

Personal Statement Example #3

I would like to use this space to provide contextual information that will assist the Admissions Committee in evaluating my application. I was born in Manitoba but moved with my parents to the Northwest Territories (Nunavut) in 1993 at the age of 11. I consider myself to be both a Northerner and Manitoban as I am currently a resident of Manitoba. While the high cost of living and geographical remoteness of our remote Arctic village had meant that life was often difficult, it was also very rewarding. In retrospect I do not feel as though I was disadvantaged by my unusual childhood, where dogsledding was a favourite pastime. Instead I believe strongly that Northerners make an important contribution to a diverse Canada; especially with respect to advancing the cause of environmental protection.

As I indicated on my form I am a proud descendent of an original Red River Metis family. My family's oral history tells of our participation in the resistance and of our role in the burial of Louis Riel. My family had experienced first-hand the negative health consequences caused by social and economic marginalization, however my great-grandmother's stories have proven to be an inspiration to me. What I recall of her is that in spite of the bitter suffering and neglect she endured in her life she was always cheerful. Rather than dwell on the difficulties, she loved to tell of how our family was close friends of the Riel family and how we received his remains after his death.

In death as in life, her grandfather had trimmed his hair. Riel's internment in the St. Boniface cemetery was only a few city blocks away from where he ran a smithing business and water mill. Riel often took shelter at their family home, especially when he fell ill. The memory of Riel's innocence and their sadness over his death was poignantly remembered with astonishing clarity a hundred years after the event occurred. Being given this history was a major rite of passage for me and I am happy to share it with you.

By retelling her story, what I wish to communicate is that to be Metis is to be an heir of a culture, and it is to be in a sense a bearer of a family memory. Although our history is tragic at times, we have many inspirational Canadians to be proud of who have defended the rights of the disenfranchised and strengthen the rights of all citizens. I believe that Riel's fight to achieve practical results for the Metis is a cornerstone of Canadian legal history as well as our own history.

In a much smaller way I too have sought to achieve practical results for indigenous people. In the year 2000 I was honoured to receive a Millennium Scholarship Excellence Scholarship awarded on the basis of academic ability and proven community leadership skills. It was a great honour to have received a national award, but I believe that it has given me an even greater

responsibility to continue working to improve the lives of Canadians and especially of indigenous people. If I am given the opportunity to study at the University of Toronto, I will continue to find ways to achieve practical results for indigenous people that will only strengthen the fabric of our diverse society. One way I would like to do this is by working to provide affordable legal services to people in remote arctic communities to help reduce the barrier to adequate legal representation that exists there. I see great potential for intellectual growth, challenge and the cultivation of leadership qualities in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto, and I hope that you see this potential in me.