those things we have to continue to do. On the other hand, we need to invest the same degree of resources doing new things differently. Where are these traditional people? They are caught up in the cycles of life. There is a time and a place for everything. There is spirituality, connection to the land and the authority of the collective. In the traditional values system, an individual person cannot come in and tell me what to do, not even the Chief. That is why the democracy in the mainstream sense, falls apart. We have to accept a different way of thinking, a different lifestyle and a different way of making decisions. The challenge is to develop programs and services that are effective on the traditional end of the spectrum. We have to start where they are.

GH: If the problem is not having enough food in the cupboard, then that is where you start.

BH: Yes. But there is resistance to alternative forms of programming. The general public is asking the question of "why are Aboriginal people different?" They are different. They are beginning their journey and where they are today is different. We have problems seeing the unique characteristics of the traditional Aboriginal person. We get preoccupied with this European, Euro-Canadian concept. People say "we are immigrants — my father came from middle Europe and lived with the cattle in the house and pretty soon his kids were doctors and lawyers." The immigrant ethnic groups left their history, their roots and their basic culture over in some foreign land. They covered over their roots and packed what they wanted to bring of their history and dropped their suitcase over here in Canada. What they brought was a mere distillation of their past ethnic identity. With that they were able to carve out a very positive image to give their children, their next generation. These children, often born in Canada don't know the history of the blood, sweat and tears experienced by their ancestors. For Aboriginal people, it is all right here. All of the history, the roots, the culture with both the good and the bad is all here in Canada.

GH: What was one of the most successful Aboriginal development projects that you were involved in and what made it successful?

BH: In one community, we used the Dual Realities — Dual Strategies concept to plan housing development. Traditional people do not think of housing in a form of a subdivision and prestige values of the size of the house. What the traditional person says is "I want my house put over there. I want it over there by that meadow over there." And the housing staff member says "okay, who should live in the other houses around you?" The traditional person says "my granny's house should be over there, and my older sister's house over there." In other words, they put up their own housing arrangements in a flexible social configuration. Okay, who is the most important in this little mini band housing setup? Well, there's granny's house. Older daughter lives right there. What happens is that the whole collection of ten or twelve houses, or whatever, becomes their "home." Everything and everyone in the extended family is all connected — like a ball of made up of pieces of wool, where it is all tied

together. The connections cannot be disrupted without destroying the whole.

GH: Your concept of Dual Realities — Dual Strategies has been used to guide economic development in many places in Canada. How would you see it being used from this time forward?

BH: The concept is used like a compass in your mind — it affects what you see when you look at things. You don't practice it so much as it envelops your whole body and soul and makes a difference in how you look at the world. The community dynamics that can be understood by using the concept exist wherever in the world a market oriented society imposed itself and its structured institutions on an indigenous way of life, their tribal homeland and ways of doing things. We have the same problems in Saskatchewan that are being experienced throughout the world. Right now in Iraq, the leaders have similar complex problems. They have a bunch of change oriented Iraqi people planning to set up a government and a democracy. They think in similar terms to acculturated people throughout the world. It is people who are at the next level that are living lives based on subsistence, agriculture or horticulture that are saying "no way, I'm not going to change. I'm going to fight you and I'm going to kill you if it takes a hundred years. We will, and we will win." There is no question they will win. Whenever one society of part of a society pushes out a tentacle of the market oriented society including the industrial orientation and ethnic control rural and remote regions like reserves, some people will accept it and the others will curse the colonizer. Those selling the market driven changes say "we're coming in to create jobs." I ask — "who gets the jobs?" And they say "well, get an education, get a Grade 12 and then you might get a job." You can look at statistics, the majority of Aboriginal, First Nation people don't have Grade 12. Why isn't the current education level sufficient to prepare people for a more acculturated life. It is because the education they are receiving is inferior. Most of the teachers have very little math, science, or physics background. Other than the Aboriginal teachers, many teachers are only in the rural and remote communities because they have to gain some experience. Traditional people also use dropping out of school as a way of resisting acculturating forces.

GH: Why do some economic development ventures fail to meet the expectations of government officials and local economic development staff?

BH: What happens is that government officials, again outsiders, want to bring change to the traditional people and to bring them across the spectrum of acculturation in order to satisfy the objectives of their program. They want to prove success of the program. For example, the officials work with the community level officials to buy a grocery store and they turn the store over to a local manager. Who is the local manager? Usually, it is somebody associated or aligned with those in power. As soon as that decision is made about the local manager, it is likely that one part of the community will not agree with the appointment as reflecting who they might trust. The half a million dollar market that you were serving before, now becomes much smaller. One third of the community residents may be traditional and they may react to the appointment by those in power by saying "no way, I'm not going to deal with that store anymore because that person belongs to "them" and does not reflect "us". The communities have what I call three mini bands. The traditional, marginal and change-oriented are all controlled by different groups of people. They have different life styles and value systems and due to historical differences are unlikely to support each other's business ventures. This dynamic can seriously affect the success of locally owned or operated businesses.

GH: You have been involved in leadership with the Inter-provincial Association of Native Employment (IANE) for the past thirty years or so. Please share your thoughts about the link between Aboriginal Economic Development and labour force development or employment.

BH: I know that everybody says "Bill, can't you look at this in a more simple way." There is no simple way because it is tied up in the minds, the hearts and souls of Aboriginal people. All of the time I was working in employment with the federal government in Northern Manitoba, employers would hire based on my advice and my personal credibility. I talked to people like INCO (mining company). They would say "Bill, we believe what you are saying about hiring Aboriginal people. I can see where what you are

talking about could save us a lot of money on turnover because we have the labour force here and they want the jobs. Many of them have proved to us they are qualified and they are motivated, steady and all that. So what can we do?" I recommended that they move families in groups of three or four so that they could set up support systems for each other, like the immigrants did. The result was good — the family might be living in Thompson but the report I got back was that Joe and Mary felt more comfortable and were more likely to stay in Thompson because they could look out their window and across the alley and see the light on in her sister's kitchen.

GH: What motivated you and others to launch IANE?

BH: It was the mid seventies and the labour shortage was being managed with plans to increase the immigration of foreign workers. So we said let's try and talk. Let's get together. We do not want money and we don't want to get government involved here as sole sponsors. We want to work with concerned people, industry, business, union, government agencies that are closely tied to the problem and create a process where they can sit down and talk with Aboriginal communities. I said, "okay let's talk across the table. What are the jobs that are coming down the tube? What qualifications do they need? On the other side, how many people do you have that can do this?" That is how the dialogue and the organization got started. We said to business that "we like the approach you are taking — we will all take a business-like approach." We are talking about qualified Aboriginal people that are going to enhance your work place and that are going to contribute to the bottom line. We committed to the recruitment of Aboriginal people that have the values, skills and abilities to work in harmony with the other acculturated people across the country. The purpose was to employ more Aboriginal people that were a good fit for the industrial workplace, not to set more traditional people up for failure. That's where the economic development went through a sort of secondary, back door way of saying, if we can put these people to work, it is going to benefit all of the communities. Every venture we've got out there, whether it is housing or economic development, or community development process can benefit the whole community if we develop the appropriate strategy.

GH: Are there any other kind of unique characteristics or considerations for economic development in an urban environment?

BH: Well I think that we are seeing a lot of problems and limited effective programming. One idea that I have proposed is that of Granny' Credit Union. I was doing a workshop for the police academy in Regina. They were telling me, "you have to understand the people we are talking about." I said "here's a question — how do you reduce crime rates in the core area of our urban centres? Drop it 30, 40, 50% in the matter of a couple of days?" I had all kinds of responses. I said "what are their needs? There needs are daily, their goals are daily, their responsibilities include care and security for the extended family." Then I said "what would happen if we could slow down the pace and allow these people to draw one-thirtieth of their disposable part of their income every day through Granny." Right now, if you look at crime, crime on payday is highest. Family violence, assaults, alcohol related problems goes on early and then, over the last half of the month, drops off. For four or five days after a monthly cheque, there is mayhem down there related to too much money. Towards the end of the month, petty theft and prostitution goes sky high." And everybody says, "that's right, that's exactly what is happening down there and flowing money differently could make a big difference and provide opportunities for small scale business development."

GH: What would suggest for a reserve based community that want to develop something for the traditional neighbourhood?

BH: We need to start by sitting down with the people. Don't bring in any outsiders. Just have an easy going unassuming facilitator sitting down to talk to people. Suggestions will come up. Someone might say "What if we brought some plywood in here, brought some tools in here, say for example, twelve little basic tool boxes, and give them to Grandpa over there to take care of. What you guys do is when you want to fix your houses, the plywood is under lock and key and is available to you by talking to Grandpa. So you guys decide which one of you twelve will

look after the tool boxes tomorrow, if that is when you decide to start." The facilitator may also say to them "Then what will happen is at the end of the day, you'll get paid ten bucks an hour. If you work eight hours, it is eighty bucks at the end of the day. But no commitment for work tomorrow. Each morning, the first 12 people to show up will get the boxes and the work for the day." All of a sudden what happens to the community then is when you go back a week later people are saying "how come your house doesn't leak any more?" They say, "Granny fixed it. Granny went up there tarred it up with the help of another person." They have never seen that before in their neighbourhood. Again, at their own pace, and a self selecting group, gets paid every day. Pretty soon they are making windows and doors. Pretty soon you say, okay, how about furniture? Immediately there is a change in the neighbourhood at very little cost and they are getting involved. So, now, at the same time, you are getting this money starting to circulate a little bit more. Aunt Harriet, as well, is sharing in the economic benefit by opening a part time hamburger stand in the back room of her house. Someone else is cutting hair and the money is soaked up daily in the community.

GH: So rather than going with the grand plan, and a big business plan and everything, you are looking to these little sort of nubs of ideas and helping them to grow.

BH: Yes. What is needed really in support of small scale community economic development is a person who would sit on an old stump and keep his thoughts to himself. His job is to be a facilitator for problem solving. When they say "how are you going to do that?" He says "well, that is your problem. I'm just here to help with the arrangements, just to help find the kind of the boards you need, and get the nails you need, and make sure the tool kits are put back over there with the elder under lock and key and the money is paid to you at 5 o'clock. I know how to fix the roof, but I'm not going to do it, you're going to do it because your kids want you to do it." What is the benefit? You have got some economic activity but most importantly, the community is building pride. For the first time in the life of that neighbourhood, people are saying "I did not know John could do that!" So he takes on a useful role in the whole social, cultural configuration. Then the rest of the reserve is watching him.

GH: Self selection is a basic principle in your approach to economic development and employment. How does self selection operate and why is it so fundamental to success?

BH: I describe it by saying "if you are going out hunting, who would you take with you?" A person will respond by saying "I would take a person I can trust. A person that I know something about. I know their skills. I know how they are connected to the community — the social, cultural relationships, the networking, all that." By respecting the power of social networks and asking people to use their knowledge to self select compatible groups of people, the employer can build on the strength of existing relationships and help groups to expand their social and cultural world to include a new location and employment. In other words, does a new employee's wife know a brother, sister or other people that are going the same path. Bring them in and talk to them. If you hire according to their advice, you have two and soon you have five of them. These five employees and their families are self selected. In other words, they all support one another. Soon there is a very strong collective that, it works. It just takes off.

GH: Your Cree name means "pathfinder", what has been your experience of being a trail blazer?

BH: Again, I suppose that is where the whole complicated process of perceiving something and learning to act on your instincts. When I quit government, I said "that's it, no more". I was frustrated with the lack of long term vision. A very small number of us had the concept of how all the pieces come together over the long term. To be able to look at a child and see its lifetime unfolding. To see how education and health affects employment and economic development. We failed in so many ways because we could not see the immensity, the complexity, the diversity within the challenges related to Aboriginal peoples' development. And I speak of, you know, being a pathfinder. I try to clear the path for both side of the duality. The best example of the two extremes is this story. You go to the industrial market, modern day elder, and say

"how much money do you want for the land?" They say "fifty million dollars, because all that land is worth fifty million dollars." Go down to the other end, to the reserve, and talk maybe to Granny, who speaks her own language and ask the same questions. She might say "Why would we sell Mother Earth? I'll tell you what, I'll talk to all the fish, all the birds, all the animals here, even the little beetle that is under that leaf over there. When they tell me the price to charge you, I'll let you know." I have had many challenges and my commitment remains to make sure the voices of the traditional people are heard. They are saying "we can't climb your concrete mountain ..... we can't take our extended family away from the land on such a journey ..... we can't take our elders up that way ..... so we'll walk around your mountain and when we meet on the other side we are both better people."

Miskum Maskanow
'Pathfinder'

You cannot lead until you have found your direction, purpose and commitment to forge a path for others. The Cree definition of this quality is *Miskum Maskanow* (Pathfinder).

The elements of forging a path for others embraces commitment to serve a belief in collaboration, the ability to be a spokesperson and an effective organizer — one who generates a democratic participatory environment and an atmosphere of collegiality. But perhaps above all these attributes, one must have a clear sense of vision.

Miskum Maskanow had a vision of aboriginal people having the same opportunities for employment as other Canadians. Of their right to self determination that would lead to creating self sufficiency and therefore strengthening community life.

Miskum Maskanow's vision was and is to educate employers on the availability of a human resource pool that was ignored far too long. Conversely, he played a pivotal role in getting us to empower each other and ourselves to send a message to employers about our availability for the employment market. Miskum Maskanow may have been the one to coin the phrase "Organizations begin to change only when individuals begin to change". He also may have been the one to realize that "life is like a dog sled team — if you aren't the lead dog, the scenery never changes".

Bill and Rose Hanson, it has been a singular honour that you have passed through our lives' journey. On behalf of all IANE members, we thank you and ask the Creator to walk close to both of you with the mantle of good health, quiet peace and happiness.

C. Willy Hodgson
May 2001
Regina Saskatchewan
Presentation to Bill Hanson