Transcript of an Interview with Audrey Benoit, August 11, 2005*

**Interviewer:** Kim Gillcrist  
**Location:** Conne River, Newfoundland and Labrador

**Benoit:** My name is Audrey Benoit. I’ve been living in Conne River for well over twenty years and I teach Special Ed [education] at the school [St. Anne’s School]. At the present time I’m the coordinator for special needs and services.

**Gillcrist:** Great. So let’s just get started. In what ways has the community’s path to self-governance touched your life?

**Benoit:** I think it’s made the community independent and I know this year especially where my son was doing grade twelve he’s been involved with many of the meetings with Judy [White] and he’s come home and he’s been very enthusiastic about being given the opportunity to express their views and points on issues that are happening in the community. Personally, I found that really good that their viewpoints were taken into consideration. For myself, I’m not involved in it a whole lot on an individual basis, but overall I think it’s rather good.

**Gillcrist:** So how and when did you come to be a part of the process?

**Benoit:** I guess from just being working at the school. I guess a few surveys and that sort of thing, you know made us aware, and reading the newsletters and talking to Judy and people that were involved in the process. Like I said I haven’t been involved in it myself a lot, like on a direct basis, it’s more indirectly outside and just discussing it with other people, and then my husband sometimes we have discussions, but…

**Gillcrist:** OK. So can you tell me what maybe your best experiences have been with the process of self-governance?

**Benoit:** That’s hard. That’s a hard question, because again, I’m not aware of a lot of the issues that are involved, right. So there wouldn’t be anything that’s best at the moment.

**Gillcrist:** OK.

**Benoit:** I guess the overall thing is this community taking over government stuff themselves, you know, that sets a…., that would be first and foremost I think.

**Gillcrist:** OK. Can you think of any of the more challenging obstacles or barriers that the community might have had to overcome?

* Interview conducted for the Aboriginal Community Development Centre at Mount Allison University, and transcribed in Sackville, New Brunswick.
Benoit: I’ve got to think about that one. Umm, again, I don’t know exactly the whole process of how things were done, so…

Gillcrist: OK. So what do you think that self-government in Conne River will mean to you?

Benoit: Let me think. I think being able to express ourselves, what we would like to see happen and I don’t know if it would involve like a, being able to run programs maybe. I know in the education program ourselves we have to do things according to the provincial standards, so I don’t know if this would give us an opportunity to maybe change some things and do things a little bit differently. I’m hoping that we can have that opportunity and be able to make some of our, we do make some of our own decisions, and we have to sort of do it within the provincial standards but hopefully this will give us a little bit more leeway and we can sort of go ahead and do some things a bit differently than the province.

Gillcrist: OK.

Benoit: That’s just speaking from my education point of view.

Gillcrist: Yeah, for sure. So what do you envision as a self-governing future for Conne River in terms of children, or potential grandchildren or your community, more on a day-to-day basis after self-governance is achieved?

Benoit: Well I guess our children are going to run this community eventually and just the fact that they started with the grade twelves and letting them express their views and explain or discuss how they would like to see the community run. I think that’s very important because, I mean, they’re going to run the community in the future and I’m hoping that this place, the community, will become self-sustained and that our children don’t have to go away, they can come back and find positions here in the community and, you know…

Gillcrist: So are you familiar with the exploratory negotiations that have been going on at all?

Benoit: I wouldn’t… I’d have to say no.

Gillcrist: OK, we’ll skip that one.

Benoit: Yup.

Gillcrist: What advice would you offer to other First Nations communities that are endeavouring in the same process that you folks are?

Benoit: I would certainly advise them to continue and hopefully they’ll be very successful in achieving their goals and fight quite hard for what they want.
Gillcrist: Do you think that there’s anything specific that the community has to have, or to do, or to prepare in order to achieve self-governance successfully?

Benoit: Umm, communication I think with the whole community is very important, and I think you have to, attempt it as a whole community as opposed to several people. I find in this community things are usually done that way, like it’s the whole community effort as opposed to just a couple of people making the decisions all of the time, and I think that’s very important.

Gillcrist: So if the process for self-government were to start again right from the beginning would you make any changes to it?

Benoit: From what I know of self-governance at the moment, no I wouldn’t because I’m not familiar with a lot of the issues. But to me right now things seem to be going quite well.

Gillcrist: OK. Um, like you read on the consent form on the front, we are in the process of documenting your community’s path to self-government at Mount A and we’re building an information repository with all of the documents leading up to self-governance between Judy and INAC and your community and your Chief and the Department of Indian Affairs and everything, and we’re really trying to make that accessible and available for everyone in your community as well as teachers and researchers and youth so that it’s really helpful for other people to see the process you’ve gone through and I’m just wondering who you think will benefit from this initiative and why?

Benoit: Oh, definitely uh, you mean like other reserves maybe can have access?

Gillcrist: Definitely if they have Internet access they would be able to access it as well.

Benoit: Well it would certainly benefit other reserves who are trying to achieve the same thing and I think that with the youth especially to be able to see what has gone on before, because it’s history. For them to know their history and see how they got to the point where they are and I think for almost anybody it would certainly be beneficial.

Gillcrist: Well I’m about to wrap up here, but I want to make sure that there’s nothing that you think I’ve missed or if there’s anything else of importance that you want to add, anything?

Benoit: Well I think that this is an excellent opportunity for our community and that the self-government, I mean is wonderful. You know, it’s certainly going to help a lot of the members in this community. I think it’s sort of gives us the feeling of, I don’t know, ownership, I think more or less of what we do. Once you have
some ownership of your programs, you tend to put a lot more into it as opposed to if it’s not yours.

**Gillcrist:** Right.

**Benoit:** Because I find the same thing at the school with the Special Ed program. I put so much into that because I believe in it. When you believe in something I think you put in 110%.

**Gillcrist:** For sure. Well thank you! [for the interview]