

# Pierre Benoit

*Tsiigehtchic, NT*  
(formerly called Arctic Red River)

*Born:* February 1, 1921  
*Birthplace:* Leth kak van tsal  
*Parents:* Benoit Coyen & Delma Jerome  
*Gwich'in:* Gwichya Gwich'in  
*Married:* Annie Koe in 1956  
*Children:* Joseph (Joe Joe) & Clayton  
(both adopted)



Pierre was born in 1921 near the little lake called Ghost Lake, which is located on the Flats in front of Tsiigehtchic. He said that he was born on a cold day in February. "Lots of good looking girls kissed me. I hope so anyway!" he added.

Much of Pierre's life has been spent living and working in the bush. In his early years, Pierre lived with his parents up the Arctic Red River where they hunted and trapped. His youth and later years were spent in the Delta, around Travaillant Lake and the Mackenzie River. He has travelled extensively throughout the Gwichya Gwich'in area.

Looking back on his life, Pierre speaks with gratitude about his father, and the fact that his father taught him to do many things in the bush and to work hard. He recalls that his father had a gift for trapping and hunting and that he was the first person in Arctic Red River to buy a gas boat in 1926. It was 30 feet long and cost \$600. That fall, his father helped other families travel up the Arctic Red River, towing their canoes behind his boat as far as Bernard Creek. The water upriver from Bernard Creek was too shallow and swift for the motor boat,

and people travelled beyond here by canoe.

Around Christmas time in 1928 when Pierre was 7 years old, his parents sent him to the residential school in Aklavik. In the spring of 1930, his adopted brother Modeste drowned, and Pierre's father took him out of school to help him trap in the Delta. By the time Pierre was 16, he was capable of travelling in the bush alone, checking on both his and his father's trap lines. Besides trapping, he also worked for two summers (1938-1940) on the Hudson's Bay tugboat "Pelican Rapids" which travelled between Hay River and Tuktoyaktuk, pulling as many as four barges behind it with freight or oil. Pierre enjoyed this work, particularly when they got to town to stay the night and people put on a dance for them. Everyone dressed in their finest clothes and there were lots of nice looking girls to dance with!

Pierre had originally intended to get married at the age of 25, but his fiancée died three months before the wedding. It wasn't until 1956, when Pierre was 35, that he and Annie Koe of Fort McPherson were married. Pierre and Annie adopted their two boys when each was only a few days

old. Pierre continued to trap after his marriage, but also worked in oil camps on the coast until they shut down. Pierre and Annie are no longer together. Pierre lives now in Tsiigehtchic and Annie in Aklavik.

Since 1986, Pierre has walked along a sober path in life. In leading his quiet life today, he follows his parent's example of devotion to God and his faith in the Virgin Mary. He loves to read Bible stories and stories that happened long ago. He learned to read English after he left school by taking books out on the trap line. He has no radio or television at home, and likes to spend his time reading, going to church and enjoying the view from his kitchen window. From this window he can see both the Arctic Red River and the Mackenzie River, he can watch the eagles soar over the cliffs and look at the fish camps set up on the flats on the McPherson side of the Mackenzie River. It almost feels like he is in the bush.

Although Pierre is unable to go out on the land anymore, he is always happy to share his knowledge and experience on the land. Pierre says that, "I can't help with work but I sure can help with my mouth!"