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What it is to be a Métis

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What it is to be a Métis

THE STORIES
AND
RECOLLECTIONS
OF THE
ELDERS
OF THE
PRINCE GEORGE
MÉTIS
ELDERS
SOCIETY



EDITED, ORGANIZED AND COMPILED BY

Mike Evans, Marcelle Gareau,
Lisa Krebs, Leona Neilson and
Heidi Standeven

What it is to be a Métis

The Stories and Recollections of the Elders of the Prince George Métis Elders Society

Edited, Organized, and Compiled by
Mike Evans, Marcelle Gareau, Lisa Krebs,
Leona Neilson, and Heidi Standeven

UNBC Press
Prince George, British Columbia
Canada

What it is to be a Métis: The Stories and Recollections of the Elders of the Prince George
Métis Elders Society

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Preface to the second printing and web-based edition (April 2007)

Since the first printing of this volume a number of the Elders who participated have passed on. This is inevitable of course, and it comes to us all, but it is bitter-sweet to reprint the volume now. The passing of these Elders is great loss for their families and the wider community. We are grateful that they gave us some of their stories here, and that others have chosen to honour the Elders by continuing to read, teach, and learn from what is recorded in this book. These are short stories drawn from long and complicated lives, and they are good stories to learn with. Merci and meegweetch again to the Elders and others who worked on this volume - thanks especially to Margo Yacheshyn, Pamela Fry, Lynda Williams and Antonia Mills who helped to get things in place to get the web-based edition up, and the second printing done!

Mike Evans, UBC Okanagan

Acknowledgments

A great many people helped to make this volume a reality. First and foremost, the Elders themselves and especially the members of the board of the Prince George Métis Elders Society gave their time, knowledge, and patience to this project. Mrs. Margaret Jaffray, Mrs. Jerline Doucette, and Mrs. Florence Aubichon in particular guided and encouraged this work. Leona Neilson, coordinator of the Society, shaped the project from beginning to end, and was the central person in linking the Elders with the UNBC students and faculty. Ruth Suvee also helped to bring members of both communities together. In the most general sense, we would like to thank the Métis community of Prince George, who under the leadership of the Elders, have been consistently supportive of our collective efforts.

The University of Northern British Columbia has likewise supported this project from the beginning. The Anthropology Program allowed the integration of two of its courses into the research process, and supported the project in too many ways to recount. Donna Hebert, program secretary, was vital for her help organizing and controlling what was, at times, a rather chaotic flow of students and equipment through her work day. Without the entire Anthropology Program's willingness to accept applied anthropological work as a valuable end in and of itself, this project could not have taken place. Lee Morrison, the Director of the First Nations Centre of UNBC at the time the project began, gave both financial and intellectual support to our efforts. Jim McDonald, the Chair of the First Nations Studies and Anthropology Programs at UNBC, has been the crucial link between the University and our project; he has consistently and enthusiastically found the financial resources needed for the completion of the project. He has also shown a creative flexibility that allowed the connections between University personnel and the Métis Elders to form in a respectful and healthy context. The editorial board of UNBC Press, Mary Ellen Kelm, Richard Lazenby, and again especially Jim McDonald, offered some helpful advice on how to deal with the twin responsibilities of creating a volume that put Elders first, and providing an explanation as to why this should be so. Pamela Genn, very kindly, and very carefully, copy edited the work. Carole Fairhurst designed the cover. Finally the UNBC Administration, in the persons of Deborah Poff (Vice President Academic) and Robin Fisher (Dean of the College of Arts, Social, and Health Sciences) have been steadfast in their support; in particular UNBC provided a grant which made the publication of this work possible.

Our thanks to all.

Métis Nation Anthem

In the forest, on the river, and across the western plain,
As the white man journeyed westward, to the land of the Indian.

A new race was created, a new Nation rose up strong.

Hardship as its destiny, and its curse to not belong.

In the land from which they came, in the land they helped to build.

They found themselves the alien, found their vision unfulfilled.

And despite their valiant effort, to defend what they believed.

When at last the battle ended, they were only left to grieve.

We are proud to be Métis, watch a Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, we're the true Canadian.

From across the plain they traveled, from Red River to the Peace
Looking for their own homeland, that would help them to replace
All the land that had been taken, and the dreams that had been dashed.
Their brave heroes now called traitors, and courageous deeds now past.

But their spirit was not broken, and their dreams have never died.

Their determination strengthen even while the people cried,
as they waited for the battle, that would end their years of pain.

And the final bloodless battle, when the Nation rose again.

We are proud to be Métis, watch a Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, we're the true Canadian.

For this newest generation, and the future ones to come,
With the past to motivate us, it will help to keep us strong.

As we build the Métis Nation, as we watch it rise again,

Our past lost in motivation, to inspire our future again.

We are proud to be Métis, Watch the Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, We're the true Canadian.

We are proud to be Métis, Watch a Nation rise again.

Never more forgotten people, We're the true Canadian.

Prince George Métis Elders Society “Proud to be Métis”

The Prince George Métis Elders Society is a nonprofit society. We take pride in the wide range of programs and services we provide in order to improve the quality of our lives and lives of people in our community. The goal of our Society is to enable Elders to deal with issues that impact their daily lives, and to educate our Métis people and the community on “What it means to be Métis.” Our Métis Elders have the greatest understanding of this.

We are creating cultural and traditional programs for those Métis who have drifted westward across the Rockies. The Elders of the prairies, Western Arctic, Montana, and North Dakota have always been vital in keeping community traditions as Métis migrated across Western North America. This migration happened both before and after the Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont were defeated in the Northwest resistance of 1885. After the Battle of Batoche, many Métis from all over lost track of their heritage and identity. Métis were long unrecognized by the governments of Canada; we were only recently accepted as an aboriginal nation in the 1982 Canadian Constitution. Between 1885 and 1982, there was a gap in our history when our culture and communities were ignored. The Métis are truly “the forgotten people.” As people “in between,” neither First Nations nor European, Métis people endured racial hatred. Unfortunately, a great many younger Métis lack understanding of their heritage. As a result, in 1993 a group of Métis Elders got together to form the first ever Métis Elders Society in Prince George or anywhere else in BC.

Our objectives in forming the Elders Society were to enrich our community by encouraging Cree language education, cultural heritage events and programs, and the collection of our history in the form of videos, collection of language materials, and storytelling. We sponsor and organize group gatherings, social events, and Health and Wellness Workshops (traditional medicine and nutritional training). We do crafts, beadwork, weaving, cooking of traditional foods, and teach and support customs such as jigging, fiddling, and storytelling. We also support each other in bereavements, home care, sickness, and provide referrals in the areas of pensions, health care and housing.

We also have fund-raising for a semi-annual pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, as many Métis are strongly religious people. According to the Catholic Church, the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage is a “God given event, deeply rooted in Native and Catholic tradition.” This pilgrimage is largely attended by Aboriginal people, who travel from places as far away as the southern United States and the maritime provinces of Canada. On each of six days pilgrims pay homage to a different Aboriginal Nation (including the Métis Nation) by holding a Mass in conjunction with traditional singing and prayer in that specific Nation’s language.

For the Prince George Métis Elders Society this biannual pilgrimage is one of its most unifying activities. Throughout the year the Elders participate in craft fairs and other fund raising activities to subsidize the summer pilgrimage to Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta. For many of the Elders, the time spent at the pilgrimage represents a renewal of the friendships they share, a renewal in their Métis traditions, a renewal of their Christian faith, and a renewal of their faith in the goodness of humanity. As many of the Elders point out, the pilgrimage gives them the opportunity to reflect on their lives and those of loved ones who are in need of spiritual, emotional or physical healing. No matter what Church the Elders attend, be it Catholic, United or any other, the Métis Elders come together with a host of other Aboriginal Nations to express their Christian faith through their Native traditions.

In our pilgrimage, as in all our programs, we seek to help Elders, who will help their families, youth, and the community to understand what is to be a Métis.

Written by Mrs. Margaret Jaffray with the assistance of Mike Evans and Lisa Krebs

Dedication

To all those members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society
who have gone on ahead.

Introduction

The Métis Nation has its roots in the marriages between European fur traders and the First Nations people with whom they cooperated. The history of this Nation is complex. By the nineteenth century, Métis communities could be found from the Great Lakes region, to the Red River area in what is now Manitoba, all the way to Montana and the Dakotas to the south, and west and north to the southern Mackenzie River valley. Prince George (then Fort George), slightly to the south and west of the main body of Métis settlement, was part of this network of communities that made up the Métis Nation. The original Fort George was almost certainly built by Métis labourers, and from its construction onward, Métis moved in and out of the settlement and other nearby settlements like Chetwynd (then Little Prairie), Jasper House, and the villages and forts along the Peace River.

After the fur trade diminished in the area, and was replaced by other economic pursuits, the Métis population of Prince George seems to have either joined with other aboriginal groups, or moved back towards more established Métis settlements to the north and east of the Prince George area. This was a difficult time in many Métis communities. The Northwest (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Northern BC, and the Western Arctic), home to the Métis for many years, and home to their First Nation ancestors for thousands, was gradually settled and incorporated into the new Canadian State. Métis resistance to this process of incorporation, first in 1869-70 at the Red River, and then in 1885 in the Batoche area of Northern Saskatchewan, was crushed by the Canadian government. After 1885, the Métis and Métis communities remained in the Northwest, as they do today, but these communities were almost always systematically ignored by the federal and provincial governments.

This time, from the early twentieth century to the mid-nineteen sixties, is sometimes referred to as the time in which the Métis became “the forgotten people.” Forced to the margins of European society by racism and the massive economic dislocations caused by the resettlement of their homelands, and forcibly separated from their Cree, Saulteau, and Dene cousins by things like the Indian Act, many Métis families were destined to live at the edges of both European and First Nations communities. They became “the Road Allowance People,” belonging nowhere and to no one but themselves. These were hard times, yet the Métis survived, and throughout the twentieth century, did what they had to, in order to keep their traditions alive.

This volume is the result of the collective effort of the members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society, and students and staff from the Anthropology Program at the University of Northern British Columbia. Each chapter is the result of one or more meetings between research team personnel and an Elder (all of which took place in Prince George British Columbia between March 1997 and July 1998). At these meetings the Elders were asked a standard series of open-ended questions drawn from an interview schedule created cooperatively between the University Research Coordinators (Mike Evans and Marcelle Gareau) and the Elders’ Society Executive and Coordinator (Leona Neilson). Most meetings were tape recorded, and then transcribed. The resulting transcripts were then edited by Lisa Krebs or Heidi Standeven (students at UNBC). Finally the transcripts were re-arranged and re-edited into story-like form by Mike Evans; in most cases each chapter is thus an edited transcript of the original interview, re-edited for continuity and flow. After this process, the result was taken back to the Elder for correction. Though the interview material was edited, we have been careful to keep the integrity of the Elder’s words. (For a full discussion of the methodology please see Appendix One).

The resulting book is a particular type of history¹. Other books are available about the history of the Métis Nation, but this book is a bit different. Collected here are the histories of lives lived, and lives told, by the Métis Elders of Prince George. The Elders involved in the project are all active members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society, whose purpose and activities are described above. The stories belong to individual Elders, and tell of challenges faced and overcome, of tragedies endured, and of children raised and families fed in spite of it all. As a group, the Elders originate from points throughout the Métis homelands. They and their families have settled in Prince George over the last few decades, and now make up a community of approximately one thousand people. This community is in turn related to the approximately twelve thousand Métis who live in Northeastern British Columbia, and the hundreds of thousands who live in the Western Arctic, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Taken together, the stories below are a history of one community within the Métis Nation. Each contribution gives us insights beyond those available in many history books. Here you will find accounts of how people have experienced the events and conditions that Métis have faced, rather than an account of the events themselves.

The book is the Elders' gift to their children and grandchildren, and to the children of us all. The project was launched because the Elder's wanted to document their own personal and collective histories. The stories of the lives of the Elders in this book are stories about "What it is to be Métis," both in the past and at present. These stories add to what can be learned from history books, in the way Elders have always taught history, in their own words, about their own lives. While we have edited the interviews below, we made no attempt to interpret the results of the project. Rather we choose to rely on the Elders to speak for themselves, and on the reader to make of the stories what they will. In a careful listening to the following recollections lies part of the history of the Métis Nation, that part that today lives in Prince George, British Columbia.

Mike Evans, University of Alberta

¹A brief bibliography of other sorts of materials on the Métis Nation and People has been provided in Appendix Two for anyone wishing to read further.

There was no men eh. There was one man so we used to go out on the lake and fetch the nets and bring them out. We were fishing herring. There used to be a big pile like that (points to an imaginary pile of fish seven feet high) of fish. And different women would take one end and spread the net out and the fish fall out. And we'd pack all that. Another girl in the back hauled the fish and put it on the train at three o'clock in the morning. Imagine... how strong I was. We used to have a hundred pound boxes and we'd stack them six boxes high, we'd just throw them. And then when we were loading them on the train we'd just stand on the back of the truck and throw them on the boxcar. Two of us. But ah, that was life. I liked it.

Anna Bellrose

Interviewed by Lisa Krebs and Heidi Standeven at Prince George BC, on June 30th, 1998².

I was born in Grouard Alberta, April 17th, 1915. And I was raised there too. I stayed until I became a widow in 1989, and then moved here. I didn't pack nothing, just necessities, that's all. That's why I got nothing. (points around the room)

Why did you make that move?

Well, I sold everything in Grouard. Figured I didn't need anything because my granddaughter wanted me to come over to help her out with the kids, she had a baby, she was teaching school. So I came, and I stayed with her for a while and then I moved to my son's and we didn't get along very good. He's was smoking too much and I have breathing problems. So then I moved to an apartment. And then I moved here, last year, it's not a year yet. But I stayed with my granddaughter most of the time, that's the one we lost not too long ago. Mrs. Hale.

What did you think about Prince George when you first arrived?

Well, it was all right, not any worse or better anywhere else.

What do think is the best thing about Prince George?

Nothing. I'd rather be in Alberta. But I'm stuck here now. [laugh] They do more for seniors than they do here. See like these wagons, walkers. (points to a walker with a basket and wheels) The seniors here have to pay for them, in Alberta they don't. This is a Alberta wagon. And I don't have to pay for it. But when I die, it goes back there. Like if I don't need it anymore it goes back to Alberta. Same with these machines (points to a respiratory machine). And same with that uh, oxygen. But this oxygen there's a company here - Medigas. It's the same as this one. (points to a respiratory machine) So they just transfer it

²The following is an edited transcript of tapes made during this interview.

to here. Like they give me a new one and they took my old one.

What's the worst thing about Prince George?

That. They have to pay for everything. [laugh] Glasses, teeth, everything. [laugh] In Alberta you don't.

How is it to be a Métis here?

Well to tell you the truth I don't know because I'm not really mixed up with very many Métis. You know the group I'm in with. The Seniors... nobody talks the language. Most of them have to go back to school to learn how to talk their language. So there's not very many that talks it. There's Mrs. Regan, and me and Mrs. Jobin, and Mrs. Bourgeois... you know her hey? (points to Lisa) Jenny Bourgeois and Mrs. Goulet. That's about all.

Is that Cree or Michif?

Cree. Yeah it's Cree.

How is it in Prince George as a Métis compared to any of the other places you've lived?

Well, I can't tell the difference because I don't know very many Métis here. But over there you know that's all mostly Métis around. You know what's a Métis in Alberta. And a White is a White. And a Métis is a Métis. [laugh]

Where you born at home?

Yes. I was born at home. And there was another one born the same day as me, about 15 minutes difference. We had the same doctor. The same oh... woman. Midwife. We are both the same age. He's in Alberta. I was born and then the other one started to get sick and he was born. The same house. [laugh]

What did your home look like?

Oh, it wasn't bad, better than this. [laugh] It was a log house. But it was hewed, you know what I mean? Square. My dad built it. We had a big kitchen, and bedrooms, two or three bedrooms, big front room, that's all. And we had a bunch of horses. Big barn, cows... the home was very comfy. My mother was a good cook. She's a very, very good cook. She could make a meal out of nothing... It was all wood heating. They'd haul the green Poplar in the spring and haul it all in big logs, like trees. And then they had a little machine and they cut it all up. And wood and us kids would pile it all up. Pile all the chords of wood. For the winter, it dries all summer.

Did you have a garden?

Oh yes. Always. With my mother and dad, we had to go and clean the garden every night. When we were kids, we had a big garden. And I did too, after I was married I always had a garden. I even have a little garden now. [laugh] At my granddaughter's. [laugh]

What was it like around your house? Was there a river or was it all in the woods?

The river was about a half a mile down the hills. That's where we went and watered the horses. We'd ride the horses, go down the hill and water them. And it was a mile, approximately, was the river down below, down below the hill. It was still there. Beautiful scenery. It was a swamp. And then the river there. People used to make hay there across the river. We did too. Everybody had to make hay for their horses for the winter, eh. They'd get a permit for so much. For so many acres where they could cut hay.

What do you first remember from childhood?

Oh, I don't know. I remember lots of things... nothing special that I know of.

Did your grandparents live with you at any time?

No. My grandparents lived about a quarter of a mile down... but she. Well there was two grandparents, like my mother's mom and my dad's mom. My dad's mom lived closer, just a short distance, like just across the street. And the other one lived approximately a mile away. We used to call her Big Grandma, Big Kohko. The one that lived close by was Kohma. That was her, Kohma.

What does that mean? What is the difference?

Grandma, I guess. Instead of saying Kohkum, it's just Kohma. It's just that's the way they all called her.

What were their names?

My dad, was McDermott. My grandfather. She married an Irishman, he came from Ireland and she..., see my grandfather came from Ireland and they sent him up North. Working with the Bay the Hudson's Bay. Then they went..., he was sent to this reserve to run a Hudson's Bay store and he met her. Met this Grandma... this Kohma.

What was her name?

Charlotte. But don't ask me her last name because I can't say it. [laugh]

What about your mom's family?

My mom well, they were Cree, they lived oh, up about a mile, my grandmother, she was a sweetheart. We used to play with her all the time. She lived on top of the hill, and we used to have a big fish box and we put her in there and we'd turn the box around and make her slide down the hill. [laugh] She was such a jolly old lady. She laughed all the time, and she was big. The other one, Mrs. McDermott, like my grandmother was slim, tall and slim. The other one was big. [laugh]

What kind of work did your grandparents do?

Well McDermott worked for the Hudson Bay, the other one I don't know. He died before our time, so I don't know what he did.

Did they talk about what it was like for them when they were growing up?

Not really, no. But I know they never had a hard time. Believe it or not, but everybody was on, what do you call it, relief, they used to call the social services years ago. But they were getting seven dollars a month, but then with that seven dollars a month they used to get an ax to clear up the sides of roads, because it was all muddy roads at that time. No pavement. And we were never, never in that line. Never did, never went on welfare. They made their own. They had their own garden, they had chickens, they had cows. They kill a beef in the fall... never... and then whatever. See there was no electricity. No running water. You'd have to haul snow and put it in barrels and melt it. And keep filling that barrel with snow. Yeah that's... and then you had to have a bath in a little washtub, [laugh] a little bathtub. And the boy had to have a bath first if we were short of water, the boy had to have a bath first before the girls... because the girls, well they're supposed to stink eh. [laugh] But we're not a big family, there was only three of us girls and two boys, but the one boy my grandmother raised. The oldest one.

The McDermotts?

No. The other one... the Gladue.

Did your grandparents tell you where they were born? Like one, McDermott was born in Ireland but what about the other ones?

Sturgeon Lake. The uh, Mrs. McDermott was born in Sturgeon Lake. And my mother's parents were all born in Grouard.

Were your grandparents religious?

Yes, very. They said their prayers, they knelt down beside the bed every night to say their prayers, their rosaries. They were very, and everybody went to church. Like us, everybody goes to church, one stays home, makes a dinner. That time it was dinner not lunch. There was three full meals a day, years ago. Not just a bite here and a bite there. One had to stay home and make dinner and clean house and the rest went to church. Then we would take turns and the next one would stay home like that. But everybody goes to church. Every Sunday the church was packed. Today you only see about three or four.

Did they have any things that they did that they were proud of in their lives?

I don't know. But my grandmother there, Mrs. McDermott she was a great old lady. After her husband died, she was a trapper. Yeah. There used to be four or five old ladies get together, I remember so plainly. They used to wear denim skirts, you know long skirts and

they had a big pack sack and they had dogs and away they'd go for ten days, two weeks at time in the bush. Sleep outside. Then they'd come home with squirrels, weasels, muskrats, beaver. And then we'd help her clean them up when she got home. She'd skin them. She'd bring home chickens, rabbits, everything like that. Made rabbit stew. [laugh] We even used to can rabbits in those and those ah, prairie chickens. Years ago. We canned everything because there was no fridge, eh. Had to can everything, or else. And there was no muskeg. If there was a muskeg close by they used to put their meat under the muskeg because there is always ice under the muskeg. And you just cover it up. But when there's no muskeg, well everything is canned. My grandmother used to pick berries and she used to can everything, Kohma. She canned everything blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and everybody goes out picking berries. And she'd make jam, preserves, all kinds.

Where were your parents born?

I think my mother was born in Grouard. And my dad must have been born... Sturgeon Lake or Grouard. I don't know.

Were they fun?

My mother was. Yeah, my mother was. My dad you had to be very quiet when he was in the house. Grouchy old... man. But my mom was a very happy-go-lucky woman. She worked hard because my dad was always sick eh. Always, always sick. And my mother worked for the Hudson's Bay for a dollar a day, and we went to school and we looked after the house. Like clean up. But when I was twelve years old I used to wash clothes by hand. On a board. My mom was working. I washed her clothes and Dad's clothes. Today the kids can't even wash their own clothes in the machine. [laugh]

So, what did your dad do?

Well he didn't do very much because he was always sick eh. Then finally they fished, you know fishing and trapping. But my mother had to be along all the time.

Was he a lot older than your mom?

No! He was just sick for forty years. We were in the mission I was nine years old. They left us there and went to Edmonton to see the doctor. And we got word that Dad was dying, the priest come over and told us. I was only nine years old, I remember that. And we were in the mission and so of course we cried and this and that. But he lived forty years. He never died. He was finally only about that thick here (she makes a measure to show about 25 cm at her middle). But still he'd go out on the lake on the ice. But my mother did most of the work and they'd hire a man to pull the nets in. On ice mind you. They were fishing through ice. And then they had a caboose and horses. They had a stove in the caboose to make their dinner, lunch, tea. And uh, they worked hard, my mother did anyway.

Were they strict?

Very. [laugh] I used to get a licking with a willow lots of times.

What are some of the things they taught you?

I don't know. They taught me how to live, how to make a go of life, how to make a living. I did the same thing after I was married. I canned everything. I used to have three to four hundred preserves. I canned pork, beef, moose meat, rabbits, ducks, geese, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, everything. I made jam and preserves. I used to have quarts and quarts and quarts and then we had a garden. We had a big garden all the time. My husband was working out. Mind you my husband was working out for fifty cents a day on the farm. We were never, never, never on welfare. And we never really owned a home. We rented most of the time, we rented. Then we rented Mom's place in Grouard when they moved to the lake. But finally, we did really own, we had our own house. I was working out then and he was working. We were both working.

What did you like to do when you were a kid?

Play ball, go ice skating. We used to make our own skating rink on the river. All of us. Scrape ice everyday. Scrape ice, finally we'd have snow that high (points to about 3m of snow) around eh. We'd put a pole on each corner with horse lanterns. and we'd skate there. There was uptown kids and downtown kids. And the downtown kids would whistle. You could hear it, like you know, it's time to come to play. Hockey or something, or ball. [laugh] We played basketball, baseball. Lots of baseball. And riding bicycles. But until today I couldn't ride a bike. I tried and I never could ride a bike. I still can't. [laugh]

What are your sister's and brother's names?

Well my oldest brother was Walter. I'm the second oldest. And my name; well you know my name. And my sister, Betty, another sister Lillian and a brother Michael. That's it.

Do you know what years they were born in?

I'm was born in 1915 and I think my sister was in 1917 but my oldest brother, I don't know how old he was or where he was born. My grandmother took him away from Mom. So we weren't very close. And then my other sister, well there would be about two years apart all together.

What was Grouard like?

It was supposed to have been a city. The capital of Alberta at one time. And it was a big town and people were moving in because it was supposed to be the capital eh. There was a bunch of stores and there was a movie, picture show hall, with silent movies. And then what happened, they wanted to check the water and the mayor made a mistake and took the

wrong water to get it checked. There was another lake called Stinking lake near McLennan. He took that in Grouard. So naturally the water was no good. But it was, you know they had made a mistake. The railroad was supposed to come through the north of the lake. This lake is seventy-five miles long and we were living right on the edge of it. Lesser Slave Lake. And then the railroad was supposed to come on the north shore and instead of that it went the other way.

So that stopped all the people?

That stopped all that, everything just went down. We had a whole mile wooden bridge there. Across that lake. That's towards the end of Slave Lake, Lesser Slave Lake.

Was there any special places that you liked to go in Grouard?

No, I'd like to go home back to Alberta. But, not to Grouard. [laugh]

Where there any bad winters or droughts when you were growing up?

Bad winters. But no droughts. Used to have snow as high as the telephone pole. Had to get a Cat to shovel snow back and forth on the road. From Grouard to High Prairie. High Prairie was the main town, like the hospital and the doctors. They had to get a Cat to shovel snow back and forth to get through. Used to have lots of snow storms and drifts, snow drifts.

How did you get to school when the snow was that high?

Oh, it wasn't that high right in town, like in the village. We walked to school a mile when I was little. But after Mom and Dad moved to a closer school we were all right.

What kind of child were you?

Yeah, I tried to learn things. I wanted to be a nurse. But I only went to grade nine because there were no grades higher there.

What was the most important thing that happened to you before you were 21?

Nothing. (long pause) I got married but that wasn't important. [laugh]

Did you have a favourite teacher in school?

Yes. I was looking at my prayer book and she used to send me cards after she left Grouard. Her name was Sister Benita. And I was just thinking of her. She had to move to Calgary because she was getting old. She passed on now. She was my favourite teacher.

This was a mission school right?

Yes. We walked there or stayed there. If my mother and dad had to go someplace we stayed there at the mission.

Did you ever get in trouble in school?

No, not really. I could have killed a Sister one time, she cut my hair. See I had that long hair and ever since that my hair has been dead. You know. It doesn't grow much see look at this it's like a spider web. [laugh] I was standing by the door and she cut my hair, standing there, oh she was a mean devil. Her name was Sister Mary.

What did she do it for?

I don't know. Well she was looking after the girls, like. And she was very mean, you couldn't even look out of the yard. We were all fenced in.

What do think school was like back then, compared to now?

I think it was better. At least they knew how to write decently. Today they don't. They got such funny writing, the kids in school. And look at her there (points to Heidi) we weren't allowed to write that like that. We had to move our hands this way (using the whole hand and wrist to move across the page) not this way (using your fingers to write). [laugh] We had to learn how to write, you know. Back and forth and then circles, circles. And if that teacher came along and saw you like this (writing with your fingers). You got it on the knuckle. Even my daughter and some others who went to school after me. The Sisters were still there and they got beautiful handwriting. But now... horrible.

You should never see mine then.

Here's my daughter's writing (shows a greeting card). All her schoolmates all write the same.

So did they give you lots of work, lots of homework when you were in school?

We did it all there. We had to take lunch in a three pound pail. You know you used to buy lard in three pound pails years ago. I guess you don't, and we took our lunch in there, sometimes it was frozen by the time we got to school.

Did you get to play at school?

Oh yeah, we had recess. Same as here. We played ball and basketball and stuff.

When did you leave home?

I left home when I was nineteen. I went out working. At the time it was housework. Then I worked in the field. I drive hoses, hauling grain and stuff like that. And then finally I started cooking, as a helper. Then after I got married I was a full-time cook help.

How much did you get paid for that?

The first cooking job I had on the road was ten dollars a day. Finally it was ten dollars an hour. [laugh]

Did you like cooking?

Yeah. Now I can't even cook for myself. [laugh] I hate cooking just for one. I'm so used to cooking big amounts.

How old were you when the Depression began?

Ohh. See we got married in 1935. That was during the 'Hungry Thirties'. So I don't know.

Well you were born in 1915, I guess you would have been, when the stock market crashed you would have been close to fifteen.

Around that, something like that. But we didn't feel it. Mother and Dad they never felt it. Then when we got married, during 1935 eh. We didn't feel it either. We worked. Whatever, like I picked berries and canned. Whatever I had leftover I traded with farmer ladies for soap or thread or whatever. They did the same you know. Cream or eggs. Butter was only five cents a pound. [laugh] Sugar was the hardest thing to get. You had to have coupons to get sugar. But then with the kids, their coupons and ours, it made out okay for canning.

What were you doing during the wartime?

I worked in the fishing camp. I had two kids, a boy and a girl and we moved to Canyon Creek. And I worked there in a fish camp. You know, a fish factory. I was candling fish to see if they were wormy. You x-rayed them. There was no men eh. There was one man so we used to go out on the lake and fetch the nets and bring them out. They, we were fishing herring. There used to be a big pile like that (points to an imaginary pile of fish seven feet high) of fish. And different women would take one end and spread the net out and the fish fall out. And we'd pack all that. Another girl in the back hauled the fish and put it on the train at three o'clock in the morning. We used to pack, imagine just to think back how strong I was. We used to have a hundred pound boxes and we'd stack them six boxes high, we'd just throw them. And then when we were loading them on the train we'd just stand on the back of the truck and throw them on the boxcar. Two of us. But ah, that was life. I liked it. [laugh] And we'd stay there in Canyon Creek, my husband was discharged, he couldn't get in the army. So he come down towards Edmonton to come and work on the farm. Him and another guy.

Canyon Creek, Is that just out of Grouard?

Well, not right out of Grouard, I'd say it's along the Slave Lake, on the south side.

How long did you stay there?

We stayed there all summer and then we were back, like the next summer. Every year we used to go there and work. We worked for this W.R. Menzies Fishing Company and they used to take us from lake to lake to fish, you see. Other than that we never went to any other town. We tried to move here once but he didn't like it so we moved back.

So, when you were little did you want to get married?

No. I never wanted to get married. I don't why I did. I was forced more or less.

When did you meet him?

Well I knew him as a kid, we all grew up together. We got married February, the twenty-third, 1935, in Grouard. With a team of horses and a sleigh, bells, [laugh] horses. Horses all decorated, and it was snowing. And they had a dance in a hall, there was a hall.

Is that the best memory you have of that day?

That's it, the rest was no good. [laugh]

How many children did you have all together?

I had six births. But one was born, he only lived thirty hours. And the little girl I lost was ten months old. And then the four lived. Now I had, I had, I lost one I only got three living. That's one of them there (points to picture on the wall of her daughter Lucienne).

When were they born? Do you remember the years?

Well Sister was born... hmm, she is sixty. Buddy is sixty-one, so I don't know I don't remember the year. [laugh]. And a uh, the baby is fifty-five I guess.

How did you decide on their names?

Well, I don't know. I didn't. Uh, friends did, you know. Her name is Lucienne. And then there's Ralph. Ralph Henry Francis. And then Fern Francis. That's the baby. That's the one that her girl passed away not too long ago. Mrs. Hale. You heard about it. That's the only child she has.

What was it like raising kids back then?

It was all right. I wouldn't say it was hard because uh, my sister-in-law was a great seamstress. All my kids were always well dressed. We'd made clothed over. Out of men's pants, like see, they're always good at the back. And here (pointing to front shins area), and make little pants out of them and shirts, little shirts, out of the sleeves. Whatever, wherever it's good, not worn out that the men can't wear anymore. And socks, I used to make socks

from old socks. There's a pattern that you can put a foot on it. My kids were always well dressed. Washed quite often, but you know they were always clean. And I have one sickly girl, her (points to the picture of Lucienne on the wall), she just about died when she was little. And the nurse used to have come every day, and I had to have clean sheets, so I had to wash sometimes twice a day. And hang them outside in the summer. To dry them quick so's they can be changed. They have to be changed three or four times a day.

What did you do in the winter with your laundry?

Well I hung them outside and let them freeze. And then I'd bring them in see, once they're frozen they dry up quick eh. Hang them in a different room. Just fold them up and hang them. With a light there someplace. Just hang them up. You had to know how to make a living them days. My kids were always well fed.

Did you have any special dreams for your kids, or things you wanted to see them do?

Yes. In a way I did. (pointing to Lucienne's picture), I had big plans for her, but she turned around and got married. The baby well, she more or less done it all herself. She went to college and part of university and... she's very smart. I'll say it, it's not because my girl, but everybody says she's smart. She's smart up here. She works for the Social Services. But she travels. She's comes as far as Jasper. Different places. And all kinds of Government jobs. She used to live here, years ago. She moved back to Edmonton. She was Mrs. Lannagan. When she lived here. She is Mrs. Welsh now.

Did you do a lot together as a family?

We did. We got along very well. Once in a while I'd give a licking. But, if you have to sneak out to go play ball. [laugh]

Your kids, do they speak Cree?

No. [laugh] None of them did. But then after she got married (pointing to Lucienne's picture), she learned how to talk Cree. This one. She couldn't talk Cree at all. And then my son lives here. He tries, but he jumbles everything up mostly. [laugh] And then this uh, the youngest girl had to go to Cree school in order to get the job she had before this one. Because I asked her I said, "How the heck do you manage with them Indians? You can't talk Cree." I said, "How do you make out?" Oh, she said, "Mom I make out," she says, "I make out, I make signs and I touch something." You know what she means. And then with these old people, like you know, she couldn't talk. And then she went to Cree school, it's not really my fault that they couldn't talk Cree. But you know we just talk English, all of us.

Did you do any other jobs, or did you cook all the way through, when your kids were young?

Yeah I cooked most of the time. And then after all the kids were gone I worked at the school as a dean. [At the vocational school in Grouard]. And I worked at the dormitory and I looked after the kids, not kids they're grownups. What do you call them schools, you know seventeen and up? They're trying to catch up on their grades.

Like continuing education?

Yes, something like that. I worked there for, I was sixty-seven when I quit. I was still working. I shouldn't have quit, really, right away. But I got mad at the boss and I quit. [laugh] He figured I should have quit when I was sixty-five. And then I seen the Government man come over, well I went and seen him and I asked him about this Canada Pension deal eh. And he said, "Yes you can get the Canada Pension providing you contribute to it." But, he said, "You can keep on working as long as you want." So I just kept on working. And then he hired another girl over my head. So I didn't like it. So I just walked out. I didn't even show her what to do, what she was supposed to do, I was supposed to and I didn't. I come out of the dining room and she was sitting there. And I knew she was looking for a job. And I said, "Well" I said, "did you find a job?" She said, "Yeah." "Where did you find it?" I said. She said "Right here." She said, "You're supposed to show me how to, what to do." "Oh, is that so." I said. I picked up books, my coat, my cigarettes and away I went. Just walked right out, and then I went to the office later and told them I quit. And then they came back and hired me. She was only there for a week, she was fired. [laugh] So they come back and hire me and I wouldn't go, I went one day and that was it.

When were you the happiest?

I don't think I was ever happy. [laugh] When I play Bingo if I win! [laugh]

Do you have any advice to give to your grandchildren?

Well, not really. I used to tell some of them, but, they don't listen. [laugh] I always tell them they are so extravagant. If you had to go through my life you wouldn't be so extravagant, you'd know how to plant a potato. [laugh] One of them does. The great-granddaughter. This one here that passes away, she worked at the Ron Brent school. Yeah. Her name was Georgette, you must know her. And she was with the union, CUPE. She was great loss, she has three kids. Her husband's working for the town.

Once the supply plane got lost. Dad went and he told Tom Lamb that we were out of food eh. And Tom Lamb sent in the food and the pilot was just a young pilot, maybe one Lamb's sons that was driving it. He couldn't find a place so turned around and come back. Dad said they have to have something over there, we haven't got anything. We don't even have a light, Mom had to keep the fires burning in the stove to get the light. And the flour bin it was emptied right out. So Mom went out in the lake and she had to take us all out there. And she made a hole, I guess she seen Dad do it so many times. And she put a stick or a block of wood just the size of a wood stove and she put it in the end of the rope... she'd put the net into that hole and she'd pull it right through and put it right into the water. Set it all by herself. And that's what we were doing. And she was catching fish for us to eat, no salt nothing. Just plain fish boiled, boiled, boiled. So they finally found us but at least she made us alive.

Antonia (Anne) Brommeland

Interviewed by Sara Geirholm and Amanda Smashnuk in Prince George BC, on March 10, 1997.

I was born in The Pas region, at Young's Point, in 1927. I was born in Grandma's place. She delivered us all. It was a cabin like, but we had our own place. We lived there off and on because Dad was a trapper eh. He used to take us with him, up north like, north of The Pas, towards Sherridon that way. Sometimes if he had to, he left us behind, all everybody behind. He went by himself. So he didn't want to take the family eh, but he always got us kept us together.

It's up way out in the bush. We'd hit that place and then go from there and trap around. That's, yeah well that's as far as we'd go, and then we'd go by plane sometimes from The Pas to his trap lines eh. Now they have all that highway right through. Yeah. That Tom Lambs' airline is still there. We used to have just a little plane eh and we'd all sit on the floor of the plane. That was in the winter. Then in the spring then the plane would come and pick us up, Mom and them, and Dad would stay on for muskrat trap.

A supply plane would come in and bring the supplies and Dad would build a tree house like way up so the animals wouldn't eat our stuff. So the bears don't get it. And he'd buy everything in bulk like flour, bag of flour, bag of bag of sugar, dried apples, boxes of dried apples, stuff like uh, that doesn't spoil. We'd stay in a cabin. Mom and Dad would build it. They'd build it and then they'd put little bunks, like for us to sleep in. The mattresses was hay, straw filled into a sack. And that was our bedding. There was a wood stove. But they never let us make fires. I don't know why we couldn't ever start a fire in the morning, they'd have to do it. And the lamps were uh... Mom used to make coils, like or ah rags and braid the rag like, braid it real fine. That's what she'd use for a wick and she'd have a pan like and she'd put that wick round and round on it and just put it to the top. She'd use tallow, that's uh animal fat.

We'd get rabbits, rabbits in stew and soup and everything out of it. I used to go out and shoot or snare them. And a lot of times I used to get up in the night and it'd be just like daylight eh and I'd go out and everybody'd be sleeping and look around and everybody sleeping. I'd put my clothes on and go gather my snares and bring my rabbits back and some of them would be up and some would be still sleeping. [laugh] This would be in the middle of the night because of the full moon eh. And it was just daylight to me.

I was nearly the oldest one. Helena was the oldest one and then myself that used to go trapping and then Margaret, and then Florence, Rachel's the baby. That'd be in the thirties anyway. I didn't start school. We didn't come out of the bush until I was eleven years old when I started school and I couldn't talk English. I had to learn.

You had lots of family in Young's Point?

Yeah a lot of them. That's where Grandpa and Grandma was from. They had reserve land there for ninety years lease. And Grandpa used to go in the bush. He was a medicine man and I used to go help him look for herbs. And he'd have all the names for them eh, everything he picked would put down the name of it and what it's for, in his own language like in Cree eh. Write in Cree, and mark them. But he never told me about them like I never learned, I wish I could of now. I know a little bit of them like uh wild ginger and stuff like that, what you can use it for. I wish I would have learned, if I would have known better, but I didn't. They used to get store brown paper you know the rolls of store paper. And he'd cut those all into squares, little squares like that eh, and then he'd fold those this way and that way and this way, and he'd mark them and tie them with store string, and that was his medicine. [laugh] His prescription.

I remember him in a newspaper, it was a brown newspaper and doctors had given up on this guy that, I didn't know what he had ulcers or something, and they had given up on him and they sent him to Grandpa and he cured him.

The community that you lived in (Young's Point), was it a Métis community or an Indian community?

Cree and Métis. It'd be Métis because both my uncle and my dad were white. Dad was Dutch and my uncle was Belgian. They married the sisters. They came over together from Belgium and Holland. They came on the ship.

So there were a lot of like European people living in Young's Point at the time?

I wouldn't know because I didn't pay that much attention. I would just go and visit my auntie and go visit my uncle or my grandma and grandpa and different ones. But our cousins were all next to us, you know, just a walk away from us. We used to spend a lot of time there. They had a farm, so we used to hang around there for butter milk. [laugh] Rachel Ducharme. They were related back like my grandpa's side. My mother's side was Rachel Ducharme's father's that's be her uncle I guess it would be my grandpa. And they used to treat us so much they used to make bowls of jello with different patterns on them and everytime we used

to go down there she'd give us these treats. And make cookies and stuff like that.

We had our little garden our potatoes and stuff Mom always put one up. We helped. We all did, had nothing else to do. Couldn't play in the bush all day.

At Christmastime Mom used to pack us all up and go from house to house we'd go visit all the whole neighbourhood. Good, it was good. I don't know how many, what the population was. Time went fast once we got away from the bush and started going on your own eh?

I know it was '42 when Dad joined that army and Mom left us for the first time to go see him in Camp Shallow near Winnipeg. And that's the first time he left us and he was gone over for five years. We moved to The Pas. I was thirteen when I started working in a café in Exchange Café when Dad joined the army. So I only had a chance from eleven years old to thirteen, only three years of schooling. I went to grade four though.

So what do you think was the best thing about living in Young's Point?

The family I guess eh. The family togetherness. That was good. Everybody took care of each other. One year Mom said Dad was late coming back from the trap lines so she said I guess we're not going to have no Christmas this year. There's not going to be no Santa Claus. We said Santa Claus and we seen candies and treats and then she used to make us a dress each for Christmas present and uh she went out here sure enough my neighbour Rachel Ducharme had come down and she had a bag full of stuff sitting there on the at the door. So she come back and she said oh yeah I thought I heard something up there last night. That's what it was, Santa Claus had come. [laugh] Oranges and cakes and cookies and all kinds of things in the bag. That was our Christmas.

Did you ever get really sick when you were young?

Yeah we had the measles that all of us were sick with. I think that's what left me with deafness. After we started school was when we started getting the mumps and stuff like that.

Did you go to the doctor and stuff?

No, Mom had medicine there that Grandpa had given her.

What do you think was the worst thing about living there?

Nothing. Our family was together until Dad joined the army. Before Dad joined the army we were in Sherridon. We went to Sherridon and then we came back and lived in The Pas. I know we went to Sherridon and Dad got a job in the mines in Sherridon, Sherridon Gordon Mines. Then we moved back to The Pas, that's when he joined the army. We left Young's Point 'cause, well my grandpa and everybody was gone. When they died. And then we had to go to school.

We had to go to school after my dad joined the army and we had to go to school. They put us all in one room though. All five of us. Helena was the oldest and they put all the

desks in a line. Helena behind me, Margaret, Florence and Rachel the baby was at the front and she was only five years old but they took her anyway. It was a German teacher who told Dad it was a shame to separate them eh. "I'll take her" she said. She taught her too.

I never got into trouble. I never talked back. [laugh] I didn't like it, [laugh] I wanted to go back trapping. Oh well we learned a little bit, not too much. Mickey and Florence is the ones that done good. With me, I felt foolish when I was fourteen and in grade four so I went to work as a waitress and I worked there for seven years in one place. I was a dishwasher, that's what I was, in the Exchange Café. One day this girl never showed up and they put me into the front and gave me a uniform and put me into the front. That's how it started. In The Pas, the Exchange Café. After Dad came back I just kept on working. Five years he was away.

What was your mom doing during that time?

Babysitting us. Still Rachel was young enough that she had to be home.

Did you have family and friends when you were in The Pas?

Lots of them. They used to come to Mom's house a lot bring their kids with them visiting. Or got us girls to babysit with them, most of them.

Just after Dad joined the army I used to go stay with Grandma a lot. Grandma and Grandpa eh, stay with them over night. She used to have to cut her kindling in the evening and I used to want to help her. One night it was getting dark, she stayed too long I guess at Mom's. We went down just below the hills where their cabin was and it was getting dark and I wanted to help her. She said OK and she gave me this piece of willow and laid it on the step of the shed and I hit it and oh my goodness it slammed right on my head. And next thing I remember, washing my face with cold water and she was scared to take me back because Mom would get mad at her for letting me chop wood. [laugh]

Sherridon was a new town site where they had new houses built. There was quite a few houses that was going up, just starting up eh. So I lived up there but I don't know for how many years though. Because when I was travelling with my dad to start with when he was trapping I was only nine years old. Three years I guess it would be in Sherridon.

What do you think was the best thing about living in Sherridon?

I guess the schooling was good. I used to babysit then too. Like a lady would come and get me and she had a little baby. She put it to sleep when she had to go someplace and she would come get me to go stay there. The baby cries and you give it a bottle. Everything is OK. A lot of children that we know from The Pas went to school there too. And there were ah, they're all gone now, they're all passed away, all older than me. I'll be seventy in August.

Did you have a favourite teacher?

Yeah that German teacher that put us all in together. She taught my youngest sister and she was only five years old and they're not supposed to take her until she's six. Our teacher used to come out and play with us you know. All kinds of games she used to play with us. She wouldn't let us be alone.

We had to be quiet. Couldn't chew gum in school. And you can't answer for the other ones. Like if we had words like teacher would write words on the board and she'd say which one to say it. And my oldest sister she's really shy gosh her face would be just red all the time because she knew what to say but she'd just say it wrong and I'd say it for her. And everytime I got into trouble. Answering for her eh, telling her.

Would you play after school as well?

No, we were supposed to go home. I had chores to do. Putting wood down the basement. Piling it up.

Did you get any awards when you were at school?

No. My sisters did though. They were younger than I was. Certificates and stuff like that.

How was it being Métis in Sherridon compared to Young's Point compared to The Pas?

I don't know, it was no different. Just when we start school they call us Indians, and try to push us around and things like that. Florence will tell you about that when you get a hold of her, she would just pound 'em. [laugh]

The only place I found difference was in BC. The only place I went because the Natives here have no use for Crees. And then I asked one time I said "What's a matter? Why don't you like the Crees?" "Oh, they come over", he said, "come over in the boats", he said, "and they come and steal our women." "You're not man enough to hold your own women?" [laugh] "Yeah they come over and stole our women, Manitobans." [laugh]

When I was homemaking in Ontario I was a Mulligan, and I lost my husband there and then I got married in BC. Yeah I was a Mulligan, my children are Mulligans (Mervin and Debbie).

What year were you married?

In '52, in Bourdeau, Ontario that's near Perry Sound and Huntsville Ontario. I came from Manitoba to Ontario, and that's where I met Mulligan. When my dad came back from the army, he took Margaret and Florence, and he left behind me and my youngest sister with Mom and he moved to Toronto. So I went down there to visit and met up. Always travel by myself. If you want to get anywhere always have to travel alone. Stayed with Dad on the farm. He had a little chicken farm. I was nineteen.

Did you have a good memory from your wedding day?

No not really. I wanted to go back home to The Pas. That's where I was born. That's where all my family was except my two sisters.

Where did you meet your second husband?

In Willow River, in '73. He died with a heart attack. I had my open heart surgery in '81 and seven months after he died of a heart attack. I'll never get married again, they all die on me. I'm trying to make up my mind with J. here. He kept telling me it's leap year now it's leap year. Now it's gone and I have four years to wait.

When your dad was away at war what did you and your family do?

I was a waitress. All of us I think was waitresses. My oldest sister Mary, and Helena, myself, and Mickey and Florence. We were all in the cafes, different ones though, not all in one café. We all worked. I only made seven dollars a week so I didn't get very much. Buy myself a pair of nylons and give the rest to my mom. Then it was big money besides your tips. My in-law Mulligan, she said she went and worked on a farm and she went and stayed with this women. She pretends she was sick I don't know. But anyway she had to do the cooking and the chores everything. Milk cows, clean the barn, feed the stock, everything, for what did she say, four dollars a month?

I made lots of tips. But never save it. Go to the show take the kids to the show and bring them things. Like Mickey and Rickey and Florence were still at home eh so I used to bring them chocolate bars. Me I just got sick of them when I had to sell so many chocolate bars. When I moved to Ontario, I worked in a hotel as a waitress in a dining room. And it was just like shift work eh, like you start in the morning and you serve your breakfast and then you get off two hours and then you go for and serve dinner or lunch or whatever and you have the afternoon off. That's where I learned to crochet and knit. They gave us a room upstairs for the waitress to rest up and the kitchen help. And you get one day off on the weekend eh. This was in Berks Falls.

My dad was in... Wawa Ontario. We all went there for Christmas one time. And he worked in a mine there too for awhile as a guard. Tried to farm but you can' get nothing' out of it anyway.

I got lonesome, after all that was my companion in the bush, travelling with him. One day we went 35 miles. We went like we had a tent set up from where the family was. A tent set up bout half ways to the end of his trap line. Then we'd go that far and then in the morning he said OK you walked enough, just trap around here, shoot a couple of squirrels and some rabbits, cook them if you like. Still he didn't like me to make a fire when I was alone. And that's what I used to do, sit in a tent and skin my squirrels and stretch them.

Who taught you how to do all that?

My dad did. But anything big like fox and stuff like that was valuable fur and you can't touch that. Beaver. My dad skinned those ones. Yeah so we didn't spoil them. And he used to tell me he'd learn me how to shoot. He made me a pair of snowshoes. I don't think they were that long the shoes he made me. He used to make his own and he got me to stand that up on a stone like a crest and put your .22 in between where the foot part is where the opening is for the snowshoe and rest your gun on that and aim for something whatever you're going to shoot at. And I'd do that and gosh I used to hit squirrels right in the eye. And he learned me how but I couldn't waste ammunition because everything cost money. [laugh] Just take your time and don't rush this. Just put your mind what you gonna do. Don't go and do it and just run up and try to hit them and spoil your pelt, be no good then.

But this one day we came home to our tent and it as getting pretty late and there was a note inside the tent. It was our neighbour, his partner who was a trapper too, had left a note told him he wanted to see him and to come down. But he didn't realize we were going to be that late coming home or coming there. So Dad said "You think we can make it? We'll go down the creek." he said. He put on his Dutch skates you know you tied them on just like pop skates but it only got the one plate on it. Dutch ones and it turn up to the front. And he put them on and he put me in the sleigh and away we went down that creek. It was nice and smooth eh. And when we got there I was tired oh gosh, and when our neighbour came out he said "oh John" he said "I didn't want you to come all that way in just one day. Look at poor Tonia she's passed out she's so tired." He grabbed me and took me in and put me in his bed. I don't remember anything about it. He had a letter or something he wanted to tell him or something he wanted him to read.

I don't know life was pretty easy for me anyway. We never had hard times as long as we were in the bush. Always could shoot a rabbit or a chicken, could snare one of those ptarmigans. Get a wire and run up to the tree where they're all feasting and grab them by the neck and you got something to eat. We used to do that in Sherridon. The crust would be as hard as this board you could run on top of the snow grab one of those ptarmigans.

I don't know, my dad was a good provider. One day he said to Mom do you have enough grub to do you until I get back? Don't know where he was going I guess down to the trap line. And Mom says no I wish we had a moose or something eh before you went back. So Dad said it was getting dark already and he was going to leave early in the morning so he says to me he says lets go down the river the a canoe and see something move and get something. And he had this moose call he made out of birch bark a piece of birch bark. Sure enough a moose came out and he shot it but it was too dark to do anything else with it so he tied it against a bunch of willows like beside the river and left it there until morning. Then he came and skinned it and cut it up and took it home to mother.

Dad used to tell us stories spooky stories and night before bedtime. This guy killed this guy and he was hungry and he cut out his liver. You know stories like that and then through the night you would hear this guy say give me back my liver. And we were all just under the blankets. [laugh] Poor Dad. That's an awful story to tell your kids for a bedtime story.

Did your Father speak Cree?

Perfect Cree. You couldn't stick him with anything, you name this name that and he named everything. He learned through Mom because she could understand English pretty good. But how did they communicate to have ten girls? [laugh]

I know your grandfather was a medicine man but did he do other things as well?

Well they always had a garden that kept them busy. They had to cut their own wood. They had to cut wood for winter. I guess Grandpa trapped when he was younger. I wouldn't remember, I knew him only as an elderly person eh. But he must of when he was younger. He had to make a living for his family. My grandpa was born Red Earth reserve.

Did your grandmother have any other roles besides helping your mother give birth to all those girls?

Yeah but she was with him too. He had those pieces of paper he had to fold and mark them and she knew how to mark them too. She knew what was what. I think people came to her for different things they wanted.

My mom and dad and my uncle and aunt and all the settlers around the place, they used to go, horse and long wagons you know the open ones with the boards on the side? Fill that up with hay on a Saturday night and away they go to that wagon would be just full of them. Up to town up to The Pas. And then Sunday the next day, Sunday they never get up, never get up. So we took that wagon and threw all the hay off of it and we'd make a church out of it. I was going to be a preacher and my cousins said no. Jean said you can't be, you were last month or last weekend. And I come and be a preacher. And she came to me and she just went like that to me and I tripped on that board and I came down and I nearly broke my elbow. Smashed the funny bone.

We were so dumb like you know like we were never told of the fact of life a person should tell all their children. And so we were never told anything. We went and got spring water... we had to go across the highway to get the spring water. So my grandma told us to go and get spring water. OK so all of you, all of you, go. And ah when we come back she said I want some more I got washing to do got some more go get some more. Next time we come there was Rachel. We had a new baby. [laugh] That's why she was chasing us away.

Were your parents strict?

No, but they always taught us never to steal and never to lie and never take anything that don't belong. Well that's like stealing too eh? And honour your mother and father and grandpa and grandma. And we had to go by that and don't swear. [laugh] And in Cree there is no swearing.

Oh really I didn't know that.

I didn't know that neither until I went to visit my dad and he's talking to me in English or in Cree. And I hadn't seen him in at least ten years or more. And I went to visit him and he's telling me these stories in Cree and I'm answering him in English. He says what's a matter with you Tonia he says you forget your language? Don't ever forget that language because that's a sacred language. You can't name God in vain because you have to name him in prayer when your praying. And uh you can't curse, there is no curse words. That's the truth too. Yeah he said don't ever forget that language.

How old were you when the depression began?

I was... we don't even remember too much of that because we were out in the bush eh. People who had nothing in towns but we had everything in the bush. Yeah it was pretty hard for some people but farmers and people in the bush like trappers, they hardly noticed because we had everything we wanted. Come every summer we'd come back and the winter time we'd stay out there.

I was wondering if there were ever hard times?

No. If there was we'd never know about it. Mom would never complain or Dad.

Did they encourage you to do anything?

No. To me I think my mother was a spoken bride. You know like how Indians will do that too. You know you can go to a home like eh? And you see a little girl that and your son's the same age and you can say your daughter when she grows up for my son. Like that they do that to children. But I know a person, one of my cousins, said she was a chosen bride and her husband was so mean to her. She took off from The Pas and came to BC and she still lives in BC. But she had two or three children with him.

Could you tell me a little bit about your house when you were growing up? I guess the one in The Pas.

It was crowded. But to begin with I remember Mom making a broom out of bows. Trees cut the branches off and putting them in a bundle and put a pole through it and she'd straighten the mud, or the floor, like it'd be a dirt floor. We were never told a man and a women's life eh. I didn't know what was going to happen even when Mervin was born. I didn't know where he was going to be from.

Never ask questions. A lot of times when we go to some place like Grandma's they'd put us all in one room and line us up like sardines all lying the same way. Don't move. [laugh] And everybody tries to get the outside to get out. The ones in the middle eh everybody's caught in the middle. The house wasn't really cold. Only once that the supply plane got lost. Dad went and he told Tom Lamb that we were out of food eh. And Tom Lamb sent in the food and the pilot was just a young pilot, maybe one Lamb's sons that was driving it. He couldn't find a place so turned around a come back. Dad said they have to have something over there, we haven't got anything. We don't even have a light Mom had to keep the fires burning in the stove to get the light. And the flour bin it was empty right out. So Mom went out in the lake and she had to take us all out there. And she made a hole I guess she seen Dad do it so many times. And she put a stick or a block of wood just the size of a wood stove and she put it in the end of the rope. And she made a hole in the ice and she put that through there and she followed that as far as it would go. Like the length of a net and she'd stop it there like she'd make a hole in the front of it like. She'd tie it one this side so she could stop it certain places and she'd make a hole and put a rope through and then she'd put the net into that hole and she'd pull it right through and put it right into the water. Set it all by herself. And that's what we were doing. And she was catching fish for us to eat no salt nothing. Just plain fish boiled, boiled, boiled. So they finally found us but at least she made us alive. I wouldn't a never thought of that. I would never thought of putting a stick in the end of a net and pulling it through a hole. And all she had was an ax to chop a hole in the ice with. And that ice gets pretty thick.

Grandpa and Grandma always had a garden. And my aunt and uncle had a big farm next to us so that it was all milk and anything we wanted was coming from there. We used to go to his garden patch and he caught us one night. There was a whole bunch of us and we'd take a spoon, a teaspoon with us and we'd go down to his garden and we'd pull up turnips and we'd scrape the turnips. And oh they taste so good when they're fresh. I guess he watch us all the time and finally he's gonna scare us. So he comes over and he say OK you gonna come to milk a cow now. You gonna come and pitch hay. You gonna do this gonna do that you know your gonna do it all for that turnip. And then he'd laugh... but that was a good life. Always seemed to be happy. There was nothing to be sad about. We were never told of sadness even in church. Mom used to take us to church every Sunday when we were living in The Pas she'd take us to the reserve to the church. And uh, we'd start carrying on eh boy she wouldn't even say a word. She had long fingernails that just give you a pinch and oh. There was no noise after. That's the way she taught us, just pinch you once and that's it. No more fooling around. [laugh] No she never hit us in public but we'd get it when we got home though.

That's the way I brought mine up to. I'd tell Mervin and Debbie OK we're going shopping but I just want to go grocery shopping and don't you ask for anything. But usually my husband would slip a quarter to her and go buy some candies. And she'd run across where she'd know where the candy store was eh. And I used to tell them and don't take anything if you take something I said that's stealing, you don't steal. I said if I can get it for you I said if I have enough money I said I'll get it for you. I'll buy it for you but don't ever take anything and they never did. They never stole.

This is all before I started going to school. And still it's a good place to raise your family. Like with my two boys or my boy and my kids that I kept from children aid I had them all on the farm. We didn't have animals or anything just a farm and old farm with a store and we lived on the store. That's still where my son is. He fixed it up. They grow their own vegetables and stuff but not anything else. I just divided the land in two, for my daughter and my son because Brommeland [second husband] didn't want to live there. We went there twice and I told him, do you think you would ever to live in Ontario? Oh no way he said I want to stay in BC. OK so I told the kids they could have the place, divide it in half though. But my daughter sold her half and Mervin he stayed on the homestead. He's got two boys. They're grown up.

I met Mulligan when I went and visited my dad on the chicken farm. We used to go to dances at Finn Hall and he used to come there too. And he used to be so shy gosh, and he's older than me by about two years. I didn't have Mervin until I was 24. I guess we were married a year. And I lost a baby. When Mervin was four years old, I was so happy, we went to school picnic and I was playing ball and all the sudden I got sick and they had to rush me to the hospital and that's when I lost the baby. I was so happy, only four years apart I though what good timing but... I adopted Debbie I was 34 years old. Debbie's an adopted daughter eh. It doesn't matter I guess she's like my own. She came at seven days old. The lady that was working for adopting children she came to me and said "you want a little girl she's up for adoption." I came home and asked my husband can we have a baby girl? They called her Debbie Anne so I changed her name to Deborah with that H in it. But anyway he said sure why not eh. "OK" I said, I couldn't wait until the next day when we got to take her.

When Mervin got married I said to them there's gonna be an Indian come out of that marriage. And when my first grandson was born they phoned me early in the morning from Ontario to here. "Mom we got a curly headed red head." You see my mother-in-law was a red head. When the second grandson was born, he phones me "Mommy you were right he's got black hair and black eyes."

So anyway, oh I don't know, life was good to me. I had lots of fun especially when I got that bunch, that first bunch they sent me, it was five in one family. Ages eight months old, and Marie was two years old, Linda was five, Laura was twelve, and Michael was thirteen I guess he would be. Five of them in one family and we had them for eleven months. We had to put a one of those plywood and make a table out of it and make benches. Gosh my own made six. But I think that was the happiest time having those bunch of children. Playing hop-scotch and things play ball with them and take them swimming.

So why did you decide to get all these foster children?

I was after them for five years but our house was too small I think. So this couple moved out from three miles out to the main highway, they told us they were moving. She was my good friend eh, and she told us they were going to sell so she said if you want to buy they were going to sell. And we just bought a new truck eh and I said trade it in. OK so he asked would you take a truck for a down payment? Sure he said and away we went and I rode right away to Perry Sound to tell them we had a bigger place. And right away about a week after we got these five. My mother-in-law she come out and she said my goodness your just like a kid out

there jumping around. I said Grandma I'm getting so tired, and she said what about me I had eight of 'em. I said yeah but Grandma you didn't have them all at once. [laugh] And I got mine all at once.

And I used to get them to play outside but don't go near the highway. OK and away they went. Even the baby, they took the baby out with them. Oh no maybe I took the baby upstairs to make the beds. And I looked out the window by golly they were all sitting made a circle on the highway. This is paved highway eh. And they're playing ball throwing the ball at each other like and oh I grabbed my baby and run out, "get back I told you not to play in the highway." Gosh that was the happiest time of my life with a lot of kids around. I went right along with them just like a kid myself. I played with them all the time. When I didn't have the foster children Mervin used to get me to go out and hit the ball and he'd catch the ball and I'd bat the ball. Sometimes he'd fool me and say come on Mom just a few and still I'd be out there in two hours.

So when did you leave from Ontario?

Twenty-five years since I came here. I moved here '69. When my brother-in-law got hurt, Mickey's husband. When a tree fell on him fighting fire and he never got over it too. Like I used to write to him every week when I was in Ontario and he passed, and Mickey, I stayed with her. So it was a year after he passed away that I stayed with her. I lived with her a lot lived with together. Then my other sister came along, Florence, and she stayed on too. Mickey, she phoned me last night all the way down in Kitimat. She's a traveller. I know this is my last stopping place.

When you moved from Ontario was your husband still alive?

No. He died with cancer. I foreseen it too, we had an outside washroom and there was blood... He was everything I think in this world. After I worked a front end loader on a potato farm. Mervin, my son Mervin and I, worked on a potato farm. I think I was forty-eight maybe forty-nine when he passed away. When my brother-in-law got hurt I came here. I stayed in Willow River that's just up going to Giscome. That's where Mickey was and then we moved to Willow River to Prince George. Debbie came, after her dad died I went and got her, and Mervin stayed on the farm. His girlfriend and him were really ready to settle down.

So what is it like now that you're involved with the Métis community?

We get a lot of teaching and you learn a lot of things because when I came here from Ontario the Natives didn't like our nationality or our tribe, whatever you call it like Crees eh, they didn't like them. I can't see where the Métis come in, I guess because they're Crees. Crees and White and that's what I am.

So is it different to be Métis in Prince George compared Ontario and Manitoba?

There was no difference I ever thought. I didn't even think there was a difference when I was living in Ontario and Manitoba. But until I came here, this is where it all came from. There's

no Métis. I thought an Indian was an Indian that's all I believed in and there was nothing else different and yet I never thought of my dad he was white. You know I never even though there was such a thing as a, well half breed. I hear half breed after I grew up. But now it's Métis in my late years.

What do you think is the best thing about living here?

I don't know. The mountains and the people are pretty friendly around here too.

How is it to be Métis in Prince George?

It's good. I'm learning more here than I did in any other place. Just because I've been in seniors gatherings and all that. And then the main woman that runs the Métis women? She came and spoke in our last meeting and gosh she nearly make you cry. She explained everything, you know, how people are treated and stuff like that. Like people you know putting you down. When we were going to school. But after I got away on my own I was OK.

What do you think was the most important thing or the most important things that happened to you before you were 21?

Having my dad come back from overseas. I don't know, I missed him so much even though I was busy.

What were you most proud of that you did before you were 21?

I don't know. My dad used to brag about me trapping.

Of all the places that you lived because you lived quite a few places, what would you say was your favourite?

Bush. It was quiet.

Your grandparents. What types of things were they proud of in their life?

I don't know. My grandpa was a medicine man so he was busy with that. And Grandma she stayed home. She had that garden.

Did you have dreams for your children when they were growing up?

No. I just told them that when they got old enough to leave home I didn't own them anything and they didn't owe me nothing for them to go. I mean my son didn't want to go to university but I made him go. He said he got no money. We'll go working on a farm, him and I, we'll work on a farm. And I asked my boss if he'll give me 50 dollars advance so Mervin can go to college? And he said "oh I thought maybe you'd adopt him out." Adopt him out I say you'd have to go take the old lady too. And anyway he gave me the 50 dollars and Mervin said I can't pay you back right away Mom. I said that's OK, go ahead take it and someday you will. He had one of those typewriters, a portable typewriter, and he gave me that to keep until he

paid me back. Now the kid, his son, got it.

Do you have advice that you'd give to your grandchildren right now? If you could tell them something that they'd hear and listen to what would you say?

I don't know if they would or not. Nobody listens to anybody anymore. That's their lives.

What person most influenced you in your life?

My dad I guess. Before he joined the army, everywhere he went I wanted to go too. We never had no brothers so I guess when I travel in the bush with my dad, he called me his son. At least that's what I used to think. All girls ten girls. His side was boys and girls, Mom's side was boys and girls, but we were all girls. I used to wish I had a brother when I was a teenager so he could tell us what to do and give us heck.

Life to me was good to me. A lot of people say oh if I could live my life over again... What would they do? Same thing as they did before. I had a girl friend when I worked at Sunridge in Ontario. They wanted a waitress at the bus stop and they had snacks where people come in and have snacks. And I met up with this woman or girl and she had two children, a baby and an older one. And she used to invite me to come and see her. And I used to go and visit her and that's what she used to say. If you had your life to live over again would you live over again? No Betty I says, I'd do the same thing anyway. She'd say you know your right. She'd say I wish could live my life over again I wouldn't do this or that. No I said, once you live that's it.

... I was about two years old when my dad moved to Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. Yeah and wherever we lived for a while here and there and then a couple of years or so and then he took a homestead about twelve miles out of town and he built a log house. The hay was so high. He just moved the family there and by fall he had the wall up and plastered it with mud. That was our home. He built more and more every year and made bedrooms. And he started farming. In the evening they used to go and brush. It was just brush that they took out. Start brushing at the same and burning the brush. I remember we were just little kids and we'd go and pick up the brush, the willows, the bush just thrown aside. The following summer already there was a garden and a little bit of a field there. He really started from right from scratch. Start having chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks all those things. Oh, there were hard times but us kids didn't know it was the hard times because we had everything on the farm. Dad had everything. And every year of course the farm and the fields were getting bigger. And finally, I was about fifteen years old I guess, when I started working out. Every now and then. I wasn't away from home all the time but whenever somebody needed someone, you know a girl or whatever, I would go to work. That's when I was working for twelve dollars a month. Hard work. Milking cows and everything and I made twelve dollars doing that (Georgina Collins).

Bill Regan and Georgina Collins

Interviewed by Joanne Burrows and Joanne Enders in Prince George BC, on April 4, 1997.

Bill Regan was born July the 11th, 1921, and lived in Green Lake Saskatchewan until 1941 when he joined the army.

So, Green Lake, is that a village?

Bill: Yeah, just a village, it's one of the oldest ones in Saskatchewan. It's up north. Older than Meadow Lake. My dad was the first telegraph operator up there. Regan, he's from California. But he had a stroke so I had to quit school about grade five I think, I looked after my old man. Until they sent him to Moose Jaw old folks home, that's where he died eh. That's when I joined the army, after he went to Moose Jaw. So I went to grade five and that was it, eh. I don't remember my mother. She died when I was just small. When I was a kid my grandmother raised me. She was from Lake Liberty. That's years ago. Yeah, she's the one that raised me.

Half-French and half-Cree, the language we learned, mixed. My grandmother's the only one I can remember.

Did you have any fond memories of her?

Bill: Oh, she knew how to bake bannock that's one thing. Not much, no. When I first started

staying at Grandma's, she had a few head of cattle or team of horses. That's all I can remember about my grandma.

Did you have other people live with you, when you lived with your grandma?

Bill: No.

She didn't have any other kids?

Bill: Oh yeah, but they were all grown up. She was all alone. Until I came along and stayed with her. She lived in Green Lake. There was just two, two rooms. It was one of them big log houses. You still see an odd one when you travel. That's the way they were built. There was an upstairs. I don't think there are very many left. It was by the lake. I had to haul the water up every day. There were some lovely fish then..

How about a garden?

Bill: Oh yes, always had a garden. Corn, cabbage, turnips and a lot of potatoes. Yeah, oh yes there was a lot, always. Them old timers had always had something like that.

So most of the food that you got was from the land, or did you get it from stores?

Bill: From the stores. She was on pension already when I lived with her... The Hudson Bay, that's where she used to get her [provisions]. You buy a little. They always had potatoes left over for seeding.

So how about meat?

Bill: Meat, somebody used to come to bring some meat.

They went hunting for you?

Bill: For the old lady. A lot of moose. They used to get it, the hunters.

Where did you go to school?

Bill: In Green Lake. That's where I went.

How many people lived in Green Lake?

Bill: There's not very many. There's still not that many there. It's just a small place. I just couldn't tell you how many.

Was it mostly just Native people that were living around there, or was there a mix?

Bill: Breed, mostly breed. Métis. All Métis. Take this with you. This is the history of Green Lake, I think that'll do better than I can.

When did you guys get married?

Bill: We didn't.

Georgina: We didn't get married yet. We're still thinking about it you know.

Bill: That's the Green Lake church, when that goes down maybe we'll get married.

Georgina: It's gonna be 30 years pretty soon. About 29 years now.

Bill: Well 1968 since she's been cooking for me.

Well, I would consider you guys married then.

Georgina: We're still thinking about it. See what would happen if we got married, we'll probably get divorced the next day.

Bill what were your parents' names?

Bill: Oh, my mother was a Bear. She was Treaty Indian from Meadow Lake Reserve. I forget her first name now. Gee, I couldn't remember the first... But I got a sister living in Meadow Lake there, she'd know. Marie Desjarlais - Meadow Lake Reserve. She's the oldest. I got a sister living in Prince Albert. Madeline Laliberte is her name. She was raised in Delmasse. That's just out of Battleford, the convent. You heard of Delmasse, that burned down once eh. The convent there, years ago. Two or three kids burnt there. The worst fire they ever had in a school like that, was out at Beauvalle, 40. 40 kids burned to death there.

Did your sisters live at your grandma's with you?

Bill: No. They were raised separate. They were raised in pretty well that school there at Delmasse.

Bill: I got another half sister, she died, Dora. She was also Laliberte that one. What a mixed up family it is. Edward, my brother, half brother, same mother. He had a heart attack in Saskatoon. He keeled over, he died of heart attack. Gerald Martin Regan, that was my dad's name. But they used to call him Bill too.

And where was he from?

Bill: California. Pasadena. I think his parents came from Ireland, but he was born in the

States, my dad. And my auntie, I had two aunts there in California. Alisha was the oldest. She died too. Her husband died first then she died.

Were your parents religious?

Bill: My dad was a good Catholic. Better than me anyway.

How about your grandma? Was she religious too?

Bill: Oh yes. Lalibertes, they're all religious. Green Lake and that's where they stayed. Build there and stay there and lived there for the rest of their lives there. All the Laliberte's. They were half-French, it's a Métis name.

So this was your mom's parents?

Bill: No. I had a different mother. That's all, that's a mixture there again, you see. My dad married a Laliberte first. She died and then he married a Lafleur, but my mother there, I don't know, she was going with my dad. My mother was a Bear.

Bill: What a mixed up family. How many mothers have I got there? three or four?

You've got three, if you include your grandmother, four. So, whose mom was the grandmother that raised you?

Bill: The one, the first one that died, my dad's first wife. I wasn't short of mothers, that's for sure.

No it doesn't look like it. So who's children were Mary, Dora, and Edward?

Bill: Oh, that's my mom there. Our mother's the same (Bear). Mary, Dora, Madeline and me, the same mother, different dad.

Georgina: Three of those young ones, they had the same dad.

Bill: Laliberte.

Georgina: Edward and Madeline and Dora, they had the same dad.

Bill: Mary Desjarlais here, she's the oldest. And before she was married, Beattie was her name.

So you said that you had three kids with your first wife?

Bill: Yup.

Have you two had any kids?

Bill: No, not yet. 75 and 74.

So what kind of a child were you?

Bill: Oh, I was the best in Green Lake.

Did you have lots of friends?

Bill: Oh yes, still have lots of friends.

Did you like school, when you were in school?

Bill: Oh yes. I liked school.

Did you have any favourite teachers or subjects?

Bill: No, they were all about the same to me anyway.

Was the school far from where you lived?

Bill: Oh, I had to walk, couple miles. Forty below or not. You get used to it, eh. There was no such thing as school buses. I know a family that used to walk three miles, every morning walked to school. The girls just dresses and stockings. That must've... they're tough. You know. Gotta be. Lafleurs, they lived all of three miles from school.

That must have been a long walk some mornings.

Bill: Oh yeah. All that cold. I remember once, in a logging camp, 71 below zero. Just that one morning, -71. Yeah. We couldn't go in the bush to work. - 71, that's cold. You don't see that anymore, you know, it's different. There's that river there too, that makes it... There's a cold place in Prince Albert, the River Street, it was the coldest. Yup, them days are gone. - 71, that was cold.

How was your house heated? Wood?

Bill: Wood, oh yes. Lots of wood. Well, they built log houses, they used to make them pretty warm. They knew how to build log houses, them old-timers. They last a long time, too. Pretty rough life in the 30's, anyway.

Did you have any serious illnesses?

Bill: No, just when I was in the army, I had yellow jaundice. Got the best of me. That was in Sicily, and then I went to the hospital there, and I got psoriasis.

What was the thing that you were the most proud of before 21? Your biggest accomplishment?

Bill: Before I was 21? Holy gosh, that's a tough one. Never done much. Just look after my old man. When I was 21, I joined the army.

And you were excited about joining the army?

Bill: Oh yeah. That was when I was willing to go. I even got four of my partners to come with me. And I was the only one that passed the medical. I was a lonely little bugger.

What was Sicily like?

Bill: Sicily, it was hot. And we didn't do much fighting there. That's the time Mussolini was kinda giving up there. When we landed in Italy, the Italians they just called it quits that day. So there was no fighting when we landed in Reggio there, that's where we were in Italy. But when we got to the Germans, then we started. It was slow going. Lost a lot of good men before that was over.

What did you think you would do when you grew up?

Bill: I had no idea. Could never think of anything. I tried the telegraph for a while there, the old man was paralysed. I wasn't doing too bad. That's all finished now, now it's all phone. No more telegraph.

What was the first job that you ever had?

Bill: Sawmill. Green Lake.

How old were you when you started that?

Bill: That's when I was 20 - 21. And don't forget to put down a dollar a day in boarding myself.

How much did you make?

Bill: Well I tell you what, I didn't make much before I joined the army, I went and drew five dollar advance. Then I joined the army, I still owe that boss about four dollars. He's gone now, so I don't have to worry about that.

What did you do in the mill?

Bill: Slab monkey.

All right, what does that mean?

Bill: You gotta look like a monkey to start with. Burning slabs, that's what they call a slab monkey. But the wages, that's pretty hard to forget. Dollar a day in boarding ourselves.

Georgina: I remember I was working for \$12 a month.

Where did you work?

Georgina: On the farms. Not easy work, I tell you.

No, I can imagine. 12 bucks a month? Was that a lot of money, back then?

Bill: It was wages, that was the going wages.

Georgina: Yeah. I wasn't getting as much as a man would, but then, you know. I was a girl, so...

Bill: I know a guy, at Green Lake there, had three kids, used to go and feed cattle. He was kinda crippled too, but anyways, used to go and feed cattle all winter, \$15 a month. And that's cold days, eh. Hauling hay every day. Feeding cattle. Them days are gone now.

Where did you meet your first wife?

Bill: In Green Lake. She was a little younger than me.

So you sort of grew up together?

Bill: Yeah, well pretty well.

What was it like raising kids back then?

Bill: Good

Yeah... hard too?

Bill: Yeah, oh yeah, hard times. Well I know, I didn't do too bad. I used to work all the time. I worked for the government for three summers, I guess. As a tower man... for the department of Natural Resources and I used to fish, I used to fish at Great Slave Lake, then I worked at the mine. I mined for two years, about 60 miles east of Hay River, Northwest Territories.

So when did you move to the Northwest Territories?

Bill: I went there... when I first went up there to fish was in '54. Well I was there all the time. Come home for a while and back again. My wife was gone then.

Bill: After the army I got married (at Green Lake) in '47. And lost my wife in '53, 1953.

Georgina: His wife, she was Florence Durocher.

Bill: I might as well tell you how she died. They went through the ice, with a car, '53 first of December. Four of them drowned at that time, my mother in law, my sister in law, and my wife, and Alec Melba, four of them drowned at that time. They went through the ice there, they went through the ice at Lacrosse Lake. They hit a crack and so it wasn't solid enough eh. There was five of them. The driver's the only one that came out of it alive. I was in Prince Albert when that happened. Tough news. Then I went to the Territories. Somebody else raised my kids, I didn't.

Who raised them?

Bill: My grandmother or my mother-in-law there. After she died over there, their auntie took over.

So one of the Aunts raised your kids (Alvine and Mary) after that?

Bill: Yeah

What were your dreams for your children? Did you have ideas on what you wanted them to do?

Bill: Well the school was the main thing, eh. They did go to school, but should have went some place else I think. Well they didn't do too bad.

Was it a residential school?

Bill: Yeah... it was.

What are your best family memories?

Bill: There are quite a few. I don't know.

Georgina: Oh, it must be when you got married and then you started having your kids.

Did you go on any trips or anything or?

Bill: No. Never did.

What person was the most influential in your life?

Bill: No, well before I got married my dad was one of the best that I've ever known anyway. He was one of the best dads. Everybody liked my dad.

Did you used to do a lot of stuff with him?

Bill: No. He was always a pretty busy man. When he had holidays he used to go down south.

So you're up in the Northwest territories working in the mines, where did you go after that?

Bill: Well, I was just going to Meadow Lake... I stopped in Hay River, in a bar there, and I heard there's a lady that moved there from Saskatchewan, Meadow Lake, with four kids. I figured that's got to be her [Georgina]. I'll tell you I always wanted to talk to her in Meadow, I used to drink with her husband. I figured that's got to be her. By God, when I figured it was her, I took a cab, it was only one block.

Bill: I knocked on the door, well I guess you... [Georgina]... well you tell them. She was ready to go to bed, I guess.

Georgina: Well that's not my story now, this is yours. I'll tell my own.

Bill: But anyway, I knock on the door, she finally opened it, little boy opened the door, Kenny (he's gone now). "Mom, somebody wants to see you," I guess she recognized my voice and she came "Ah, it's you." "You want any coffee? You here for coffee." "No," I said. "I'm drinking over here. Do you want to come for a beer?" "Ah" she said, then she dressed up. After a few beers, I said "I'm taking the bus at seven tomorrow morning," I said, "is it okay if I stay at your place tonight?" "If you don't mind sleeping with kids," she said.

Oh well. And she kissed me goodnight. After the kiss, she woke me up before seven. "Coffee's made, there's your bus." "Oh, I don't think I'll take the bus today. I don't like to travel on Saturdays."

Georgina: And that's it, he never took that bus. And we end up being together, ever since then in '68. I worked in the hotel there in Hay River for eight years .

Bill: And I used to go fish hauling. And I worked at the warehouse for seven years. NTCL, Northern Transportation Company, loading barges on the Mackenzie River for yarding. Seven years I worked there.

Georgina: And then we came up here. I had a brother at Quesnel.

Bill: So we moved here. We had always heard of Prince George. So we got to like it here.

Georgina: Oh, we've been here ever since about twenty-seven years, twenty years now.

Bill: I phoned the girls here to find a place for us, Alvine and Mary. When we got here they didn't get a place yet. Oh well, I had to start phoning on that day. Well we got a place over here on Gorse Street. A duplex. That's where we were.

Georgina: Just a small little duplex. Well, then we didn't care what it was

Bill: It was just a place to put all our junk. Two days after I heard that neighbour there was a bootlegger. Boy he was handy on Saturdays.

Georgina: And then after we got settled and that, so now we go look for work. So I get a job and he didn't. So I had to work at the Goldcap. So way out there I walked every day here. One or two o'clock after midnight, I'd be going home.

What was Prince George like at that time?

Bill: It was not like now. It's dangerous now.

Georgina: It was more lively though like, you know. You seen more people. People were more friendly. They'd come and visit us. Oh you know, even we're strange people that moved in, but they'd hear about us and...

Bill: We got along good with people

Georgina: And it didn't take long, we picked up a lot of friends. They used to come and visit us.

Was Prince George a lot smaller?

Bill: It's grown up a lot and it's more violent now.

Georgina: Now it is, yeah. Probably that's why people they stay in more now. They're scared to go out there. It's not everyday that we have company. No, not everyday. No not now, but at that time they used to stop for coffee or whatever and a little chit chat.

Bill: We used to go out every Friday night, Saturday night, dancing

Georgina: Ya. Well, we did have a good time. Of course we're older too now obviously but still it's not the same like it was when we first moved here.

Is there a big difference between how being Métis in different places has been? How does Prince George treat you as Métis?

Bill: Oh good

Georgina: No different than any other people, I guess.

Bill: No. The same. The main thing is to get along with people. You know what we got there the other day from her brother. He went to Northwest Territories (Yellowknife)... bear and caribou meat. Ah that's good. We got some here. Did you ever eat that?

Georgina: He brought us a couple of pieces of Caribou meat and a big fish. What kind of fish is that?

Bill: That's a trout, it's one of the big lake trouts up north in Great Slave Lake.

Georgina: We used to go travelling quite a bit after we all quit working.

Bill: We made a lot of miles: Florida, Alberni, Victoria, we've been all over.

Georgina: We did some travelling for a while but now we don't, especially this winter I haven't been able to go anywhere.

So Georgina, you were born in Meadow Lake?

Georgina: No. St. Paul, Alberta. In 1923. But I don't remember nothing there. Apparently I was about two years old when my dad moved to Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. Yeah and wherever we lived for a while here and there and then a couple of years or so and then he took a homestead about twelve miles out of town and he built a log house. The hay was so high. He just moved the family there and by fall he had the wall up and plastered it with mud. That was our home. He built more and more every year and made bedrooms. And he started farming. In the evening they used to go and brush. It was just brush that they took out. Start brushing at the same and burning the brush. I remember we were just little kids and we'd go and pick up the brush, the willows, the brush just thrown aside. The following summer already there was a garden and a little bit of a field there. He really started from right from scratch. Start having chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks all those things. Oh, there were hard times but us kids didn't know it was the hard times because we had everything on the farm. Dad had everything. And every year of course the farm and the fields were getting bigger. And finally, I was about fifteen years old I guess, when I started working out. Every now and then. I wasn't away from home all the time but whenever somebody needed someone, you know a girl or whatever, I would go to work. That's when I was working for twelve dollars a month. Hard work. Milking cows and everything and I made twelve dollars doing that.

I helped my dad a lot on the farm when I had two brothers older than myself. But you know the boys, sixteen or so they want to leave home and so they were gone. I remember I used to sleep in the living room. I had my little bed in the corner like that and that's where I used to sleep and the boys, they had the bedroom. My mom and dad had their bedroom and then the boys and that's where I used to sleep in the corner of the living room. So by that time I was going to be twenty-four when I got married.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Georgina: I have two sisters. And I have seven brothers left, and I lost three. There was, starting the oldest one, but my two oldest brothers, they're gone. There's Johnson, Victor and then after me, there's Michael, Pat, Eddy, Robert, Dave, Raymond, Dennis and Donald.

So where did all your sisters fit into there?

Georgina: Well I'm the third one in the family. My first sister, she's ten years younger than me. And the other one she's fifteen years younger than me. Yvonne Ross, Ross we were before we were married. And the other one, Bertha, she's five years younger than Yvonne.

Okay, so, who has died since? Is it Johnson and Victor?

Georgina: Yeah, my brother Victor got killed in the Hong Kong War. There was two there, over there. Yeah, one's my husband. The other ones my brother. And my brother Johnson he died in '67, I think. Up north in Hay River.

And everybody else is around still?

Georgina: Yes, but scattered here and there though. And the other got killed in, out of Fort St John there. Dennis.

What was your dad's name?

Georgina: Willie Ross. William Ross. My mother was Madeline Laboucan. Anyway, I was only about two years old or so when my dad moved to Meadow Lake and started this farm. My mother she died quite a long time ago, maybe forty some years ago. I don't remember the year. But about forty some years. Forty-six, forty-seven years I think since my mother died. She died of cancer. After they had moved to Hay River. My dad's getting older and he couldn't very well handle the farm any more and the boys as they grew up wanted to leave home. So Dad got rid of the farm and he moved up north. To the Northwest Territories and tried to fish over there. So, there was all the youngest ones yet of the kids still.

What was your husband's name?

Georgina: Alfonse Collins. I don't remember how many years we were married for. Well, I had this one boy before I married him. My oldest one, Stanley. He goes by Ross because I'm a Ross. And then I end up marrying Alfonse and then we had six more kids. Seven with him.

What were their names?

Georgina: Oh, Valerie. That's her mom (pointing to one of the granddaughters in the room) this girl here. The fair one. And Bruce and Ken. I lost that one two years ago. And Brian,

that's that fisherman you see in that picture there. Then Linda after Brian. And then Larry. Most of them they're all fine except Ken. He got killed in Edmonton, car accident.

Do you remember what your first memory of childhood was?

Georgina: That's years ago. When I first start remembering probably I was about four years old or so.

With a family that big, you must have a lot of memories.

Georgina: Oh yeah but you also forget most of them. Probably too many things happen and then, you forget. But I remember after we got to Meadow Lake. And I remember my mother she had put a big garden in. It wasn't very big then but I could just remember all those things. She used to be alone quite a bit. My dad used to go to work, until he got that homestead and started building it. We were a little bigger then. But still every now and then, he still had to go and work. He had to make that money to buy the material for the house.

My grandparents, they lived about mile, a mile and a half away from us. My grandma and grandpa. My dad's dad. And their youngest son lived with them though. My uncle, he died here a month ago. His wife, she's still here. He got married and they lived with his folks. See they were getting old eh. Carbet Ross. That was my grandpa. But I don't know what was my grandma's name, though. I just know that was my grandmother.

Did you see them quite a bit when you were growing up?

Georgina: Well they lived about, something like a mile or a mile and a half away from us, eh, you know out in the country. And then whenever we go there, well we see grandma and grandpa. But she died first and then two years later he died and then later in the year that my uncle moved up here. After the kids were all gone. They had seven kids. After the kids were all gone they moved up here. And he just died here a month ago. At ninety-five years old.

Were your grandparents religious?

Georgina: Oh yeah. My aunties, my dad's sister, she was a nun. So therefore, my grandma and grandpa were religious like you know Catholic.

Your parents too?

Georgina: Ah, well, they wouldn't go to church every Sunday cause we lived twelve miles out of town. And there's no cars them days, you see. Just horses. So. They'd go Easter and they would take mass, that's about it.

Do you remember your mom's parents? Where they ever around?

Georgina: No. I don't know one of my mother's relatives on her side. I don't. Just later in the

years about fifteen, twelve years ago maybe, I met a few of my cousins on my mother's side. Her sister's kids. But also her sister and brother-in-law, they're gone years ago. But like her nephews and nieces, I met about three or four of them.

Where was your mom raised? Where was she from?

Georgina: Around St. Paul I guess there or wherever. My dad was from Duck Lake.

Bill: We were there last summer. We went to Batoche, last summer. It was really nice.

Did your grandparents work in the house? Did they work other jobs outside of the house?

Georgina: Well, since I remember them they were getting pretty old. Oh my grandpa used to put up a garden and he used to get me to go and weed the garden. I was just a little girl eh. And I'm weeding this garden, maybe I was pulling the vegetables too, I don't know. And then he'd be standing there with the catalogue in his hands and what's he's going to order for fall. Well I finished the job and this and that. He'd be looking at the catalogue at what he was going to get me. Maybe I was pulling out the vegetables, though, I don't know. But I wasn't very big, but I was there pulling weeds anyways.

Bill: This church in Green Lake was built in 1903. It's the old church. That's a long time ago. I went to that church a lot.

Was your mom Cree, Georgina?

Georgina: She spoke Cree. They spoke Cree to each other. That's my folks over there. They used to speak Cree to each other and then to us they talk French.

So was this so they could say things about you and you wouldn't know what they were saying?

Georgina: Or they could say things, whatever they wanted to say and think, and that we won't understand. But it didn't take long until we caught on.

So your mom was Cree?

Bill: Laboucan, they were Métis.

Georgina: Laboucan. My mother was a Laboucan. Métis, I guess. They were Métis. And so was my dad. They could speak Cree but like I said they didn't speak Cree to us.

So your dad was a farmer but he went outside sometimes and did outside jobs?

Georgina: Not really after he started going with the farm eh. And you know, he got everything going. But before when he was building the house and all this and that. That's when he used to have to go to work a few days or whatever it took to buy the material to

finish the house. Dad had to buy the lumber and the flooring and all that. And all the window frames.

What kind of jobs did he do to get the money for the farm?

Georgina: I don't know, that was about the only thing there was to do then. There was some farmers, they had been there before, way before us. They were big farmers already and they needed help and whatever. He'd go to work, you know. A few days, whatever it took eh. To make a few dollars and then we had to buy food.

Bill: He used to go north, fishing, in the winter time.

Georgina: We ate so we had to buy food. And he was a fisherman also.

Bill: He used to go up north with horses, way up north, hauling freight.

Were they strict parents?

Georgina: Well. We were not allowed to just go ahead and do things that you not supposed to do or whatever. They were very good parents. Trying to keep us on the right track eh. And there was more of us every year. Mom kept having a baby every year. My youngest brother Donald, his birthday's in June. And my oldest son in October. My youngest brother turned fifty in June. And my son born in October turned fifty.

So what did you like to do as a child?

Georgina: Well, I didn't have much choice at all but work on the farm. That's about it.

Did you have lots of boyfriends?

Georgina: Oh no. I was out on the farm. I was a farm girl. No, I didn't have boyfriends probably until I was eighteen, or seventeen, eighteen or whatever, nineteen.

How did you meet your husband?

Georgina: I was working out. I was working for Amie Senegrette who was his cousin. I'm out on the farm and he used to come there. But I had my little boy with me, see I never left my little boy at home. He was a month old and I start working out again and I took him with me. Never left him at home. And he start coming there and start talking. Next thing I know it was getting serious and he asked me to marry him. So I told him to give me a little more time to think about things. The next time he came I said, "I think I'll accept your proposal." All of a sudden he asked me what I was going to do with my little boy. "Oh," I said "that's another story." I'll never ever give him up for a man. If there is a man that will love me enough to want me, to want to marry me. My little boy would have been included or not at all, I said. Next time he came and said you can keep your little boy. "I'll take him as my own."

But I didn't know how it would turn out. We were married, oh I don't know how many years. We have six kids. But my kids, they're all two years apart. Linda and Larry they're six years apart. And then from Brian to Ken, I think there's three years apart too. And then the other ones they were all two years apart. I don't know how many years we were married but we broke up. It was too much. I used to work out quite a bit until I was about five months pregnant. Trying to feed the kids.

He died about ten, fifteen years ago. He burned to death. Three weeks before Christmas. He was supposed to come out and visit the kids here at that time. Where he was living, caught on fire. He didn't make it to ever come see the kids. Well that girl, the dark one there, that's their granddad, but they never, he never seen those kids. They never seen their real grandpa. He's (Bill), he's grandpa to them.

Did you go to school in Meadow Lake?

Georgina: Me, I never went to school. I have no education whatsoever. And that's why I had to do the hard work when I worked.

Did any of the kids go to school?

Georgina: Oh yeah, my brothers, my sisters. They're all younger than me so.

Did you make a lot of friends, in the village?

Georgina: Oh yeah. After I was married I lived in town. And yes we had a lot of friends. Anyways that's that. Mom and Dad they left the farm. My dad was getting more work and didn't want to farm anymore and they moved to Hay River in the Northwest Territories, thinking that he'd make a living, a go at it over there fishing. But he didn't. They went over there and they got really poor. Didn't make too much for fishing or anything. About three or four years after they were out there my mother died of cancer and then a few years later he died of a heart attack. That was that.

What did you think that you would be when you grew up?

Georgina: I was not ever thinking, because I didn't go to school. Just a regular farm woman, working girl that's about it. Always on a farm, after I was married and we moved into town, then I was getting jobs at the cafes, washing dishes and stuff like that. Or else housework, wash ceilings and walls and all that kind of work, that's the only kind of work that I was doing. Then I finally got a job at the provincial building, government building, cleaning offices, like from 5-9 at night. I had that for four years until I got pregnant with my baby and my boss had to lay me off. There's six years apart with my girl, my youngest girl. I get pregnant and I lost a job then. I got laid off and I was suppose to go back in six months but that didn't happen. I just about died when I had my next. That kinda finished my work then. So then I moved to Hay River but I still used to go to work here and there though. Housework and that, there in

Meadow Lake. Then I moved to Hay River in '68. Then I got a job in a hotel. I had a steady job there.

I had four kids. I moved with four kids. The other three they were gone, on their own. And that's what I took with me. It's kind of a sad story. But anyway, that's all gone past now. I worked out there for eight years, seven years I guess really, I worked. Seven full years. There was one year, I was not feeling well, so, I stayed away from work for a while. So that's just about it. My youngest one he's, he's going to be thirty-three there on the 7th of April. And my daughter, she's thirty. They're six years apart my two youngest ones.

Did you have any dreams for your kids?

Georgina: No. I don't... they live their own way of life, the way they want to live, so it's not much use for me to try and correct them now.

What kind of advice would you give to your grandchildren?

Georgina: No I don't think so. They have their way of life too so that's that. No I don't try to tell them what they should do because I know what I went through. And ah, they would never go through anything like that anyway, like I did.

My dad had a homestead... 160 acres. We had half of it cultivated. I guess close to a 100 acres was cultivated and the rest was a lot of hay meadows. We had cattle, horses. We lived right beside a lake. Good Fish Lake. Swim everyday. A nice place to swim. Good to fish. Jackfish. Pike. You go up there early in the morning or late in the evening and catch fish. Oh, we lived good there. I don't think we seen hungry days. We had cattle and horses, pigs.

Dick Suvee

Interviewed by Andrew Embree and Kristy Andersen in Prince George BC, on March 10, 1997.

I was born 26th of March 1926, my birthday, [laugh] two weeks away. We lived at Good Fish Lake, Alberta. Then I moved to Kikino, Alberta. That was about fifteen miles west from the place I was born, it was a Métis settlement there. I bought a house there on the little property I traded for. We used to do quite a bit of logging: horse logging. I traded a bunch of lumber for this place. I think I was 22 years old that time, when I first bought my own place. Lived there four years.

1953 I moved to BC, to Hansard. Seven years we lived in Hansard. I worked there for Hansard lumber company from July 1st, 1953 until 1958. Then I lost one year and I had my back broken. I was in a body cast for eleven months. I got the papers here. Time slips when I first come here, the wages were a dollar ninety an hour when I first started at the sawmill. That was a lot better than from where I come from. I used to work in Alberta for a farmer at harvest time with my own horses and mine own wagon and rack for three dollars a day, ten, twelve hours [laugh]. These were union outfits. They were all union outfit except for one, A&W logging. My brother used to be bush foreman there, and I went and worked for him for a couple years. There was no work around Alberta them days. I had a brother working at this place, Hansard. He was working there already a couple years before I come. So he told me, if you want to work, he said, come on up: lot of work here, my oldest boy came with me. So I come and I got there on the first of July. I got off the train there and I started work the next day.

Was it a good job?

Well it was... it made money eh... you earned a few dollars. Had four kids already that time. I came ahead of my wife about a month, she came up in August. I had to get a place there to live. There was an old house that we built an addition onto it. The guy burnt to death there I think last summer... we knew that guy pretty good too. He used to work for Hansard.

I used to work for Church sawmills. They had a sawmill on the right here (Willow River). When I quit working for this Hansard lumber, I worked for Church and we moved here. We rented one of his houses here. He had lots of houses here he had a sawmill planer mill here. 14 years after that I bought a house up on the corner over here. Stayed there until I

bought this place. I rented since I moved out here two years. That was the only time I ever rented in my life. [laugh] I always had my own home; it's good to have your own home. At least you don't have to pay rent.

The boy that came with me, Ralph. He got killed. He'd be fifty years old now. He was killed when he was young, (looking at certificate of brave conduct). Him and another guy were hitchhiking from town. And they caught a ride up to near here and they were sitting around on a really hot day. And this lady come running over there crying. Her husband was pumping out the well and the hose didn't go too far to get all the water. So he had to build a little ramp six feet down to the water and naturally, when that tank got full of gas fumes the motor quit and he went down there he thought he was going to start it and he died there. When my son went over there to put a rope around him, he got gassed. That's 20, 30 years, 1968. He was 18 at that time. He'd be about 50, 51. That's the one that came with me from Alberta that time. He was about seven years old then. See, my brother and his wife were there and they wanted him to come stay with them until he started school. He was older than me, my brother Bill was, never had any kids, never did have any kids, died like that. His wife is still living in St. Paul.

Did you have any friends here at that time or were you coming into a brand new area?

I had a friend, he passed away too. Yeah, he used to work with Bill at Hansard. Miles Norris his name was, lived in Edmonton. He died in Edmonton two years ago. His wife still living there, my wife phoned her last night.

When you first came to Prince George, you mentioned, of course for work, what else was happening around here? Of course there wasn't as many people around here.

No, there wouldn't have been people no. Mostly all logging and lumbering. Doing a little bit of mining going on around here that I remember. I pushed a road for a mining outfit just past Upper Fraser there, up in the mountain there. There was a lot of work and there wasn't any people. If you'd just quit your job in the morning you'd have a job for the night shift. [laugh] Yeah there was lots of work, now there's no way.

Your wife, would have she worked too?

No she had to look after the kids. When they started school at upper Fraser and they had to walk to school about three miles. That's how come we moved here, it was too far to go to school. Moved in here in 1960. They had a school right just beside the store there. It was handy for a school there. But anyways I had quite a ways to work. I would come home on the weekends. Drive to work Monday.

We lived in Prince George, only three years. We had a boy that was kind of handicapped little bit and he had to go to special school. So we lived in town for three years school there. Bought a trailer in the trailer court. My wife couldn't stand living there on account, pulp mill stinks so much [laugh], makes you get sick all the time. So I ended up buying this place

here. That is how come to we move back: my wife couldn't stand that smell.

Where are your mom and dad from?

I guess my mother was born in 1899 in Fort MacLeod, Alberta. So she'd be 99 this summer. My father's dad's name was Frank Suvee, (and my dad was named Frank Suvee), he came from the States, Montana. I don't know what town though. He died when I don't know, a long time ago. I never seen him. My dad, he was in the First World War. Four years he was in France. Got wounded over there in the trench right. He was crawling in this trench and he got shot right here (in the sternum) and it came out of his back, one inch from his heart. Went right through his lung. He only had one lung and lived like that until he was 66 years old. He was kind of short of wind, he was short winded, couldn't walk up hills really fast.

My dad had a homestead they called it then. 160 acres. We had half of it cultivated. I guess close to a 100 acres was cultivated and the rest was a lot of hay meadows. We had cattle, horses. We lived right beside a lake. Good Fish Lake. Swim everyday. A nice place to swim. [laugh] Good to fish. Jackfish. Pike. You go up there early in the morning or late in the evening and catch fish. Oh, we lived good there. I don't think we seen hungry days. [laugh] We had cattle and horses, pigs.

The first time I remember playing with horses I get kicked by a horse. I got a scar this side (of his face). I think I was about six years old when I got kicked by a horse then. [laugh] We had some pretty snappy horses my dad had. I was taking them, my dad wanted to take them out, I was only six years old, and wanted to take them to water down at the lake. He had a long rope on her. And that horse starts, I took that horse out. I was still a kid I don't try to have it right close. It come out of here racing. I'll never forget that because no doctor around then, my dad used that black tape, electrical tape. He just cleaned that off good here, tape it up. Everyday he used to put that on. Boy did that ever hurt.

I had that big scar for a longtime, then I got kicked again by a horse on this side here. [laugh] It was just a colt, my brother Bill was trying to break him in to ride and it wouldn't go. I [laugh] I got kicked right in the eye, that one only cut me up this way though.

I was born at home. I don't know who the midwife was. We had a pretty good house then. Three big, big, rooms in it. I guess my dad built it, but I don't remember when he built the first one. The second home my dad built, there it had an upstairs and about three bedrooms upstairs, two big rooms downstairs. In the summer time we slept in the granary... in the wintertime we slept in the house. When he built the one with the upstairs, that was already when I was ready to get married. 52 years ago.

I got married in that same house. We stayed there for one winter and then we went on our own in the summer. We had a bunch of horses, cattle, and things like that. Took a logging contract way up north, Pinehurst Lake they call that place. We were up there for one winter when I first got married. My wife was cooking for us.

My dad, my brother, and me, and we had one hired man. The old man (Dad) used to drive the equipment, drive the team and he hauled logs. We had three teams of horses up there that were working. Then after that we bought that place in Kikino and then some work there. Lived there for about four years and then after that he retired. It was no work around then. The only time you could make a little bit of money was spring time trapping rats. In the wintertime I used to haul posts or haul logs and sell the posts. There was only a little bit of work around in the wintertime. That's why I moved around from there.

My dad used to go commercial fishing, we always had a boat around. Not only on that lake. We used to travel around and wherever they opened up for commercial fishing. He was always on the go, the old man. He used to run the mail. For years my mother was postmaster there (Good Fish Lake), for 19 years with the post office. My dad had to go with the horses, the mail was in the town. Then in the wintertime then we used to have the dogs team. I don't know how much we got paid for hauling the mail, wasn't too much in them days. Twice a week he hauled the mail.

We lived right beside the reserve, the reserve was up, I guess, here and we had our place was out here. South was all those Ukrainians, Ukrainian settlement. We went to school about three miles from home. *Wayet Now* school they called it. That's means the gully... in Cree.

So when you went to school, did the Ukrainians come there?

Yeah, and a few off the reserve sometimes. Not too many. May have been about three families went there, three or four of them. I used to be able to talk Ukrainian in those days. My brother Bill, he was married to a Ukrainian woman. She can talk Cree good. I don't think her parents spoke much English. I remember the spring when they came right from the old country out there. They weren't born here. She was born in Canada but not her folks.

What kind of child were you?

Oh I was a happy go lucky guy. I got along with anybody. I liked going to school all right the only thing is we had to walk so far. I was in good shape then, I couldn't walk three miles now. We used to go play ball with this Macrae, that was another little settlement in across the reserve, on the north banks another school district. Play ball with them and we had picnics there. Either they come played with us or we played there, that's the only place we'd go play ball. When we were going to school all we had were maybe two scribblers and a pencil; now they got the computers and they got the calculators and all that. We had three scribblers, one for arithmetic and maybe drawing pictures. I only went to school three years though in three years I made it up to grade six.

So then after that I used to go working for a farmer every fall, every fall he'd come pick me up. He was a pig farmer, east of Edmonton. I worked for him maybe two months every fall and I had my special job there. He'd come and pick me up at four o'clock, take me back to the farm, the farm yard, and I had to pump water for pigs [laugh]; he had 400 hundred head of pigs. [laugh] It all had to be pumped by hand. We stayed right there eh. Stayed right in the granary, and he had a bunch of guys working for him thrashing time. That was after I quit

school.

What is your first memory?

Well about the first memory I had was I got kicked by that horse [laugh]. I remember too when I was a little bit younger than that we all had whooping cough. I think my first memory of when I was a kid. I lost one brother to that. He was in between Henry and Ralph, they were small that time, Henry and Ralph, and he died. There was no doctors where I come from. They had a doctor in Vilna, that's about 18 miles south from where we lived. It's a long way to town. Never seen a doctor when I got kicked. [laugh] My dad was the doctor, boy he was a rough doctor. [laugh]

My grandparents lived the next border from us. Once in a while we stayed with them. It was a little bit closer to walk to school, half a mile closer. My brother Bill he stayed with my grandparents quite a bit. My grandmother's name was Christiana Gladue. Gladue, she was born in 1865. I don't know how many times my grandmother was married. Maybe she was never married. She had seven kids. One went by the name of Albert Lightning. She might have been married to Lightning, I don't know, but she lived with this old man by the name of Gaddy Horn as I remember. And my dad was Frank Suvee, 'cause his dad was named Frank Suvee. [laugh] His stepfather, he raised my dad. I think seven kids she had. One we had an aunt in Calgary. Her last name was Salter, she married a Salter. I got a couple cousins I never met them. Younger, they must be old, old now. They were older than me.

I remember my grandfather, my mother's father, he was in a wheelchair all the time he had some kind of crippling arthritis. Never done no work Grandpa. I used to call my grandfather Santa Claus, he had a big beard. That was my mother's dad, my other grandfather, never met him, he's from the States.

My grandmother and her dad, they went to Church just about every Sunday. They lived about a mile, two miles from Church, in the wintertime it was closer across the lake. There was two Churches there: one Catholic Church and one United Church. That's where we used to go. I was only a kid when my grandmother died, so before that I don't know. I remember when my grandmother died, she was sick for quite a while... and our old grandfather got us to go across the lake, passed the Church, there was an old man there, he was a religious guy. Indian preacher, he didn't preach in English, preached in Cree. He told us to go let him know that she was pretty low. So my brother Ralph went next to me, we took a lantern and walked across the lake. We had to walk right beside the Church. The house was across the road from the Church, and then that old man lived further down another little lake you walked right across that, it was winter too. And he wasn't home, and that old lady said she would tell him, soon as he got back. Should be back pretty soon. He usually come down there. We walked back. We had to walk the same way going back by the Church, and, [laugh] I'll never forget this. Just as we're walking by the Church, pretty dark eh, we had this lantern to see where we were walking, the whole door, we had a double door, turned, it was like, it was wide open, and a bright light in there. I never said nothing, I put my head down. I made two steps. My brother said, did you see that? [laugh] We weren't pretty big eh? I think I was only about 12 and my brother was nine. [laugh] We got scared. We had to walk right

there eh. [laugh] Yeah, what it was? And that must be about the time she died, about the time we were walking by that Church, that's no bull. [laugh]

My dad, he had pension from the army eh. I don't know, I don't know how much he got, wasn't too much to start out with but towards the end. Yeah he come to work up here at Hansard for awhile. In fact he died here in Prince George my dad, he was 66 years old. My mom's a healthy, healthy, woman. Hard worker, canned everything you know like vegetables and fruit. Worked in the garden, always gardening.

I was talking to my mother last summer she said, "You know what, when I was sixteen years old I used to work here in St. Paul and a guy by the name of George Bell had a store." She worked in that store. I don't know how long she worked there and after my dad came out of the army he was some kind of translator for the Indians around Saddle Lake reserve working for the government there he used to talk English, he used to translate for them. He done that job for quite a while in Saddle Lake. That's just a little ways from St. Paul. I think that's where he met my mother. My mother's dad was some kind of... had something to do with working for native fishing guys.

My dad was pretty strict. Oh yeah [laugh], we were about fifteen - sixteen, we go to a dance. You know and five six o'clock we had to get up go and look after the horses, "Feed the horses another dance tonight." he'd say. [laugh] Yeah, he was pretty strict the old man, when he hollered you had to move. [laugh]

He showed us how to do the logging with the horses and how to cut trees and cut the logs. I didn't tell you that. The first time I went to work for a logging outfit up north we had to walk three miles everyday to work. It was pretty cold, maybe twenty below, told Dad to get a tent for us. Well, we'll go and live right at the job, so he got us a tent we went and got groceries there was three of us; me and my younger brother Ralph and another guy, my wife's uncle. We were cutting logs there, ten cents a log, that's all we get. It got cold, sixty below, we stayed in that tent [laugh] you know, all the clothes we had on for working clothes we had to go to bed with it... or we'd freeze to death that tent. We had a stove there and we'd be hot on one side... turn around and you'd freeze on the other side. [laugh] We stayed there until we finish that job. Ten cents a log that's all, [laugh] we used to cut maybe a hundred logs a day, good size logs. all hand work, no power saws. If you cut a hundred logs that's ten dollars, three people, ten dollars, only three dollars a piece. [laugh] Tough times then, no welfare them days. It was a twenty... forty miles away from home and we stayed out there for six weeks without going home. We had one kid already at that time, that's a nice little job there.

I remember one time we worked for a farmer too, that was before we had any kids after we come back from that logging at Pinehurst Lake. We went to work for a farmer brushing land, you know clearing land? And me and my wife's brother in law married to her sister went to work for this farmer. I don't know how much they gave us, so much an acre... clearing land. My wife, she went for a walk down by the track and she found a bunch of Seneca roots. They used to buy Seneca roots to make medicine out of it or something. Take them to the store and they buy so many pounds. She made more money digging Seneca roots than me working brushing there, yeah, that's right [laugh] we got so much a pound I think it was over a dollar a pound for the roots. She had more money than us. [laugh]

We went once after that but the people we went with they didn't like picking the small ones they wanted to go all the time and find bigger ones. They're all the same size. [laugh] A lot of people use to do that long time ago, dig Seneca roots take couple of bags, get fifty bucks. Good money yeah but there's lots of Seneca roots in couple of bags. You got to dry them up, they shrink really small, pack em in there, not much weight in them.

Did you see any evidences of the depression, I guess, when a lot of people were getting poor and stuff like that. Did you see that happening around where you lived?

I guess a lot of people had a rough time. And there was no work, but like my mother she used to get a cheque every month, and my dad got a cheque every month for disability from the army... so it didn't make it too bad for us. Never went hungry or anything.

I was called up to the army, I went to Calgary two days and they said that a bunch of young guys that was called up there... and they sent us all back. They said if we need you we'll call you back, so that was that. I was only 16.

I got married when I was twenty. Maybe it was nineteen, probably nineteen when I got married. I got married... it was in July anyway. Around that date in July, they had a big doing in Saddle Lake Indian Reserve, that's further south from Good Fish Lake. And we were already shacked up for a year, me and my wife. Well we were uh, we had a marriage licence but it was running out. We had to get married... so they had a big truck, cattle truck eh. They hauled a whole bunch of people to St. Paul, you know, they wanted to do some shopping, I guess. We got on this truck we had to pay about fifty cents a piece, riding to St. Paul about 15 miles. That was when we got married. That little Church still standing there... United Church, Protestant Church.

Most of the children, we named them after all of our relations eh, either her sisters or my brothers or her brothers. Something like that. After I moved over here, I worked pretty steady, a lot of it was seasonal work. I start driving Cat, I might be off for a month and a half in the spring, a month and a half in the fall. sometimes I'd work right through. I made pretty good money then, I don't think they went hungry anyways. I worked pretty steady for a union outfit, 29 and a half years I worked for a union outfit.

English and Geography, and Math and all that stuff. I used to sit at home there until 12 o'clock. The Teacher was strict, if you didn't finish your work well, you don't have no what they call recess. You stay right in school and do your work. He was tough but he was good. I used to like him... He told Dad he said, "how'll be I take that kid with me" when he quit, when he moved to Edmonton he said, " how'll be if I take that kid with me". But when I was learning in school, the short time I was in school I wanted to learn something. I didn't go down there just to, you know, to fool around... My dad wouldn't let me go. I burned all my books I was so mad, I had a stack of books, you know, after I took school. I was so mad, I wanted to go you know, so I turned them and burned everything up. I should have some sense in here, I could have kept them and studied myself at home.

Ed Letendre

Interviewed by Heidi Standeven and Craig Mitchell in Prince George BC, on March 10, 1997³.

I was born in Alberta, 50 miles this side of Edmonton, a place by the name of Lake Saint Anne, in 1902.

I lived there until I uh...well I moved a lot. We moved a lot. We were in Grande Prairie, 1910. I was pretty young then of course, you know. My sister, one of my sisters was born 1910, Grande Prairie. There was no white man there, but one. He had the store there then. And I went back, and we moved in the coal mines 1914, First World War. I was 12 years old around then. We lived there until it was 1919. Then I was back up at 18 see. I went to school there for about oh, about six months. And I went to work in a boarding house there, a mine boarding house.

How long ago did you come in to BC?

Well, I came out here more than once. I, the first time I came,...I was on the railroads in Alberta, then I quit. In '53 I moved out here. Then I graded lumber out here for Northern Planer Mills, for three or four months. Then they had that big strike. I doubt you'd remember. And then I went back home. And then I came back again, I think it was '60. I graded lumber south of here. What's the hell's the name of that place, that outfit I was working for. I worked there, now I remember, Dunkley Lumber, I grade lumber. I remember that mill's still running, and what the hell is that, that name of that outfit? They sold out anyway. I worked there until Christmas and then I went back again. And then the last time I come back it was '63, and I

³Mr. Letendre speaks with a heavy Michif accent. No attempt has been made to include the accent in the transcription.

worked in a bar here at the Astoria Hotel for nine years. In '79 I moved to Vancouver. I sold my house. I had a house here on Patricia Boulevard. Then I moved to Vancouver.

So what were you doing between what, 1918 and 1953?

I lived in Alberta, you heard that before. I travelled back and forth, you know. This is the longest I stayed in BC, see. Since I came up in '63.

So, how come you moved to Prince George? What made you decide to come here?

Well, I left in '79. The doctors told me to get up and get out on account of my heart. I was diabetic in '79, so I moved to Vancouver. I've got three boys down there, Vancouver. I got one in Salmon Arm, and I got one in Hawaii. He's been there for 37 years now.

Did your whole family come with you when you moved to Prince George?

No, no. They left, they left home early you know. Some of them come up here, and then this guy in Hawaii. He was in Paris just after the last war. And then he moved to Calgary, got married there. His wife went to Hawaii and she was working for a lawyer. And then he moved up there. In Hawaii. He lost his wife a year ago. She died of cancer....but he had business in Vancouver, in Hawaii. He sold out a year and a half ago. He's still living there. Two of my youngest boys both got gas stations in Vancouver. My oldest, the boy he lives in Salmon Arm. He retired from the liquor store here and he was manager there. Then he retired and he lives in Salmon Arm.

So was it just you and your wife then that moved to Prince George?

Yeah. Just the two of us there last time. Like the without the boys and that.

How, how about the first time? When did you first move to Prince George, what year?

Uh, I don't know, let's see. Oh, in '53. I was on railroad for 12 years in Alberta. Then I quit. Then I came out here with a pick-up with my youngest boy, the only one that was left at home.

Did you know anybody in Prince George when you came here?

My oldest daughter lived here, they were here, see, my oldest daughter. She's still lives here. The only daughter I got, well, I lost one, she was four years old when she died. There were two more girls. And my oldest girl, she lives here.

It was a small town then, '53...It was in the spring anyway. There was always work for northern planing mills downtown by the railroads there. And then when they went on strike, well there was no work. I went back to Alberta.

So did you, did you like it here?

Oh, I didn't mind it you know. It wasn't that big then, just a small town in '53. That's quite a long time ago you know. I didn't mind the country, I didn't mind the place, you know. You know, as far as the weather being concerned, there's not much difference here in Alberta. Vancouver is different.

What did you like the most about Prince George?

Well, I don't know, I got acquainted with quite a few people you know. This time I moved, well, I had lot of friends here then. I was in the hotel see, bar manager.

How was it for you being Métis living here?

Oh, I didn't mind it.

Was it any different being a Métis here than it was being a Métis anywhere else?

Mmmm. Well, it's no difference anyways.

Yeah. Did you want to keep going? We can start. Did you want to keep going, 'cause we can start on your life history if you want, or we can...

Well, I don't know...[sigh] this is my last move anyway [laughter].

So, were you born at home?

Well, where were you born eh?

Were you born at home, or were you born in a hospital or ...

No, no. I was born at home.

At home. What was your home like?

Well, it was my grandfather's you know... He had a home homestead type log shack there eh. That's where we lived, home. My grandfather, my dad's dad,...and then, my other grandfather related to me, he was from the States. He was born in Michigan. He landed in Canada when he was 21 years old. He moved to Canada.

So, who made your house? The first one you lived in? (Grandfather.) So, how big was your house? When you were growing up?

Well, in those days, that's a long time ago, in those days, they're just more like shacks them days you know. They don't have houses like that today, I'll tell you [laugh]. We travel so much, we moves around you know...and as far as the Métis goes in this country here, I don't know any of them. I know them to see them, but I never talk to them. I don't know who they are. The only people that I know is my own, my own relations...my grandchildren. I got quite a few grandchildren.

How many grandchildren do you have?

Heh. I got six kids, and I got ten grandchildren, and seventeen great-grandchildren, and I got five great-great-granddaughters, grandchildren, two boys anyway, and three girls.

What was it like around your house? Did it have like a garden, or...?

Oh yeah. They have gardens. They have cattle. A few cows you know.... Then we move to Grande Prairie, and then we came back. I don't know just when around 1912. 1914 when the war broke out that's when we went to the home...I was only twelve years old then.

Did you do lots of hunting when you were a boy?

Well, we travel all over them days. You gotta, trapping and hunting, and fishing, you know. That's, that's the only way you can live in them days you know...then...I went to school about six months in that home, and then I end up working in a boarding house. Fifty dollars a month. That's big money in them days.

We lived there until 1919. Flu broke out in 1918 you see...then we came back, back home...and I stayed there for a while then I went back to the boarding house and worked in the mines for years. I drove in the mines. I worked on the railroad.

You went to school for six months?

About six months over there, yeah, but I went to school at home in my younger days. In a big log house school. That's where I went to school.

How many students?

Oh, there's quite a few kids. Oh, yeah. A fella by the name of...McConnell. Englishman.

So, what were your grandparents names? Your grandparents, that you lived with, what were there names?

Well, Letendre. My dad's dad was John, Jean. J.B. Letendre they would call 'em. He was

eh, he was part of the first war, Indian war. First war you know, Indian war [1885 Resistance]. He had...his dad, I never seen my great-grandfather, he passed away. He come from Quebec. I know he was born there some place. That's why there's so many of us Letendre there [laughter]. I guess they have from there a whole army of Letendre down in Montreal and Quebec.

When were your grandparents married?

Oh, I don't know. They were married in Alberta...I don't know when.

And how many children did they have?

Well on my dad's side there was uh,...oh, golly I don't know, there's so many family, I don't know how many, five, six...there must be about eight...eight in that house...And on my mother's side there, at least...my grandfather was willing to meet on my momma's side. I think there was four boys, three girls.

And do you know, do you know where your grandparents were born?

Around, around Alberta. Except my grandfather... Yeah. He's the only one that's born in the States. Michigan.

Were your grandparents religious?

Catholic.

Catholic. Were they superstitious at all about anything?

Oh no. We, we believed, we believed what we believed was as long that's all...As long, as long as Catholic religion.

What did your grandparents do?

Well, they didn't,...he use to, about my grandfather and that, farmin'. He had grain and cattle, horses. We had cattle, we had horses.

Did you help at the farm too?

Not much...well, later on, after I came back. 1919 from the mines. Well, I used to go out harvesting east you know with my grandpa. The four of us, we used a go out harvesting, an threshing, an stooking and that.

How about your parents, were, they were born in Alberta?

Oh, yeah. Well, some, yeah, but they must be I don't know, what I can remember. They were

all born in Alberta...pretty well. Lake St. Anne.

What, what would be your first memory of them, of your mom and dad?

Oh, I don't know [laugh]. We use to live in a homestead.

Are you their eldest son? (Um hmm) How many siblings do you have? Brothers and sisters, how many do you have?

Brothers and sisters? Oh, Christ! Well uh, within a year we lost five bro...I lost five brothers and two sisters. I got one sister living here now and one in uh, Alberta. Lethbridge and a boy, and I got a young, youngest boy lives in Vancouver. Both of them were in the army for six years, one of them died...in the last war. Two of them were in the first siege. I had uh, I think there's...four brothers in a the family, there's about eight of us. There's only four of us left.

You lived on the farm with your parents as well? Your parents ran the farm and did all the farming and stuff? (No). No? Who did it?

No, we, we never did nothing...we had a whole lotta other folks on the homestead...We moved around too much.

How did you travel?

Pack horses. That was in the old days before...before 1914. There was no cars, we just travelled by wagons and horses. We moved to Grande Prairie on uh, with horses with no wagon. Just, just pack, pack horse.

I did work, labour, work. That's all. That's the only way you can live is to do work out. That's all I ever did. I'll tell you, I, I went through hardship myself. And during the hungry '30s by Jes' I had, I had them kids to look after, and I was, I was loading lumber for fifteen cents a thousand. And I worked for a dollar and a half a day, in the camps. It wasn't easy, for anybody, not only our family, the whole damn nation, the whole country, was so hard up. I worked for fifteen cents an hour, a dollar and a half a day. And paid my board seventy-five cents out of that. So how much money did I have left? I get that fifteen cents an hour, a dollar and a half a day, ten, ten, ten hours a day, and you have to pay uh, seven cents a day for your compensation all out of that wage. And you were boarding seventy-five cents a day.

Did your family live with you when you were working in the, for board? Was your family with you?

My whole family, yeah. I travelled 28 miles a day uh, 'round trip, when the camp was 14 miles... Driving team. You know, hauling groceries and that for fifteen cents an hour. Piling lumber for fifteen cents a thousand. You can imagine how much money you can make out of that. I worked on the railroad for 12 years too. Just a labourer. Yeah. I was relief , then I

quit the railroad.

Do you remember any really tough years when you were growing up, like, bad winters, or droughts, or, flood, or anything like that?

Oh. Oh my God yes. '50, or '55...

Can you describe some of those winters? What were they, what were they like?

Tough. We had to fight snow, that season. That snow's three or four feet deep, and when we were livin' in Grande Prairie. But, we survived. Uh,...it wasn't, there, it wasn't easy. Not only, not only our family but, the rest of the families. The white people too, as well. Because we never got no assistance from the government like you got today. You had to fight for your own.

In 1919, or 1918, you said there was a flu.

Yeah. I don't know what they call it. That was the German flu I guess. I couldn't even remember when, but it was around the war, the last war, the first war.

Like measles?

No, no. Measles, you just keel over and you spit blood and everything else, that, we were in the mines. It's only a small, uh, small place you know. It's big enough them days. One of the biggest mines they had in Alberta, like North American Coleridge. And there was sixty people died there. It's a lucky thing I survive, but I worked in the boarding house you know, and uh, all, the only thing you could save your life is whisky. An there's no, no, no medical records or anything in there except super-four-medicine, you gotta send for the express. The only ones that have some, live with the doctors.

Did your family get the flu?

Yeah, my dad and my mother were, both lay in bed. Lucky they got out of it. I lost an aunt in there too. My uncle's wife died up there. She had uh, three little kids. I lost a first cousin with that...

Yeah. Did you, you said you went to school for a short period, did you like going to school?

Oh yeah. I used to like to go to school, sure. I was in grade eight going to grade nine when I quit.

What, was the, what was your school like compared to what school is like now?

Oh, there's lotta difference them days. Yeah. We had, I had good teachers. Yes, I use to work at night, books you know, learn. He was tough, but he was a good teacher. I use to,

twelve a' clock at night. I live at home. He was a good teacher.

One room school house?

Yeah. Quite a few kids. Yeah. Different classes, different uh nationalities you know. All types... I think there was about 30, 35 or 40 kids. In a log house.

So, how old were you when you left home?

Well I never was at home after, I was uh twelve, fourteen years old. I worked from there. I worked there in the mines. I just sleep there. That's all, and then work in the boarding house and then I went to work on a pit hole. Oh, I quit that ... boarding house.

How did you get your job in the coal mine?

Inside driving. Drivin' horses.

And how much were you paid then?

Well at that time, when I first got married, my girl was six months old, when I moved the first time to the mines. I worked in the mine, I got \$6.50 a day, eight hours inside. And then I went to Norday Mine, that's uh way up in Calgary there. I went there and I got \$7.21 a day, and that's '23, year of '23.

Where were you living when the Depression started?

I was living in a small village. And the name of it's uh, by the name of Blue Ridge. And you might see it on the map. White Court, that's the next place, 13 miles from there. It's a big town now. It's a big mill there. Just like here.

So what were you doing during the Second World War?

On the railroad.

Where did you meet your wife?

At home. Down home, Lake St. Anne.

And when did you get married?

'21. It was April '21. 19th of April.

How old were you when you got married?

Uh, well, my birthday, I was born 12th, 1912...Past my 18, I think. I got married in April and I was 19 in the fall in 8th September, figure that. Well, I wasn't 19 when I got married.

How old was your wife?

She's two years younger than I am. Born in the same month.

What years were your children born in? (Oh, they're all different months). Just the years would be...

The girl, my oldest girl born in, February 22nd, and my other daughter I lost, October 6th, 1953. My boy, November 25th. My youngest boy he'll be 60 years old in October. That's the youngest one.

How did you decide on their names when they were born?

Family names.

Was it hard raising your kids? I guess besides being in the Depression. Was it hard raising that many kids?

You, you mean look after them? Hmm, mean while eating and rising on fifteen cents an hour to support them, I tell you. I never got on relief in my life, but three months, on the last part of it. There was hell of a lot of people got on the bread lines long with me, even doctors in that Depression. That's how, how hard it was. But I managed to live. Eight dollars, I got eight dollars a month for six kids. Three months I was on relief, welfare, like they call it these days.

What kind of life did you want for your kids when they grew up?

Well, just working like me, getting, you know, most of them moved back moving up here. Stayed out of home and look after themselves, after they, you know, after they were 17 and 18 they left home and look after themselves.

What would be your fondest memory of your family?

Well, I don't know, one of them, the youngest boy, he's a mechanic. He has two stations, one for each boy to run and the one...And the oldest boy he runs a liquor store, and the second youngest he's got a gas station, he used to run a flower shop here in, in Prince George for years. The first flower shop, the main drive there, House of Flowers used to be the name of it. Yeah. He used to run it with his wife. So, I can't remember...And there, the one there, the one's in Hawaii. Oh, I don't want to mention him, he's a millionaire. He sold his business for five million here two years ago, so...

So what do you think would be your happiest time in your life?

Well, in a way I was happy all the time, because my kids are grown up and they were well you know, I never have any problems with the sickness and that. To tell the truth about it all,

I never had any problems up there except work, work, you know. But, I brought them all anyways, they all lived but one. They might have hard times with me but, then, they were happy.

What kind of advice uh, would you give to your grandchildren?

Oh, I don't know, I never give them any. When they grow up that's their, their business.

Okay, so you moved, Grande Prairie was the first place you moved to? Grande Prairie was the first place you moved to in 1912? (Um hmm). And you took horses there? (Yeah). How come you moved there?

Well, it was probably, you know, it's uh, I don't know how the hell, or how my dad moved down there, I don't know what, I don't remember that far. You know, there was nobody there but one white man in 1910. Right where that town is, that's where we lived. Trapping most of the time, in the winter time trapping.

What did you do in the summer?

Work. Work in the summer trying to get a job wherever you can get it. Get a job where you can get it.

Did you guys know anybody in Grande Prairie when you moved there?

No. Oh, yeah, there's some Métis people there, you know.

So what was the Métis community doing there, at that time?

That time was only just trapping and in Dawson Creek and in them places, you know. Just a small place.

Was it generally a Métis community?

My dad trapped in them, where that mine uh, what's the name of that place? That's where, I can remember that...from Chetwynd up north...

Oh, Tumbler Ridge?

Yeah. He trapped right on that place. That's 1915.

That's a pretty, pretty big mine...

Yeah, yeah, that's a big mine there. I never saw it now, I wished I thought I can get down there, you know and see it's face. We had a small cabin at the watch post snow there. We had, they had a cabin over there.

So what kind of things did you trap?

Big animals, you know. Fur animals.

Was that hard work?

Oh yeah, because of what with that snow. Your snow shoes, you know, at that time there, that uh, where that mine is, I went through it about five feet, snow was there that was. We got there with pack horses and, you know, walking.

Did you like trapping better than, than working in the summer?

Oh no. I'd rather work. It's a tough life that trap.

Must have made for a long winter.

Sometimes you got that long winter and maybe one or two blankets on your back and that's all you sleep with 40, 50 below zero. Not like today. Them days, my God, even in where I was living in Alberta down there, it could be 60 below there or with wind chill. We don't see them weathers anymore over here.

When you went trapping with your father...did your mother come, and your sisters?

No, no. She stayed, stayed back in the cabin. It was a big cabin, you know, log cabin. They still go on the old, there's a lot of places, I guess, where we trap. But it's different now than it used to be, you know, like people now, trapping with new...Them days you walk, you pack everything.

So what kind of things did your mom do while you guys were out trapping?

Oh, look after the kids, small kids. She used to make clothes with fur, you know, just that stuff.

How old were you when you started to trap?

I would...I went with him in Alberta when I was, with a friend of his, partners. His family, one winter, I was about 14 then. I'm so old to remember them things at my age now.

Well, you are remembering pretty good.

Oh, I, hell, I can picture everything in here...but it's to tell it is the difference.

Do you remember when you went trapping, did you follow a river or a stream?

Oh, yeah. Well, we're in the bush, you know, you got to pack a trail.

Did you use the same trail every year for trapping?

Yeah. You set your, your trap on the trap line you gotta trap line maybe 15, 20 miles long. You stayed when you go out, maybe you stayed a week, or on, on the road, like. You know, on the trap line. Every year yeah. You go out once a week, you gone for a week from the cabin to look at the traps in your traps. You'd stay home a week and maybe go back and fix, fix furs, game, big game like, you know. Not like today. I'm not even sure they are still at it.

How did, how did you mark your trap line? How did you know it was yours and nobody else's?

Well, there was nobody else, there's so many people, so many miles apart, you never saw them, never was. Well, uh, I think it was about a year and half, I don't remember that, that much about how long we, we didn't stay very long, a couple years. And then we went back with pack horses...back to Lake St. Anne.

I'm curious, what side, you, your grandfather, your grandfather's side or grandmother's side, are they both Métis, or... is one side Métis? Which side is, of your family is Métis, both?

Well, I can't tell you very much about that, because as far as I'm concerned you know, we're a half French. We're made for, for it's, it's uh, Métis people you might call it nowadays, I don't know.

So, was your, your grandfather was Métis?

My grandfather was American. He was born in Michigan. My mom's dad. And my other grandfather he was born in Alberta. Around Alberta. His dad came from Quebec around uh, Montreal and Quebec, someplace. That's where he was born. That's why there's so many Letendre's today. God knows, ah heck [laughter]. A guy, his family, his wife and them came to Vancouver and seen us while we was over there. Yes. There's so damn many of... you come look at the damn half of the population is Letendre. [laugh] 'Specially, Montreal and Quebec.

So, your grandfather from Alberta... is Métis?

Yeah. Well, you could call it, you could call it Métis people as far as we're concerned. I don't know any of them there, eh,... I don't know any Métis people here. Mostly I don't know what the hell, they call them, they talk Cree. I can talk Cree, mixed with half French.

Did you speak French?

No. I can't speak French. I never learned that, my people don't talk French.

Did you speak English or Cree when you were growing up?

Cree.

So, when did you learn English?

I talk, we talk Cree when we were growed up and then when I went to school well, that's where you learned the English. My kids, none of my kids talk Cree. None of them talks it. They can understand some of it, the oldest ones. You take my daughter, you can talk to her in Cree, she understand pretty near every word, but she can't talk it. They grow out of it you know. Because we lived in uh, white people in most of them place.

Can you still speak Cree?

Oh, I can. I can talk to you...

Yeah. Say, can you say "Hello my name is Ed Letendre." in Cree.

Well, no. No. I can't say that... well, Ed Letendre, eh, that's, I can't say it any other way. Not in Cree.

Could you say "I was born seventy years ago in Cree?"

Well I could say that, sure. I could say that in Cree.

Could you tell us how, how it sounds? Can you say it? Just tell me something in Cree, in your language [laugh]. Tell me something in Cree.

You won't understand it anyway. [laugh]

That's okay. I'd like to hear it. Can you tell me something anyways?

Hmm, hmm. Well, I can tell you I was born Lake St. Anne, uh in Cree. I don't use very much now because my family don't talk, I don't talk to them in Cree, because they can't talk it. None of them. They might understand some words, but that's it, there, especially when they swear [laugh]. They swear in Cree, [laugh] but that's all they can talk about. I don't... [laugh]

Did your wife speak Cree?

Oh yeah. Sometimes at home we'd talk Cree to, the two of us, and then mix it with English and Cree and... Because when now our kids are moving to see us, they talk English, they can't talk Cree. So we uh, we have to talk English when they come to uh, to see us

nowadays. See, my grandfather, my mother's dad, when he landed in this country he was 21 years old and married an Alberta woman. When he landed here. And after my grandmother don't talk English, you know. And he talked just as good as Cree as I, I was. After, after he got married. Because that was what he used, he used to sound funny when he talks Cree, because he talk broken Cree, you know. We used to laugh at him. But uh, a lot of our uh, my aunts, my oldest aunt on my dad's side, she talks uh, as good in French as she does in Cree, 'cause her husband was a Frenchman. And all her kids talk French.

Can they talk Cree as, as well?

Broken Cree. They talk Cree because they have to learn Cree because she, she's awful strict you know. Because she talks Cree, you know. But my dad, my uncle there, why, she learn the, he learn the family French and she learn the Kenton Cree. So they could talk both languages you see. When you go down there to their place my God almighty, he talk French to his kids and she talks Cree to their kids at home.

Well, half of Cree today is French. Lots of things you talk, like bread and stuff like that. French... I can, I can tell you if uh, it make bread, what is the difference in it. Like the French, bread is *le pain* and that's bread see, *le pain*, that's French.

Do you remember when you went to school, did you, you couldn't speak, could you speak Cree at school or only English?

Oh, no, only English.

Did you get in trouble if you spoke Cree?

Oh, no. But you don't see, because it's mixed in there and the teacher's just learned you English. So then you can't help but talk English.

Did the other children you went to school, did they also speak Cree?

Yeah. Things, the same thing, they don't, if we do, it was only with ourselves we talk Cree, but in school, you gotta talk English.

Did you have a lot of friends in school? (Oh, yeah). Yeah? Did you have Métis and white friends?

See, this uh, school them days was school, not like today. Today it's like a bunch of animals, they fight amongst themselves and do everything. When I was in school everything was, school is, uh, you know. You go to school an have a short, what they call recess in the morning, half an hour or so and then in the afternoon it was the same damn thing. And then there teachers were teachers, not today.

I was clearing land at home, where I uh, where I came from. And I was working for a German outfit, a couple, clearing land for them. And we measured the land. I measured the land myself I'm in there taking out what, but I wasn't quite good enough, I wasn't sure of

myself. Why would a high school kid be, he went to college in Edmonton. And he was running the hotel and I was working for him at after hours. At six o'clock I used to work for him to help him out in the line of hotel. He was a Ukranian guy. And I said to him I said, " I walked the land over and measured and everything" I wanted to be sure if I was right or not. He couldn't figure, he was high school kid, and he couldn't figure out the land. I think better myself and I figured the land. Took me quite a while you know... because I have... learning more.

So what kind of things did you learn in school?

English and Geography, and Math and all that stuff. I used to sit at home there until 12 o'clock. He was strict, if you didn't finish your work well, you don't have no re... what they call recess. You stay right in school and do your work. He was tough but he was good. I used to like him. In fact he was, he told Dad he said," how'll be I take that kid wit me" when he quit, when he moved to Edmonton he said, " how'll be if I take that kid with me" he said. But when I was learning in school, the short time I was in school I wanted to learn something. I didn't go down there just to, you know, to fool around. Like, picking things, I used to be not too bad, you know, when we went to pick wood, that was my paper. Any other thing of course, I didn't... you know.

So why didn't you go with him?

He wouldn't let me.

Your dad wouldn't let you?

No. No, he wouldn't let me. I burned all my books I was so mad, I had a stack of books, you know, after I took school. I was so mad, I wanted to go you know, so I turned then and burned everything up. I should have some sense in here, I could have kept them and studied myself at home. But I forget everything now because I don't, don't use it anymore.

Do you remember why your dad wouldn't let you stay in school?

Well, because you know, things were so hard, you, you know, you gotta, you gotta help out. Every dollar counts, whatever you make because the wages were so small. Of course, things were different in prices too, you know. We're paying about ten times as much as we used to pay in the old days, that's what you get.

When you were working on the trap lines, did you make very good money for selling...

Some, depends on where you look too. Depends on the price of the fur. And you get gypped and everything else on the fur business too.

Where did you take your furs to sell them?

Well, we were selling, you know, Hudson Bay that's the only one there was years and years

ago. They're the first ones to buy uh, the fur.

So, they bought your furs too?

They steal most of it from the Indians. No white, when you uh, see them days from the time I was born then 1910 in them days you see, you go and see, you sell your furs and that. You just couldn't imagine how much, how much money you lose. Either you sell it or, or you, or you go, you don't sell it.

Was there one store, one Hudson Bay person you sold furs to?

Yeah. That's why they're so rich today, they are the Hudson Bay. I seen, I seen when I live now, where I used to live when I moved, moved this last time. My buddy, moved on watch, I don't know where, he's a good friend of mine, he had two kids, two boys. And he run the store there when I moved in there the first time. Here's an Indian caught a silver fox and they were worth 500 at that time, and he bought it for 50 dollars. So, that was what they do see, they get them half drunk and they, they were not allowed uh, to drink or anything. Give them extract and that and then go with. And he bought it for 50 dollars, silver fox, he sold it for 500. At that time the furs were a good price. It's not that, it's not that anybody told me, I seen it myself. Christ, they were good friends of mine you know.

That's what they used to do they, they're bootleggers because weren't allowed to drink whiskey and that. They did just want some stuff to drink, extract, whatever they can get a hold of. I'll tell you, when you get about as old as I am and see all the things in the world, 94 years...

Did many things like that happen to your family?

No. That's the thing, I never, I never was important in my life. I used to be when I was a kid, if I see a police car then I used to run like hell and hide. You know, I was scared of them. You know. So therefore I never [laugh], I never did anything wrong in my life. No. Actually, when you get older you'll see that things have changed hell, more things have changed for crime now. It's like there uh, you know, this, they should put this uh, punishment back in there. It might help some, you know. Nowadays it's nothing to go and shoot a person in a, you don't like them you shoot them and get out. You go to jail. You know, the way the world is going, going to heck.

Emile and Betty Nome

Interviewed by Sarah Ramage and Aaron Crowe in Prince George BC, on April 20, 1997⁴.

Emile Nome was born at the hospital in McLennan, Alberta on December 5, 1940, and grew up in Faust, Alberta in a three bedroom log house that was without plumbing. The house was close to Lesser Slave Lake and had a garden outside. Emile's maternal grandfather, George Gauthier was a teamster, hauling lumber by horse for the sawmill, and caring for the horses. His mother died when Emile was seven, and his father, Joseph Nome was a planer at the local sawmill, they had two girls and two boys aside from Emile. Emile attended school in Faust, and admits being a mischievous child, as his public school yearbook will testify to. One of his fondest childhood memories is picking blueberries and raspberries, his other chores included hauling firewood and gardening. He remembers that he always wanted to be a boxer as a child, and had an exciting opportunity to go to Edmonton to see a Canadian Championship Boxing match. Unfortunately he made a trip to the washroom only to return and find that the match had both begun and ended. For a time, he and a friend worked as janitors at a school and the money they earned went towards sports equipment, at one time they had a real football that went missing, and no one understood how it could be stolen without being noticed in a town as small as Faust. Eventually it was found in the outhouse hole, and Emile had the job of fishing it out, after which no one would use it for about a week. Emile Nome left school at age 14 (something he has always regretted), and left home to work as a flunker (dishwasher) on an oil rig at the age of 15. He was earning about \$175 a month which was excellent pay at that time.

Emile had been cross-eyed as a child and had spent a lot of time fighting to defend himself. His proudest moment was the day he got his eyes operated on. One day when Emile was 18 years old and living in Kamloops, his brother had been chasing him, and he had the fortune to hide near a sign that advertised eye surgery. He ran into the office and asked the secretary if his eyes could be fixed, she said yes and there he sat for two hours until the doctor was available. He had money saved for the surgery in no time, and waited for four anxious months until the day of his surgery. He even arrived at the hospital early.

In 1956 Emile went to Quesnel, looking for work and then moved to Kamloops, and finally to Prince George in 1960. Emile had no family waiting for him in Prince George, but at that time, Prince George was growing fast and jobs were easy to find. In present times, Emile feels that Prince George is a good place to live, although there are declining opportunities for work, and the long winters are tough. There is also a strong Métis community here, and

⁴This interview was not taped. This story was written by Sarah Ramage from her notes.

never any problems being Métis. Many Métis people have begun to move back to the prairies in the past few years.

On February 7, 1941, Betty McKay was born in James Smith, Saskatchewan in a small riverside two room cabin which was heated with a wood stove. Her parents were both born in Saskatchewan and had a difficult time during the depression and worked hard to survive. The McKay's were proud of raising a family. Betty's grandfather, Alec McKay was the father of twelve children, and lived with Betty and her family, and worked in sawmills. Her maternal grandfather John Peter was a farmer and father of fourteen children, she remembers him as being religious as well as superstitious. In 1951, Betty's father Frank decided to move the family to Prince George in order to find work. Betty had two uncles already in Prince George, and the McKay's travelled there by train. Beginning life in Prince George, she remembers being surprised at the lack of Métis or First Nation children in her new school. Growing up, Betty was a loner, and spent most of her time reading. She recalls being awkward as a teenager, and not wanting to get married when she was young. Betty had two sisters and one brother, and they all attended a one room Métis school, where grades one through twelve were taught. At the school, the Canadian flag was raised every morning, and lowered every afternoon. Betty stopped attending school at the age of 16, and is disappointed that she never graduated. Her first job was babysitting and doing housework as live-in help for about \$50 a month.

In 1959, Emile Nome met Betty McKay, and in 1960 they were married. Together they have three children, Leonard Robert was born in 1960, Sandra Rachel in 1961, and Diana Lynn in 1964. The children's second names were all names of grandparents. This tradition has been carried on in Betty and Emile's grandchildren. Their greatest hopes for their children were that they would finish their education, stay out of trouble and grow up to be good people. True to Betty and Emile's wishes, two of their three children have finished their grade twelve education, and all have families. Their best family memories are of family meals and get-togethers. Betty's proudest moments were when she became a mother and grandmother.

Emile worked at saw mills and as a logger, while Betty had jobs cooking, tree planting, working in a glass shop, and as a janitor. Betty thinks back to a time shortly after they were married when she and Emile did not have any lard to fry their potatoes, and so they made a trip to her mother's place to borrow some lard. Her mother was mad because Betty thought she was poor; when in fact she was living so much better than she had as a child. Of course Betty's mother knew that potatoes didn't have to be fried. Betty told her, "maybe I just wanted my potatoes fried," Emile agreed. Both agree that James Kalapa, a Native minister, had the most influence on their lives, and that becoming Christians was an important step for them. Their advice to their ten grandchildren, of whom they are very proud, is to stay out of trouble, and to get a good education.

Frances: Like I said, it has never bothered me being a Métis.

John: Mixed, White, French, Métis, it's all the same over in Alberta and here.

Frances: My kids come running in here when we first came and one of the boys said "Mom, are we cowboys or Indians?" [laugh] I never tried to make them think that they're different. It just don't bother me, if anybody figures that it should then they're the ones with the problem.

John and Frances Cunningham

Interviewed by Stephanie Capyk and Taralee Alcock in Prince George BC, on April 3, 1997.

Frances: I was born at Drift Pile, between Grouard and Faust, on the 1st of March, 1930. It's an Indian reserve. After, my father died and we moved to Grouard. I was a year old. My mother had to move off the reserve and find work. We stayed in Grouard until 1965, and then we came to Prince George.

Why did you move to Prince George?

Frances: Following the dollar, work . [laugh] I'm a seamstress.

What was happening in Prince George when you came here?

Frances: Logging was going very hard. John: The lumber business, that's still all we have here. That's the back bone of Prince George

Was Prince George fairly big then?

Frances: Not as big as it is now. John: Around the By-pass, there was nothing on there. We used to go pick blueberries where Overwaitea is now. There was just downtown along the river, and South Fort George that's all. They didn't even have the industrial site. I worked there, I helped clear that.

Did you come with anybody else when you came to Prince George?

Frances: Our children, we have six of them. We loaded them all up in the car with our dishes and blankets. It was rough, we had a three month old baby.

Did you have family or friends in Prince George before you came?

Frances: Relatives, a brother on my side of the family lived here.

What did you think of Prince George when you first came? Did you like it?

Frances: Not until we went home for Easter. I was so lonesome. We just brought what we could take in the car, and we had to start all over here. I didn't like it. I'd walk out the door and look, I wouldn't know which way to go to town or anything. Then we went home for Easter and that cured me. [laugh] Now I like it. Lots of people go away to retire, but I don't think I'd like that. I like it here.

Do any of your children still live in Prince George?

Frances: We have three boys here: Brian, Darrell, and Brent, and one in Vancouver, Clayton. We have a daughter June, but she's passed away last year of cancer. So we have our three boys here. One of the girls, Fern, she's in Ontario. Another girl is in Gibsons, that's Judy. That's seven altogether.

What do you think was the best thing about Prince George when you came?

John: Work. Frances: Work, and the kids. It was better for the kids. John: That's why we came here, work, and the kids. It made it better for them. You know them little towns, only one horse towns. Frances: There is more to do here, more for entertainment, and less chance for them to get into trouble. We lived up near the airport for awhile. We had no bus service, no water, there was nothing for the kids. So we sold our house and we bought this trailer. (John: 1972). They go skiing and play hockey, at least it's not a place where there's absolutely nothing, where they would tend to get into trouble.

What was the worst thing about Prince George when you came?

Frances: I didn't think there was anything bad because it was such a beautiful place. Every weekend we'd drive in a different direction, just to see the scenery. I thought it was beautiful. I was very scared though, because of the mountains. I wouldn't let him drive to close to the edge. It took us eight hours to come from Chetwynd, I wouldn't let him go over forty miles. [laugh]

How do you find it being Métis here in Prince George?

Frances: Doesn't bother me. I was never a person that talked to people. For a long time I couldn't. I've changed quite a bit. They didn't bother me and I didn't bother them, so it was fine.

Did you find that there was a big Métis community? Did you feel at home here?

Frances: No we were always away, we didn't live close to anybody. We always had our own place instead of getting into the Métis housing. We bought this trailer in nineteen seventy-two and we're fine. It's great for us now. We had five children in here for awhile, but they were grown up and they were out enough.

How was Prince George compared to other places that you lived in terms of being Métis?

Frances: Like I said, it has never bothered me being a Métis.

John: Mixed, White, French, Métis, it's all the same over in Alberta and here.

Frances: I never let that bother me. My kids come running in here when we first came and one of the boys said "Mom, are we cowboys or Indians?" [laugh] I never tried to make them think that they're different. It just don't bother me, if anybody figures that it should then they're the ones with the problem.

Were you born at home or in the hospital?

Frances: That's one thing that I couldn't tell you. I never discussed it with my mother. It was probably at home. A lot of these older people will say, "Oh I only had one kid in hospital, all the others were delivered at home."

John: Yeah for most people my age, the hospital was twenty-five miles, thirty miles away. It'd take one day to go up there on horseback.

Frances: When we first got married, his trade was a faller, and he was cutting logs with a cross-cut saw, you know those big saws.

John: A hand held, cross-cut saw. Oh we used to like it. I still do, I just, nobody wants me anymore. I guess I'm too old.

Do you remember what your house where you grew up looked like?

Frances: I was raised in a convent until I was sixteen, then I went into a sanatorium because of something that was going around. Sort of like cancer today, and they put you in a sanatorium where you sit and rest.

You went to the convent when you were very young?

Frances: Five, My mother had to work.

Do you remember your parents home?

Frances: I don't really remember what it was made of, it's not brick or anything, it's just lumber.

Do you remember the convent very well?

Frances: Yes. That part I don't care to even talk about.

What's your first memory of your mom?

Frances: Oh, putting me in the convent. I don't remember anything else. I just didn't want to go there, but we had to. I figured they maybe they could've kept us home. But it wasn't their choice, the government told them they had to send their kids to the convent. I don't have very good memories about my life as a child. I was quite sick. I had bad eyes. I remember my mother putting me under the table and covering the table with blankets, so light couldn't hit my eyes and then when I went to the convent. I stayed there until I was...

John: You see, the government made a deal with Catholic priests, and they had a contract to take these children from the Cree Indians, not the Métis, but the Cree Indians. To go and stay in the convent you get so much for room and board, that was the law. RCMP would come and get them if you didn't.

Frances: That was the worse thing.

John: But not Métis like me they won't. I went to school in one of those schools, but I could get out at the end of the day, just go to school like here. I had a meal a day while I was going there, if it wasn't for that strap I don't think I'd have eaten that stuff. Cod liver oil, in a big bowl, and one big spoon. Every one was using it, there were seventy-five boys there. Everybody was using it, everybody using the same spoon, from the same bowl.

Frances: No wonder you could catch so much stuff at those schools.

John: No sense. But you had to, and if you didn't they call the priests there to come and get you in trouble.

Frances: That's my worst memories of my childhood being in the convent. All my life wanted to move around, so I could see different places. I got enough of that when we first got married (John: laughing). His dad had a logging contract, and every six months we moved and had a new house. Sometimes it was a lumber house, other times it was logs and we'd stuff the cracks and put up wallpaper on to brighten it up. By the time we'd finish up we'd be moving again. [laugh] That was what we did. They'd finish a contract and we'd have to move again, so another house. Some pretty rough ones, until our children started coming and then we had to stay around where there was a school.

Did you ever build your own house?

John: (nodding) Built it with logs, back in Alberta.

Frances: Nothing fancy.

Have you ever had a garden in the houses that you've lived in?

Frances: My mother always had a garden, and she canned and made things. They had a real good life. I wish I could've stayed home but I ended up in the convent.

What was your first memory of your childhood?

Frances: Not wanting to go to school. Every day my mother would take me down to the convent and I didn't want to go, but she'd always take me back. I just hated to go back to the convent. I didn't want to stay there.

Do you remember the names of your grandparents?

Harriet and Isadore, (Willier) that's my father's parents.

Do you remember the names of your mom's parents?

Frances: Eleanor and Joshwe (Bellrose). I don't know how it's pronounced. I never could pronounce it. I didn't know him anyway. He died before I had any sense. [laugh] When you're young you don't remember people too well, so I don't really remember him. I remember my grandmother. They used to make great big pots of soup in those great big black cast iron things that hang on a tripod.

How many children did your mother's parents have?

Frances: I don't even remember. My mother never talked about anything, and I wasn't with her too much, although we would go out for Christmas dinner. She never told me. We never did sit down and talk about the family. She was a very busy women, she worked all the time. She was very smart, worked in the post office and did all her own books, and she just went to grade three. I think years ago people learnt more or something. John's family would be easier because he was raised at home.

John: On my mother's side I don't know anybody. I know an aunt and an uncle and they're both dead. My mother's still in Quesnel, ninety-four years old, I go and see her sometimes.

Do you remember if your grandparents were religious or superstitious? (John: Both.)

Frances: Well my grandparents, I don't know if they were religious, but I think they were sort of superstitious.

John: They were superstitious.

Frances: They were? He knows of my family more than I do because he was raised in that area. I was taken away and dropped in the convent. So he knows. I met a lot of my relatives through him after we were married.

Do either of you remember what kinds of things your grandparents did?

John: Trapping, mostly trapping. Frances: Hunting. John: Logging. Fishing, commercial fishing. Some of them farmed a little bit.

Frances: I heard my grandfather say he had a little store, but I don't remember.

Was that just the men or did the women also farm and hunt and fish?

John: Oh yeah, except logging. There was only a couple of women I've seen with a cross cut saw or doing anything in the bush.

Do you know if there were any accomplishments that they were that they were really proud of?

John: Well there are so many things. No matter what they do, they're going finish, they're proud.

Do you know how many children there were?

Frances: My grandparents lost all their children, every one of them. I think they had about five. We were the only grandchildren they had, the other ones died before they were married. There was an epidemic at that time.

Was there anything more you wanted to say about your grandparents?

Frances: I'll always picture them. They used to visit some neighbours of ours, and they had this cute little cart and horse and that was so nice to watch. I don't know if that was a luxury in those days.

John, we'll go to you now, and just go through the same set of questions

John: I don't have anything to tell you, I've told you already. [laugh] I was born at Jousard, November 27, 1929. In 1965 I moved to Prince George.

Did you move around in the Jousard area?

John: Yeah, we logged right around Lesser Slave Lake, north side, west side. It's eighty miles long, and about thirty miles wide that lake, and we worked right around it.

When you came to Prince George did you have relatives here?

John: Yeah, I had a brother here, and a cousin, and lots of people who moved from our area moved up here.

So did you start logging as soon as you came?

John: Well I worked in a mill for awhile, then I went out logging.

Was it pretty easy to find work back then?

John: Oh yeah, some days I'd go and work for somebody and when I'd come home in the evening I had worked for three different people. If the timber's not too good, or if it's not good going, I'd just go to the next one until I find a good one. You can't do that anymore.

So did you like Prince George when you first came?

John: Oh I like it any place.

Were you born at home or in the hospital?

John: I was too small to remember, at home.

Did you have a garden?

John: Well, no I've never saw a garden, maybe once in awhile we had one or two hills of potatoes, because we were moving steady. Every three months, six months. There were sawmills all over the place, and you can't make a garden when you're going to move. I started falling trees when I was twelve years old, with my dad. He used to give me such a hard time for going to slow, not doing enough, kicked me in the ass.

So how about your grandparents?

John: Well actually I only had one grandfather. Albert Cunningham. My grandmother died before I was even born. This is Dad's side I'm talking about. My mom's side the only one I can think of is Richard Norris, my grandmother I don't know.

What did your grandfather do?

John: Same, logging, that and trapping and whatever they could find.

Do you know if he was religious?

John: I don't know if he was superstitious. He was a real strong Catholic. He would go to bed kneel by the bed and pray, and in the morning when he gets up.

Do you know where he was born?

John: I don't know where he was born but I know he came from St. Albert, and then moved up into Peace River country. That's only about a couple hundred miles. I think Lesser Slave

Lake was a real good thing for people. If there's no work you can do a little fishing, at least you can have fish three times a day, smoke them. Hunting ducks.

How did your parents meet?

Frances: That's a good one. She (John's mom) was in a convent too, and they picked a man for her, and married her off when she was too old to stay there. She didn't know him.

Did the nuns do that?

John: The priest, Catholic priest.

Did her family know him?

Frances: No, nobody. She doesn't even know when she was born. She was never registered. She hasn't got a birthday.

John: The government had to give her a birthday. So what she is now is ninety-four, still lives alone and takes care of herself. You go there... (Frances: And she starts cooking), she wants to feed you, make tea or coffee, whatever you want.

Frances: She did the cooking in the lumber camps for lots of men. They lived in the bunkhouse. It was just like a little town.

John: It was all horse logging, none of these big trucks or skidders.

Frances, do you know where your parents were born?

Frances: They were born around St. Albert.

Your mother worked in the post office?

Frances: And she worked in the hospital. She was sort of a jack of all trades, she was a cook too. She worked all the time.

What did your dad do before he died?

Frances: I don't know, nobody really knows too much about our family on my side. My grandparents weren't very affectionate. They only had three grandchildren, they weren't that affectionate with them.

Did you feel that your mom was very strict with you?

Frances: I don't think so. My mother remarried after my dad died and he seemed to be the one to do that. He owned a pool room, and he'd hear these guys talking about women, and

he would tell my mom that he didn't want to hear them talking about the girls like that. He was concerned about that. I never had no life. I was in the hospital from when I was sixteen until when I was eighteen. Four months after I got married, all my teenage life was in the hospital. It was an old army hospital, and they had army nurses in there, it was just like an army jail. The nurses would be screaming and everything was on the double like they were commanding an army.

Did you have sisters and brothers?

Frances: Yes. In my mother's second family they have three girls and two boys. And there were three girls and one boy in the first family.

John, you said that you started work when you were twelve, what did you think of that?

John: I wanted to do that, all the boys did.

You had fourteen brothers and sisters?

John: Well some of them are dead. There's only about ten of them alive. There is twenty years, something like that, between me and the baby.

Are you close to any of your brothers and sisters?

John: Well when we see each other we're happy, but I never phone them, they never phone. I don't know how they are. You never know if someone's sick.

Did you have any other family live with you when you were young?

John: When I was a kid no. When I was about sixteen years old a couple of my cousins come to stay, to work.

So were there any particularly bad winters or droughts?

John: It was pretty cold, sixty below. Of course nobody had any underwear in those days, couldn't afford them.

Did you enjoy your teenage years? (John: Yeah) What sorts of things did you do?

John: Work and go to bed.

Were you sick at all when you were a kid?

John: No, never saw a doctor until I was fifty-five years old.

What did you think you would do when you grew up? Did you have any dreams?

John: No dreams, I just wanted to go to work earn some money. Don't think about tomorrow so much, but today is there. Tomorrow if it's not there, it's okay too.

Before you were twenty-one, when you were young, what were some of the most important things to you?

John: Ask her. [laugh] Work.

Frances: He played ball

What did you think of school?

John: Well I'd rather of worked than gone to school.

Did you get into trouble or were you a good kid in school?

John: Normal, got into a bit of trouble but never anything big.

So when did you first leave home?

John: 1948, when we were first married.

When you first started working, did you get paid for that?

John: No, I was just helping my dad, helping my family, and learning.

When did you first start to get paid?

John: When I got married

How did the two of you meet?

John: I don't know, I just seen her one day and went over there and started talking.

Frances: I didn't know him four months before we were married, and nobody picked him out for me. [laugh] We married at the church in Grouard.

So what was your best memory of your wedding day? Do you remember anything in particular?

Frances: I don't know, it was all like a dream I guess. It was a horse and buggy wedding, and we had a reception and dance out at the lumber camp. There was about five hundred people there. They all knew my relatives. I never met 'em until after I was married. There was a lot of people at the dance, at the wedding.

How long after did you children start to come?

Frances: [laugh] That one comes anytime, I think about nine months after. We had seven. I was a sickly child. Seemed like everything that came around I got. At one time of my life I didn't walk, and I don't know why. I was very sick, for a whole three months I couldn't walk. I was about nine. I remember going home to my mother's house. I had a brother there and my mother would have to go some place, and she'd leave. She'd stack up toys by me so I could play, and my brother would come and take them all away, taking them across the room and I couldn't have them, couldn't get them.

What did you think that you would do?

Frances: I really had no plans, other than getting married, there was nothing else in those days eh, having a family.

When did you first start to work?

Frances: When I moved to Prince George. I used to sew a little at home. I did all my kid's clothes, but I started working as a seamstress when I moved here.

What was the most important thing that happened to you before you were twenty-one?

Frances: I got married. Until then it was like I was in a jail. I had no freedom, from the convent to the hospital. We couldn't even get dressed. I never got dressed for three years, I was just in pajamas. There was nothing exciting in that time. The happiest time of my life started when we, when I got married, then I had my own family. I always felt like I didn't belong anywhere until I was married, I had a home. I had somebody that cared for me. I think that's when I started living again, when I got married, and we're still together. I didn't know him four month before, so I guess we were meant for each other.

What was the first paid job that you ever had?

Frances: Spanners Men's Wear. I was very unsure of myself. They made me feel very nervous because I went in and applied for the job, and I had never worked as a seamstress and I didn't understand the instructions. So I went down there and he said "I'll try you out until six o'clock today, if you can do it we'll let you know." So they brought two pair of cook's pants for me. They had some kind of instructions, inside measurements, but they didn't make sense to me. So this one German man that worked in there must have noticed that they were giving me sort of a hard time, so he came down and he said, "don't let 'em scare you, if you don't understand you just talk to me." So I did, and so when I was ready to go they told me to come back. I had never done measuring or anything, but I'd seen my mother do it, so I guess I was self taught. I was paid a dollar an hour.

When did you start raising your children?

Frances: Oh, it was nice. I enjoyed them. I had three girls first and they helped me with the boys. My boys are really spoiled because the girls always looked after them and helped with cooking, and when they came home from work they just had supper waiting for them.

What kinds of dreams did you have for the children?

Frances: They don't do what you want 'em to do.

John: I never had any dreams for them, just to try and make a living.

Frances: Just try and make sure they have everything they need. We were lucky we didn't have too much problems with our kids. They were all good, they didn't give us too much trouble, especially the boys. When you have a lot of kids they kind of look after each other. The older boy would always say to the younger, you get yourself in trouble and I'll wring your neck.

What are you best family memories?

Frances: All of us. We never had no T.V. until we moved to Prince George. So we had a guitar, and all the girls and I sang. We'd all sing and the neighbours would all come around to listen. Christmastime that's what I miss most. I feel kind of sad. I'm kind of lonely when I think about the day's we all did things together, and sing all in different parts. That's one thing I learned in the convent, we used to sing in four-part, so I taught my girls to do that too.

John: For me it's just another day

Frances: He never had a gift for Christmas. They had their turkey, but the kids never got anything, but we did. It wasn't much, but we always got gifts. For him it's just another day like he said. For an anniversary or a birthday or anything he won't even know, not even remember, any other women would ditch him eh? [laugh] But he was raised like that, and then, whenever we want something whether it's Christmas or anytime, we get it. We have a lot of kids, so now we're not able to give everybody gifts. They all understand because of the pension.

Do you know why your family didn't celebrate Christmas?

John: They were in the logging camp. In the bush. Mom and Dad used to go to church every Christmas, midnight mass that's it.

Frances: Years ago, after we were married, we'd all go to church. After midnight mass we'd all come home and my mother she'd put her turkey in like two, three clock in the morning, 'cause it was a wood stove eh. They'd cook all night, and everybody would come in for a drink and open the gifts. That is how it was, that's my family, and my mother's.

What kind of advice would you give to your grandchildren?

Frances: I think they have a real good life. I really don't know what I could tell my grandkids.

John: Well for one thing they've never seen the hungry thirties, they never got that. It might be coming up, they'd never seen that, so what can you tell them.

John, so how was it for you raising your children?

John: All right, she did most of it.

What were some of your best family memories?

John: I guess taking the boys out with me into the bush, teaching them how to do things. Some of them are still in it. I'd bring em up there when they were twelve to sixteen. I'd brought a machine, a skidding machine. The sixteen year old used to run the skidder, and once they know how to run a skidder, the older one'd go and find a job, and the next one would step in there and learn. They took turns, and then they went down the road and got work.

Okay what person most influenced you life?

John: Frances.

And what advice would you give to your grandchildren?

John: Do the same as I did. I don't really know what I'd tell them, like I say, it's different today than in my time.

Frances: Yeah there's no work for them. I kind of feel scared for my grandkids when they get old. Is there enough work? You know there's nothing now, it's all automation, everything coming in taking jobs from people.

Where I was brought up, the name of the place was Water Hen. But I never learned how to swim and I'm scared of water. The only thing I learned how to do is skate. It wasn't a town it was more like a reserve eh. It was ok, until I went to school anyway, I had a one friend, but she was also my cousin eh. So I don't associate with too many kids. We had a school there , but they didn't build it until my early teens. I went to boarding school [at Beauval Sask.] eh and that's where I learnt how to skate.

Flora Gervais

Interviewed by Kristy Andersen and Andrew Embree in Prince George BC, on March 30, 1997.

I was born in Meadow Lake Saskatchewan, May 7, 1943.

Well what was your childhood like?

I was alone. I wasn't brought up with my sisters or brothers eh. I got three half sisters and two half brothers. One of my half sisters passed away awhile back. I didn't know them 'cause I was brought up in one of them foster homes, about 50 miles out of Meadow Lake, by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dionne. I moved here in 1960, April 16. My oldest daughter Lorraine was with me.

What was Prince George like when you first got here?

Well it was a little bit smaller. You didn't have the pulp mills and there was a lot of jobs. The pulp mills came and it started growing eh? They started building apartments and motels and hotels. The best thing about Prince George was jobs. You go to any place and go to work. My first job was a babysitting job. I was babysitting for a nurse. I made \$25.00 a month that I remember, when I worked for the nurse. To me it was a lot of money in them days. I could buy a lot of stuff with that \$25.00. Plus put \$10.00 in the bank, \$15.00 for myself. Can you imagine if you had been the person who makes \$25.00 a month now, you'd never make it.

I didn't hardly know anybody here, except for my half sister and her family. My brother-in-law brought me to come babysit, and that's how I come here. It's kind of lonesome at first because I didn't know anybody and there was no place to go. [laugh] But I got used to it after, and then my second job was waitressing at Prince George Hotel and then the Bus Depot.

Where I was brought up, the name of the place was Water Hen. But I never learned how to swim and I'm scared of water. The only thing I learned how to do is skate. It wasn't a town it was more like a reserve eh. It was ok, until I went to school anyway, I had a one friend, but she was also my cousin eh. So I don't associate with too many kids. We had a school there , but they didn't build it until my early teens. I went to boarding school [at Beauval Sask.] eh and that's where I learnt how to skate 'cause we used to play broom ball, like hockey. Where I went to school we used play against the kids from the village there. Then we had we had

ice carnivals.

Did you enjoy school?

Yes, I wish I would've went to school earlier in childhood like they do now eh. But we never had that chance in our days.

Did you have a favourite teacher in school?

Yes, one, and his name was Edwin McRae. Him and his wife, I stayed with them in Meadow Lake when he was teaching in there and he used to write to me when I first came here. The last time I heard from them it was from Moscow. They're very nice people

So what was school like back then compared to now?

Well the work was easier, it was easier and you didn't have the drugs in schools and stuff like that. When I first started they still had the strap. Matter of fact we had one teacher that really abused it but we never knew eh, that he was an alcoholic. Seems like the kindergartens couldn't do anything right with him. We didn't know that he was half drunk all the time eh. After we got older we find out he was having this problem. I didn't stay long enough in school to know. When I left Meadow Lake I was 15 then I turned 16 in May 1960.

So what is your first memory from childhood?

Holy, I don't really remember. [laugh] I just never thought of trying to remember.

The Dionnes went to play cards with some neighbours, it was winter and the lake was frozen. The moon was shining so bright that it was reflecting off the snow on the lake and the snow was sparkling. It was so white it sparkled and it was very beautiful.

Did you know you're grandparents at all ?

No, the only one I met, in 1957, was my grandfather, from my mom's side, his name was Marcel. He was pretty old already. That was the first time I met him, and that was the last time I seen him. So I really didn't know my grandparents.

Did you know your parents at all?

I knew my mom, I seen her when I was ten years old, in 1953, but she died in August in 1953 [Marie Louise Martel].

Do you remember any bad winters or droughts when you were growing up?

Yes, [laugh] lots of cold winters. [laugh]

What did you think you would do when you grew up?

Work. [laugh] I got married when I was 19, and had my first kid when I was 19. Well, I had an older daughter before that eh but she was step daughter to my deceased husband.

When you were little did you want to get married?

Well not really. [laugh] You know it never crossed my mind.

So your first husband did you meet him in Prince George?

Yeah, and he was also from Meadow Lake. I met him here. A lot of people from Meadow Lake came to Prince George. He died four years ago, and we were married for 31 years, since 1962, September 4. I didn't have no wedding, with my first marriage. He took a half a day off, we went down to the government building, got married and went home and cooked supper. That's it. [laugh]

What was happening in Prince George when you came here?

Well nothing much really... have a few ball games we used to go and watch. I didn't go out that much eh. We'd go berry picking and can them in the fall. I went hunting with my husband a few times.

How is it to be Métis here?

Not any different than any other place.

So how many children did you have?

Well I had seven. My oldest daughter is 36 and my oldest boys going on 35, and then I lost one between my oldest boy and the two girls, she would a been 34 years old in January. And then I got a set of twin girls they're 31 years old. Then I got a set of these twin boys there they're going on 21 years old. Then I quit after the boys. (Flora's children's names and birthdays: Lorraine - Born on September 2, 1959, married to Brian Johnson, her children are David, Shawn and Sarah; Michael Roger - Born on September 16, 1962, married to Colleen Paul, his children are Amy and Ashley; Brenda Amy - Born on January 4, 1963 - Deceased; Donna Marie - Born on August 29, 1965; Doris Marie - Born on August 29, 1965, married to Dennis Crawford, her children are Eric and Taylor; Glen Steven - Born on April 11, 1976; Kenneth Charles - Born on April 11, 1976).

How did you decide on their names?

Well my oldest boy named these two (twin boys) because he used to go to hockey game here eh and he liked the goalie. He picked the names. I never picked the names for the kids.

And my oldest boy his grandmother gave him that name, like he's got his grandpas name, Michael Roger. And she named the two girls too, Donna Marie and Doris Marie. They both have the same second name. [laugh] I couldn't argue with the grandmother. The only one I named was my older daughter Lorraine. And then when the little girl I lost, her name was, I named her too, Brenda Amy.

So what was it like raising children back then ?

Children, it was OK. I had no trouble with them. The only thing, feeding time comes when they both cry you just have to let one cry. Getting up every four hours. Sleep with one eye open. [laugh]

Did you have any dreams for your children ?

I wanted them to have their education eh. They did have their education but I wish they would have gone further.

Do you have some good family memories ?

Yes we used to go camping a lot. The kids really enjoy that. Fishing, and the outdoors.

About Lawrence and when did you meet him?

Well we knew the whole family. I knew them when we came here (to the housing complex). I was sick all the time. I was in Vancouver. I was working in Cloud Nine when I come back and when I first moved here my address was going to be 105. I find out when I moved here it was 101 and my mail used to come to his address.

One day I was washing dishes, my doorbell rang, just after I got home from Vancouver and I couldn't figure out who it was. I look, I check the front door, nobody, and look at my back door and he was standing there, "You got any garbage to go out to the can?" And we switched phone numbers. He was all by himself. And then one night he phoned. One night he phoned me and I fell asleep while we were talking, and my next door neighbour come pounding on the door at one o'clock in the morning and I thought who was ringing my bell? He says, "Lawrence was talking to you on the phone and he was wondering what was the matter?" I still had the receiver off. [laugh] I guess he was worried eh. 'Cause I used to get dizzy spells. It wasn't a boring conversation, but I just fell asleep.

So when did you get married ?

It was two years in March. We had a reception. We had the works. To start with we were gonna have a small wedding in here eh, just the family and a Justice of the Peace. And then he's got a big family and my family and some... it kept getting bigger and bigger. So we had to get a hall we wind up getting a hall. Yeah we had a nice wedding. One of his sister-in-laws made a styrofoam cake for us. That's our wedding pictures up there, which I didn't have

with my first marriage.

When were you happiest?

Well when the kids were born I guess, and I don't know. And when I got married the second time and the first time, even if I had to cook supper at home. [laugh]

What other jobs did you do other than babysitting ?

Well waitress, janitor for 19 years. I worked for Wes & Audrey Walker, and I cooked in the logging camp with my mother-in-law. She was the day shift head cook, and my step father-in-law was the second cook, and then I was night shift head cook. Then I worked at the hospital for ten years, then these guys put a stop to it (her twin boys). It was just kind of hard to get a babysitter, two little kids and somebody that you can trust.

Well so what person most influenced you life ?

I can't say anyone. 'Cause the people that raised me, she died when I was just a kid. So I'm kind of left. I just wanted to get out of that Meadow Lake. I said when I leave this place I'd never come back again to live here.

What advice would you give to your grandchildren ?

Go to school. Have your education. Like these kids we'd push them quite, quite hard eh. Got five of them graduated out of seven, and one died eh, so five out of six. Only one didn't graduate because he become a young father eh.

So what are your best family memories?

Well I guess Christmastime when the kids are all home and in the summer time when you go camping, and going on vacations and that. I asked my husband to bring a tree. He worked in the bush at that time so he got the top off of a very large tree from the forest. It was a very nice tree. It looked like it a bought tree. It was good because it was hard to find nice trees. Most of them would be sad little Charlie Brown trees. The tree from the forest was a good one.

Then they used to play baseball too and I used to cook hamburgers in there. I enjoyed that, watching them play. Babe Ruth. I got a plaque from the president from Babe Ruth for the support. And it was all volunteer work. Like the rest of the parents wouldn't volunteer. That's why I wind up cooking all the time 'cause being two boys and they were on opposite teams sometimes you had baseball every night. And then when they play against each other you have to cheer for both teams. [laugh] Yeah and even when they play against the other team I always cheer for both teams. You don't want to be a poor sport. And to me in that league, kids they're there to enjoy themselves. But some of the parents were very competitive.

Were times hard? When you were raising the kids?

When my husband was always working. You know we were both working. Even though I had, I brought up the kids by myself or I had babysitters. I don't know how many babysitters I fired. [laugh] Like when I worked at the hospital I didn't make that much money neither but my babysitters I payed them pretty good. Sometimes I'd only get \$80.00 a paycheck to myself and the rest of the money went to the babysitter.

J.R., He's my youngest girl's son. I babysat him, and he [her grandson] babysits me too once in a while. When I was sick, a few years back, he came over to stay with me. He goes to school close by. When I broke my arm last year he came to look after his grandma. I've babysat him enough and he's paying me back.

Florence Aubichon

Interviewed by Craig Mitchell and Heidi Standeven in Prince George BC, on April 21, 1997.

I was born at Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, May 1st 1929. I lived in Meadow Lake Saskatchewan until I moved here. I moved in 1962.

Did you meet your husband in Meadow Lake?

Yes. He was born in Green Lake, Saskatchewan. It's not too far from Meadow Lake. My husband passed away May 16, 1990.

Why did you decide to move to Prince George?

My husband came here to work. He had a sister, a nephew, and cousins living here. We lived with my husband's cousin Joe Aubichon for a couple of weeks until we found a place.

Were you sad to leave Meadow Lake?

No. I had my children with me, I was not sad to leave.

Were you born at home?

Yes I was.

Do you remember what your home looked like?

Not when I was born. [laugh] Do you mean as I got older? It was a log house. That I can remember. Two rooms.

Would you say it was a big log cabin, or a small log cabin?

Well, it wasn't big and it wasn't small. As a kid everything looks big.

When you were growing up did you do chores to help your mother?

Well we had to haul wood and snow. We would melt the snow for water to wash with.

Did you have relatives living close by when you were living in Meadow Lake?

Yes. I had uncles, aunts, and some cousins.

Do you remember what Meadow Lake was like when you were young?

Well there wasn't much there. It was pretty quiet. There was a Rodeo every year. The town wasn't big. It had a couple of restaurants and a couple of stores, and bars of course. That was about it.

What do you think was the most important thing to happen to you before you were 21?

I got married and started having children. That's it. That's all there is. I had five boys and one girl in Meadow Lake. After we moved I had two more girls. I had eight children altogether. We lost a son in 1972. He was in a car accident.

How old were you when you left home?

I left home when I was married.

Do you remember when you and your husband were married?

Yes, March 11, 1946. At Our Lady of Peace Church in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. It wasn't that big of a wedding. It was very small. We were married in a chapel. After the wedding we had a dinner and a dance. It was just family and a few friends. Nothing Fancy.

Did you have a honeymoon?

No.

What would you say is the best memory of your wedding day?

Getting stuck going up to church . [laugh] It was muddy and the church was up the hill. They had to push us. It was a Model A or T.

Did people have to travel far to come to your wedding?

No.

You said you had eight children?

Lester, Darlene, Larry, Victor, Lloyd. He's the son we lost. Vernon, Deneen and Leila.

How did you choose your children's names?

Someone else always seemed to choose their names, except for Victor. I thought I'd name him after his dad . [laugh] Deneen... I was watching TV one day and I heard that name. The oldest boy, Lester, named Leila.

Do you remember what it was like raising your children in Meadow Lake?

It wasn't that bad. You didn't have to worry about them. You knew everybody. It wasn't that big of a place. So you knew they were playing with friends.

Do you have any special memories of your family you'd like to share?

At Christmas when we are all together. Now, I've got a small place and I usually go to one of the kids' for Christmas, which is great because it is easier for me.

When you were raising your family did you have to work and raise your children?

No. I stayed at home. I never worked until 1972. Then I got a janitorial job at the Oxford Building downtown. I worked there for 15 years.

When were you the happiest? While you were raising your children?

I guess it was when they were all at home safe and sound. That was the best.

What advice would you offer your grandchildren?

I could, but I don't think they would take it . [laugh]

What about Métis culture? Did you learn Cree?

No. My husband spoke Cree, but he did not teach the children, all they speak is English. I will say that I've learned a lot since I joined the Métis Elders in Prince George. I joined their society in 1990 and I really enjoy it.

How many grandchildren do you have?

Oh, don't ask me [laugh]! Twenty-one and I also have great-grandchildren.

Do all your children live in Prince George?

Yes, except Vern. He lives on Vancouver Island.

Is it important for you to have your family close by?

Yes, it's nice to have them close by. I don't see them all that often. They're busy working, busy with their families.

You babysit your grandchildren don't you?

Yes. I babysit one for one girl every weekend. This is one of my grandsons here, J.R. He's my youngest girl's son. I babysat him, and he [her grandson] babysits me too once in a while. When I was sick, a few years back, he came over to stay with me. He goes to school close by. When I broke my arm last year he came to look after his grandma. I've babysat him enough and he's paying me back. That's what grandchildren are for, to help out when I need them.

... that must have been what they call they Hungry '30s. Everybody was hard up eh. There was no work and white people started coming into the Indians hunting places. 'Cause, I remember my uncle didn't have to go very far into the bush to kill a moose, when we were young... There was plenty of wild meat and stuff like that. But them days like, like my family killed a cow, or beef, and the neighbours, they went from house to house. Gave them a chunk of meat eh. Share and share alike. And then they do the same thing. Even when they kill a moose, if two guys get together like, and you know, they each get half. Then they divide that meat into needy people. Mostly old people like. And they'd cook up a whole big meal and would go and eat. That's what we used to have.

Gertie Ragan

Interviewed by Trina Chivilo and Tanya Kirkland in Prince George BC, on April 3, 1997.

I was born at May 3, 1922, at McLennan, Alberta. I was born at my grandparents house by a... maybe my grandmother and another woman, you would have called her a midwife, you know when the child is born at home. There were hardly any doctors in them days. So we helped one another.

How many people lived there?

I was the only child and let's see, there would have been my grandmother, my granddad, and my mom, and one of my uncles that would have lived in that log house. I lived with them, like I said on the back there, until I was fifteen. I slept with my grandma. In the day time there were no cradles or cribs in those days, so they make a swing for a kid in the day and at night we sleep with them. We had some wooden beds that my grandfather made. We used anything, straw or feathers for the mattress, you know.

What was it like outside your house?

In Alberta? You had lots of room, you had lots of yard. There were no lots, nothing, just a homestead or whatever you call it. We always had a garden. There was a lake, but you couldn't drink it. That's why they called it Stinging Lake. It was no good to drink. We had to use water from the sloughs, from the muskeg. And whoever lived close to the river used the river water. But we had to haul our drinking from the muskeg. In a barrel, you know for cooking. But we had a slough out back where we lived, but it wasn't fit to drink

What is your first memory of childhood?

The only important thing to me was to start school and learn how to talk English. I understood... you see my dad was a white man, and I understood him when he talked to me in English but I would answer him in Cree. So it was kinda hard for me when I started school

like we had to learn English and French, and we talked Cree.

I also remember washing clothes, scrubbing floors and hunting ducks and rabbits, go hunting with my granddad and that was all there was...

My granddad was Charlie Ghostkeeper and my grandmother was Theresa, her maiden name was Cartier. You know, Jacques Cartier, that was her maiden name. Now speaking of Kathleen, that was the house they lived in, and they both died there (referring to a picture).

What an amazing picture.

And that's the only picture, oh look at the dust, you could write your name on the frame. My grandparents they are the ones that raised me. Our house burned down in Alberta, and I lost all my old pictures and stuff like that. My daughter was working at the hospital and she had some of them, and that's how this survived. And when we moved here one of my daughters took it to West Studios and he blew it up you know in a bigger picture. I wanted colour, some nice flowers into the background, but this woman told me your crazy, if that's where they lived and both died in there then that's the way you want it.

My grandparents were married but I don't know when. They had three daughters about six boys, and the three girls. One of them was my mother.

What work did your grandparents do?

Well that now see, grandpa he didn't work out like my grandmother. When they had a farm, like where I said they moved out from Grande Prairie? They had a farm there of course, and you know what farm work is? And when they moved to McLennan they didn't have nothing. Just live eh. Hunting you know. They build roads, you know they work on the road building highways and stuff like that. They were cutting brush and burning for other people, to make a few... a dollar a day or a dollar a week.

Where were they born?

They were born I don't know. That's a good question, they never said. It has been quite a few years since they died. They talked about hunting and how they lived you know.

Where your grandparents religious?

Definitely, we had to walk to church whether it was rain or sunshine or sixty below. We had to attend Catholic church regular Sundays you know.

My grandmother, what she did was tan hides and make moccasins to sell for groceries and my granddad trapped and hunt ducks you know. We had a little farm, we had cows and pigs and chickens in a small holding, we had enough to survive. Like we didn't have to buy eggs or milk and they would kill pork from the pig you know. Lots of wild game, lots, and you didn't have to go far to get a moose, you know and there was lots of rabbits and lots of partridge

and where we lived by the lake there in the spring there were all these birds that would come back geese, swans, ducks and all that, then we would go hunting there. My granddad had a row boat and there was an island not far and we used to go shooting ducks over there.

Did your grandma teach you how to bead?

Yeah and my aunt. I had done the bead work for my grandmother. Then she made moccasins like me and Mrs. J. Then she would sell the moccasins or gloves whatever they would make. And you know what, she charges \$60.00 now for a pair of moccasins, the wrap arounds whatever, but, she has little bead work. But years ago my grandmother used to make them plain moccasins they call them, plain moccasins and you know how much they got for them... twenty-five cents for a pair of moccasins.

Mrs. J pays four hundred and something, it all depends on what size of moose hide, and she had a heck of a time to sell it for five bucks in my days, but five bucks was lots of money though. You could get lots of things for five bucks. Like my grandparents they finally got so old that they can't do nothing, you call it... relief? Like they get ten dollars a piece, twenty dollars a month for the two of them and they would go and grocery shop from Kathleen or wherever they lived, to McLennan with a team and wagon, talk about groceries they bought. They would do them for a whole month. Because they got their own meat you can get your own meat and vegetables so twenty dollars went a long way. For ten pounds of lard it was fifty cents. You know by telling people now what the price of groceries were... it was... you could get a pound of butter for five cents because everyone had their own cows and they make their own butter hey. They called dairy butter. Ten cents for eggs. Oh me and Mrs. Jobin we get together and talk eh about the price we paid for stuff like that. You get a nickel for oh what do you call it?... You know spending money. You might get twenty-five cents or whatever was spared after groceries. Even a bag of candy that much would cost you a nickel. Good candy, not like the junk they have now. And peppermint and that, two different kinds. The old people used to buy the peppermint, that's why they call them Grandma's candy. And that's how much spending money we had.

Well when I first started working some places you would be paid twenty-five cents a day and gradually it went up to fifty cents a day and in a month you might make twelve or fifteen dollars, and you would go shopping and you would buy a lot of clothes. The first clothing I had bought they called it a swagger with a skirt suit and you know with the 3/4 length jacket, and I maybe paid not even five dollars. It was tan. It came in two colours tan and a rosewood. So that was my first suit. you paid seventy-five cents for Oxfords and you used to get rayon stockings for twenty-five cents. So you could be dressed from head to toes for not even twenty dollars. Dresses were fifty cents seventy-five cents cotton ones. It's unbelievable. But then you look at all the work a woman had to do: tanning hides and beading that's lots of work. I know because I helped my grandma and my aunt tanning hides. All that beading and sewing, and fifty cents for a pair of well-beaded moccasins. Gloves those long gloves whatever you call them, I think they were seventy-five cents. Now Mrs. J can sell them for fifty bucks. But then she's got to make a few cents like, she pays so much for a hide and she pays me, used to pay me ten dollars and now she has come down

to eight. But she pays me eight dollars for a pair. Cause she's got too much other bead work to do for her nephew. This way it gives me... it's quite a lot of time and work but... she buys the hide for four-fifty and sells the moccasins for fifty-sixty bucks.

Do you remember what accomplishments your grandparents were proud of?

When they kill a moose and get together, you know a family gathering, a group gathering, that's what they were proud of. And their grandchildren. They already raised all their children and then I came. I was the first grandchild with my grandparents eh. And then my other cousin came alone and the same thing happened. Her mother died when she was just two months old, so her and I were brought up together, by our grandparents as two sisters. And just living with their grandchildren and their family. What else is there to be proud of? Lots to eat.

Is there anything else you wanted to add about your parents?

Well I couldn't think about anything else. Well I got nothing to say about my parents cause I don't remember them and all I know is my grandparents, so...

Do you know how your grandparents met?

Well, I guess like any other people they didn't really, they were, old people them days they were shy, they were kind of scared to talk to, talk about anything to the younger generation like you know, like they had maybe too much pride or whatever. You know, cause they didn't really talk about, only everyday living, you know. Like, what else could they talk about cause it's the only... they went to dances, pow-wows, and you know, go camping and hunting trips in the fall, and go and kill moose and dry their, dry meat and you know for their winter preserves.

Were they strict with you?

Really, not kidding. I had to work my head off in the morning until night if I wanted to go dancing. You had to earn it. Then that you're not to go alone, you had to have an elder person to be with you like to watch over you eh. For fear of boys going to kiss you or something. They were strict. They weren't mean but they just, you know had to show that they cared about you and loved you. They didn't want anything to happen to you.

What were some of the things that they taught you?

Hunting and sewing, how to make a garden, you know, that's all. Me and my cousin that were raised together there, Mabel, we done outside work mainly. You know we worked outside cut wood and help our uncle make hay, you know, in the winter time you haul snow and melt snow and cut wood and bring it in the house and when my other cousins come to live with us years after, the oldest one was a cook. She done the cooking and the sewing. The other one was sickly. So there was me and Mabel. Her and I were just like sisters, we

were brought up together. And we worked outside like boys. Yup, milk cows. We had to milk cows before we went to school. That was our chores.

So you did have a cousin living with you, in your grandparents house and then you had an uncle and an aunt living there too?

No not after eh, that was just when I was born. There was just my mom, her parents and her brother. But then when my mom died first, then my aunt died. But she wasn't living with us, she had her own place. She was married, had her own place and she this... I think I was a year old when she [Mabel] was born and she was two months old, same age as me when her mom died so we were both adopted together with our grandparents. So her and I didn't know we were first cousins until we were about twelve years old. So like her and I were raised together. Until the day she died she was my sister. She is still my sister.

Where did your parents meet?

They met in McLennan I guess. Where I was born. My dad was a Blacksmith but ahh, my mother died when I was just a baby. My dad had his own place, but I was adopted you see, I didn't live with my dad. I know who he was. He died when I was twelve years old.

Do you know where he was from?

Actually... I think he was from Edmonton. 'Cause that's where he went back to when my mother died. He went back to Edmonton and worked down there in the... and I kinda lost track of him 'cause he wanted to take me when he left, but my grandparents wouldn't let him. So all these years you know we were kinda separated, and a friend of his from McLennan told me when he passed away in Edmonton, but you see they couldn't notify us because they didn't know our address. So that's what happened with him.

What did you like to do as a child?

Go dancing I guess. Um hmm. You know. That's about the only thing. We didn't have no basketball or different activities like that, like they do now eh. The only place we went was uh, to a little dance, to a *mochagin*,... what do you call it? You know, how... not even a, a hall, just somebody's house.

Like the people used to, they didn't have very much furniture, maybe a table and chairs and bed and that and that. Haul that out, pile it up outside, cover it with a tent and make fences around the house, or in that, the middle part is a dance floor. Birthday party, wedding or something like that. And that, that's the only place we went. We never went to a show, 'cause we lived seven miles from uh, McLennan eh. And I think the shows were twenty cents at that time. Uh, silent movies, whatever you call it. Black, black and white. And there was a lot of comical things though eh. And even move real fast eh.

All I could remember from instrument, was a violin and a guitar. Very rarely we seen a banjo.

And an organ, some people that was a little better off had an organ, and you peddle with your feet. So the only music we had when they had them little, those dances, was violin and guitar. Fiddle and guitar and... jigging and square dancing and all them old time dances. There was no jitterbug, I don't know, maybe that's jigging. [laugh]

So McLennan was the nearest village or the nearest town?

Yeah. Yeah. We had a store and a round house there, that's where the, the trains fired, split, one to Peace River, one to Grande Prairie, so there was a round house there. One to Edmonton eh. Passengers and freight trains. Now there's nothing... did have a freight train maybe once a month, since the truckers started, trains just went down.

Were there bad winters or droughts when you were growing up?

40,60 below in the wintertime. And you're out there snow up to your waist cutting firewood. Pack it onto this, load it onto the sleigh. And come and dump it in the yard and me and my sister, well, these big cross wood saws, cutting firewood our little sweets off. Pile wood up and that, that would be gone before morning. You had to get dressed and cut some more wood to keep warm. They were cold days.

What kind of child were you?

Well, just, just me and my cousin mainly, together all the time eh. Went to school together, played together, worked together. And we were both spoiled, but I think I was spoileder than her. [laugh] I was the oldest. Have my own way, dried up, and I, but I never got a lickin'. Just simple, obey or you know, get the willow.

What were your teenage years like?

Well, we worked. And uh, like I say we'd go dancing, you know. That's about the only thing. We played ball just, you know, just like school kids. That's the only entertainment we had. No basketball, no skating. We couldn't, I didn't learn how to skate and, we couldn't learn how to swim because that boggy water there, you know. So I couldn't swim a stroke, stroke, I started skating once in McLennan there with other kids and I was gonna take off like they did and I went on my ass and broke my tail bone, that was the end of that. That was the end of that, skating period. It was (clap), just like that eh. That was the end of my skating career. You couldn't sit properly and, hurts and, especially when you bend over and pick up something. Oh... The worst.

What did you think you would do when you grew up?

Not to have any kids. I didn't want to have any kids after babysitting for that woman with nine kids. I had to wash clothes and cook for them 'cause she was a seamstress and her husband was a dry cleaner eh. You know, they had dry cleaning. And I was a mother and dad to them kids from morning until night. And I used to think that no, well, they had power,

and I used to think when I grew up I'm never have one kid. And that's why, it's a coincidence that I went home there after I had them, that many kids and I ran into her. And she said, "How many kids did you end up with Gertie?" I said, "15." "Oh," she said, "who was it used to talk loose and said that you'd never have any kids." Well, she's dead now. That's the sister-in-law to Mrs. T. Yeah. So I end up with 15 kids anyway whether I wanted them or not I just had them I guess. They're all grown up.

What was the most important thing that happened to you before you were 21?

Got married and had kids. My oldest one was born in 1940. See, I got married October the 3rd in uh, '39. And he was born October the 16th, 1940. So I must have been 19. So, and uh, I had another one 15 months after that. I was 42 when I had my 15th one. And she asked me, "How old, how old were you when you had me Mom?" And my other daughter was sitting here, Connie. And I said, "Connie," I said, "figure it out now," I said, "how old I was when I, like from the year to then eh." And she said uh, "Oh Mom was only 42." Wendy, that's the baby, I was sitting on a rocking chair and she walked past me and tapped me on the back, "You dirty pig!" I says, "Why'd you call me dirty pig?" She said, "You were too old to have kids." I said, "Well, lucky," I said, "I had you now look who..." she was about 15. "Sorry Mom." [laugh]

What did you do that you were most proud of before you were 21?

Got married, I wasn't very proud of getting married but when I had my first child I was proud, you know. He was born in a hospital. But I did have five kids born at home.

What was your greatest disappointment?

When I got married and I had to leave my grandparents behind. Like, you know, that was my biggest disappointment, to leave them behind, in my books.

Did you go to school?

Yes. It's a country school like, you know. It was in that Kathleen area. A big school made out of logs. That's where we went to school. Maybe 25 students, I think I could count them on my fingers. There's, let's see, four of us and about four English, and uh, three French kids, that's uh, no, maybe five French kids, and one Ukranian. About 25-30. The most would be 31, because they grow older they quit school eh.

Did you enjoy school?

Oh yeah. We had a French teacher from High Prairie. As a matter of fact we had the French teacher, woman, a real old lady. She use to have a strict, kids that misbehave got the treatment. Well, you stand in the corner, very rarely that you had a strapping. Or give you a bunch of homework or something. You know. Like, punishment, you have to learn.

Could you speak Cree in your class? (No). What happened if you spoke Cree?

Nothing, we, the other kids asked us, our Cree language you know. And we'd talk to them in Cree, you know, and they'd answer in English or French. I was in grade two in French. And we had to write sentences in French too and uh English. It was kinda hard eh. After I quit school I forgot.

Did you get into trouble in school?

Only once. Me and my friend there, my best friend pulled up this French, French girl's skirt. [laugh] That was a bad thing to do eh. They had one of those black, black pleated skirts and uh, it looked like men's boots. Skinny little legs. Her name was Jacklyn, poor little thing. We were playing outside and nobody, none of us girls wore slacks, no. Dresses eh. And she had this pleated skirt and we lifted her skirt, that was embarrassing for her eh, and she went and told the teacher in French. I don't know what all she said, but me and Florence had to stay in at recess. Gotta put our hands out like that, we got... ruler. A yard stick. But that was only once. And uh, we never played hooky or anything like that. We all played out in the yard and, in the you know, we played ball, hide and go seek, whatever. Hopscotch. That was our entertainment out of school.

You had to obey your teacher, listen to what she tells you 'cause she's your teacher eh. And we were taught the same thing at home, obey your parents and you obey your teacher you got, like we'd say, "Oh we're not going to school," something like that and my grandparents would know what's about eh. It's just about being lazy, didn't want to go to school. But we had to. Winter, summer. When it was too cold for us to walk they took us in a little sleigh. A sleigh with a caboose and a heater. You know, when it was real cold. Same with going to church. We were glad when school was out and we were glad to go back too.

And we had a lot of homework. Arithmetic and spelling. If you had your spelling wrong, wrong words, then you had to copy them over and over again and recite them until... and we used to learn how to sing nursery rhymes, whatever, you know. And go stand in front of the class their and recite your poem. After we done our chores and had supper then we'd, then our homework. And there was no electricity eh. We had to do it when we had daylight. And uh, my cousin there, she was the oldest, and she went up to, oh, I forget what grade, she went up to grade six, I think. But she was way smarter than we were and she kinda helped us along with our homework eh. And helped, 'cause my grandparents couldn't.

I was 15 when I went to go to work in McLennan. Babysitting. I washed dishes in a restaurant too, my very first job. Fifty cents a day. Wash dishes in a restaurant and make beds. Just a little small restaurant eh. And set the tables. Wash the dishes, set the tables, change table cloths and uh, make the beds. The beds, the rooms are fifty cents a night. I had an aunt uh, my mom's first cousin lived in town in McLennan. And I stayed with my cousins, like second cousins. And they were also working and I got a job through them. This aunt used to do laundry for this uh, Peggy was her name. A little old lady eh, she was cook and she had a restaurant. And uh my aunt, she done the laundry for her all by scrubbing by

hand and one of those old washers, you know, swing back and forth. And put them through the ringer.

Did you enjoy it?

Yeah. Well, we, you're getting paid. And go shopping when you get paid. See you didn't get paid every day, you get paid by the month. And, come of average about \$15.00 is it? Fifty cents a day seven days a week. No, not on Sunday. Boarding house we worked on Sundays washing dishes.

Did they give you time off to go to church?

On Sunday? If they didn't they'd be murdered. Had to go to church in the morning. Like if we, if we had to work on Sunday we go to church first then. Everybody went to church them days.

How old were you when the Depression began, you must have been little eh?

Hungry '30s. They call it Hungry '30s. Yeah, that's when my grandparents uh, no they didn't, were they on relief then? No. No. They, when they moved to Kathleen that's when they started getting help because they didn't have no chickens, no stock, like you know. Just, and they didn't get their old age pension until way after because they had to search for baptism papers and all that. So in the meantime, that's what they called relief like, you know. They get \$10.00 a month, you know, for upkeep. And that must have been what they call they Hungry '30s. Everybody was hard up eh. There was no work and white people started coming into the Indians hunting places. 'Cause uh, I remember my uncle didn't have to go very far into the bush to kill a moose. When we were young, you know. There was plenty of wild meat and stuff like that. Besides, you kill a beef and pork. But then uh, when you haven't got a fridge or uh freezer, it was pretty hard eh. But them days like, like my family killed a cow, or beef, and the neighbours, they went from house to house. Gave them a chunk of meat eh. Share and share alike. And then they do the same thing. Even when they kill a moose, if two guys get together like, and you know, they each get half. Then they divide that meat into needy people. Mostly old people like. And they'd cook up a whole big meal and would go and eat. That's what we used to have. Cook, even cook outside. Cook bannock outside and something different like, you know. Well that's how people cooked their food years ago, before they had stoves.

Do you remember what was happening for you during World War II?

I don't remember. I know one of my uncles was in the army, but he never went overseas. He never went to war. But he was in the army.

Did your first husband, did he go off to war?

Yeah. I was raising a kid during the second world war. Raising kids. We met a month before I got married. 1939 I got married in High Prairie, Alberta. Them days I wasn't old enough to get married without my parents signature. Yeah. So we had to go right from Faust in a taxi to High Prairie to get married. And we were interviewed to the priest there I had to have my parents signature. So we had to go to High Prairie all the way to Kathleen to pick up my grandparents and we had to get back to Faust and there was no room for my grandparents to come with us, so we dropped them off in High Prairie there, right on the church steps. But they, my granddad had a brother lived in town, so it was walking distance from the church, they didn't have to, for they know where to go eh. But that was the saddest part. Like you know, see the two of them sitting on the church steps. And uh, I didn't really know what the heck I was getting married. You know, I just met a guy and you're married. Cried like a little kid. I just even hated him. You know, because my parents were my, my parents. Nothing better.

How many children did you have?

Ten girls and five boys.

What was it like raising children back then?

Hard. A lot of work. It was kind of hard in a, you know, hard times. You got to wash your clothes by hand and everything, no electricity. I was all by myself. My grandparents died when my two oldest kids were young. After that I was just on my own. And my kids helped me as they grew up like, you know. I sure had a lot of help. Oh, but we managed you know. We find enough to eat and clothe our kids with what little amount we had. I think it was easier to raise a big family then uh, just the one. I had more help and like hand-me-downs eh. And they weren't too choosy because they had to use what they got. Not like nowadays. Even my granddaughter here. She's got stacks of clothes she's got piled up that she can't wear and she wants newer things. When some of my kids never even had that much to wear when they were that age. All mostly hand-me-downs.

Were all your kids baptized in the Catholic church?

Yeah. I had some of them baptized all together, no, five baptized all together when I moved here. Let's see. Three girls and the twins were baptized here. And the little one had the candle, held the candle on top. The priest, raised her up and held her there and she had, and we never had no cameras, nothing. That would have been nice.

What other jobs did you do?

Like uh, outside of home? Yeah well, it was hard doing housework and raising kids and uh, I washed dishes in the restaurant here and Edson, Alberta. That was about the only outside work I ever did.

You didn't do beading back then? For money, to sell?

No before, when I was a young girl. But after I got married and started raising kids I didn't have time to do beadwork. Busy washing. But I used to knit socks and mitts for them. Yeah. In my little spare time. And sew clothes for them. Now I don't do anything like that. 'Cause if I made anything they wouldn't be satisfied.

But material is so expensive.

Yeah. Well, that's what I say. You go and look at a material at Fanny's there and when you have to get a pattern and time for your work. You can buy a blouse maybe \$9-10.00 like, you know, just for every day. Well, of course, maybe better material if you buy it at the fabric store eh. But I'm not that handy. You lost interest of anything like that as you get older eh. Not like when the kids were small and all they needed this and that, they gotta have this and you get to work. I used to sew by hand. You know, before I had a sewing machine. And maybe stay up all night trying to finish what they were gonna out on them for a special occasions like. You know. I don't know, now the kids are all grown up and I'm by myself, I don't even do patchwork anymore. Well, I'm busy with these but now, if I had a little better sewing machine, I don't like this sewing machine. It's kind of heavy eh. I like them light ones. Maybe I do more patchwork.

When were you happiest?

I used to be sad now and then you know. But uh, you , when your kids are all healthy and happy-go-lucky, you're happy along with them, you know. I was lucky, I was fortunate with all the kids I raised, they hardly ever got sick. Well, of course the flu and stuff like that, but I mean to be really sick and hospitalized. No. It was only my oldest girl that had tonsils out.

What person most influenced your life?

My grandparents I guess, what they taught me as I grew up and all that eh.

What advice would you give your grandchildren?

Get up in the morning, get ready for school. Get all the education you can get. And don't miss a day. That's my duty now, get up in the morning, "Get up, get up." And uh, sometimes I tell her I'm gonna make a record just stay in bed and put that record on. "It's time to get up! It's eight o'clock!" [laugh] But still, I told her, I said, "Maybe it won't be no use," I said, "I'll still be awake eh." No, she just times herself exactly, jump out of bed and get her clothes on, in the bathroom, brush her hair, brush her teeth, and out she comes in ten minutes. 'Cause everything is ready there for her in the morning eh. She doesn't fuss with her hair anymore, now. Or any makeup eh. So that's quick. And she has her breakfast on the table in time for them to pick her up. She's ready in 20 minutes. "Give yourself half an hour," I said, "sit around and wake up, you know, before you have to go to school." Anyway, that's how it goes...

How many grandchildren do you have Gertie?

Oh, let's see, about 33, 35. I didn't really count them lately. About, take a while to count them. And great-grandchildren... I count ten. Just lately they start to come.

So when you have Christmas' and stuff do you all get together or do you get together once a year?

We haven't had a family dinner together since, in '88 when the old man was here. Since then everybody's got their own dinner's and maybe sometimes I got up to eat dinner. I never, this is the first time at Easter that I had cooked a little turkey. Just for me and T. and... D. isn't even home, she was at her mom's but K. and her husband and the kid came. That's the first time we had dinner here like, you know, for Easter. Before when all the grandkids were here little grandchildren, it was just like Grand Central eh. Oh God. We had tables right from here to the end. No more of that since the old man left.

Lets talk about the places you lived now, when did you go to High Prairie?

High Prairie? We lived there for a little while, long enough to have a baby. And from then we moved again to a logging camp. And from the logging camp we moved to uh, where the kids could to go school that was in called Reno. Up north, in Alberta. And from there I had to go the hospital again to have another kid, Patsy, was born in Peace River. And it was about 50-60 below. I had to stay another, extra days before I could come home because it was too cold for me to come home with the baby. And from there we moved to another place again, where in the heck did we move to? Back to High Prairie? High Prairie to Snake Lake. Oh, too many places. Snake Lake, Kathleen, Mackenzie... from uh, I don't have to go through them all, I don't think. Too many. Like I said before, we have to go where uh, my old man could get to work. We got bread and butter. Where we can get bread and butter, living, and uh why did you move there? He was a logger.

So when you made the moves, when you went to different places and stuff, how'd you get there?

Mostly by team and wagon, until we got a car. First time we had a car we were going sugar beeting in Lethbridge. Anyway, we went there to haul sugar beets for the summer holidays, you know. And uh, we stayed there until school started, then we moved to a place named uh, Big Prairie. That's where my old man's dad lived. And we lived there for... I had, let's see. We lived there, I had four kids. It's just a small, that was the name of the post office. Like you know, it was out in the country.

Your husband's dad, did he have a homestead out there?

Yeah. A little farm. Couple of cows, goats, chickens, pigs. That was half of our living right there, like you know. And at the same time my husband was building a log house and my

oldest boy went out to go to work, to help out, and my father-in-law was also skidding and I was the cook and raising kids. Washing clothes. Cooking.

Do you remember when you got, did you get a car when you were down in Lethbridge? What kind of car did you get?

Chevy. I don't know what year. It was a car with four tires and a steering wheel. First time we ever had a car.

Do you remember what year that was?

That's where I should mark all their birthdays, like you know, when they were born. I know the date, the month. But the year? The only ones I memorize is the oldest one and the youngest one, what year they were born. And uh, even Wendy was born in '64, Cindy 1961, and Brenda would have been, she's older than the twins. '58 and '59. That's when we moved to Big Prairie eh. We had all them kids there. And my husband went logging again in Rocky Mountain House. And we moved to Rocky Mountain House. And we moved to Rocky Mountain House in 1959 it would be because Cindy was born there in 1961. [Gertie's children: Marcel 1940, Robert 1942, Violet 1943, Lloyd 1945, Marline 1948, Teresa 1950, Patsy 1952, Connie 1953, Shirley 1954, Susie 1956, Brenda 1958, Lester and Leslie 1959, Cindy 1961, Wendy 1964]. To Rocky Mountain House, where are we now? From there, like, well, that's how we moved from Rocky to Wildwood, that's in Alberta. We had to go there because that's where he had a job. Yeah, and then Wildwood. It's about 100 miles, 100 and some miles from Edmonton, here's Edson right here. Just put that we moved to Edson. Never mind Wildwood because we didn't live there very long. Just put Edson, Alberta. That's where we lived for, from Rocky to Edson, see Rocky and Edson, Wildwood is in between there somewhere's. You can go through it with a wagon through bush country to get there. And Edson, we lived there for maybe two years. And then from Edson we moved to Nakusp. And then from Nakusp to here. And I haven't moved since.

So when you were moving to places, like Rocky to Edson and stuff, did you have family in those places?

I guess eh. All my family went with me.

I also mean did you have family that was already living there that you went and saw?

No, no. Strange town, and my kids had to begin right, mostly like, from the beginning eh. They had to make new friends and different places go through. That's why my kids, none of them really finished school to graduate because too many moves eh. In some places they had to catch the bus, they had to pack lunch. Like from, when we lived in Rocky Mountain House, we moved out of Rocky Mountain House, well, seven miles in a little place called Farrier. We bought a place there but we got burned down the same year. And they had to take the bus from there to Rocky. And that's when we had to move from Rocky Mountain House to Wildwood because my husband had a job there. And it wasn't easy you know,

moving with all those kids. Most of the times we moved with team and wagon or we got somebody with a truck to move us. Well, before we hit the Lethbridge, that's how we travelled from place to place, with team and wagon. Pitch up a tent on the way and camp there and you know. We lived hillbilly style. Hillbilly style. [laughs] And it seems that everybody was happy, you know, kids just playing in the wild open, wide open spaces. When we first moved to town here, I thought I was, I pretty near had a nervous breakdown. I had to run to the doctor and get some nerve pills. Too many kids, you know, and I was used to living out of town. And so many things they could get into here and we had about these places before, it was awful. You get kind of used to it. Troubling, troubling. Yeah.

What did you do when you first arrive there? (Reading the question from a paper). What a foolish question. What does a person do? Look for a place to live and, you know. It wasn't easy when you have a big family. A lot of people wouldn't rent you a house unless no children or just a couple. Well, we kept on looking until we got a house, on Fourth Avenue there. It's not there anymore, but it was a great big house.

But in places like Rocky and Edson and most place, were you living in logging camps and stuff?

In Rocky Mountain House we lived in a house in town. And from Farrier we bought that little house there, it used to be an old store and a post office. But the people moved away and it was up for sale so we bought it. And then we got it all settled there, maybe a year, Christmastime everything went to the ground. Yeah. And then they moved us back to town, in Rocky.

Who's they? The company?

The people that helped, volunteered. And he worked there, cut props, whatever you call props for maybe a year. See, we had to follow where the logging went. Like from Rocky down to Wildwood. The guy he worked for moved to that place, he was from there. So anyway, he got a house for us. To move into, and that's how it worked. Same with Edson. It was not much of a house, but it's a roof over our head eh. It was really too small for my family, but we managed, until we moved to Nakusp. Nakusp was mostly white and Japanese, and Chinese. There was no Indians there. But there was lots, the ones that went to work for Hydro eh. A lot of Native people families were there.

Oh my God, coming from Alberta, like Edson, Alberta. There was my granddad, father-in-law's car and a friend of ours car. Two cars. And my son-in-law with a pick-up. When he moved us from Edson to Nakusp. That's when I told you that the kids that we knew lived in Armstrong. The other kids said to my kids, "You guy's family move like the Clampets." All tied to the top of the pick-up. That just remind me how true it is. [laughs] You couldn't get mad because they kind of said a mouthful eh. But these kids well, they're white people eh. And they have a nice home and all that, you know, and us, we didn't have a home, we were just on the road. Looking for a home. And we had a big house there, apple trees and fruit trees and everything. In Nakusp eh. And the kids got so used to looking at the fruit, too

much. In Alberta I used to cut an apple in half or four to make it go around, little package of apples we buy eh. Then they use them for baseball. Throw apples there, bat. Apples just laying on the ground, I couldn't believe it after being in Alberta eh. And the way the water was running from the mountains.

How long did you stay in Nakusp?

About a year and a half. Yeah, we spent one Christmas there. And then we moved to Armstrong. And Armstrong, we spent one Christmas there and then that's when we moved here.

Was your husband working for BC Hydro?

That's when he first started working for Hydro, was in Nakusp. And then from here, I remained here and then he went to Rupert. And that was the end of Hydro. And again after that, when they were finished with the job over there, then he came back to Prince George and went logging here until he died. About nine years. Camp maintenance. A camp job. Look after everything like, you know. Cook's helper or whatever. Camp maintenance 'cause he looked after the power saws and all that. Sharpen them and everything. So, he didn't have no hard work after that. And that was it.

Did you ever live in communities where there was a lot of Métis people?

Yeah, when I was growing up. But after we moved here and there, you're mixed people as I say. French, white, Ukranian, name it, Chinese. My childhood is, we're mostly all Native in that area where we lived. It's all Natives. And they visit one another. After you grow up and be on your own you're all over the place.

My grandfather was the person that most influenced my life, because he never saw barriers only opportunities. For instance when I was very young we used to sit on the beach and we'd look across the lake and we'd have deep moments. He'd give me a cigarette, well a rollie, and I'd be sitting there and couldn't smoke. Listening to Grandfather, and sit and have a thought. He'd say, "When you go to Paris I want you to climb on top of the Eiffel tower and spit off it, because on D-day I was on the very top of the Eiffel tower, and we were so happy we spit off the tower and threw our hats off the top." I probably never would have went to Paris if it wasn't for my grandfather telling me that. So I did. But, I couldn't get to the top, they were repairing it, and so it was sort of mid-way where I spit. I don't think the French were impressed.

Grandmother and Grandfather Morin

(as told by Jean Morin)

Interviewed by Sara Geirholm & Amanda Smashnuk, Prince George, March 14, 1997⁵.

My grandfather trapped and my grandmother was a midwife. My grandmother was born in Black River and my grandfather was from Stanley Mission. My second child I named after my grandfather, Alexander, so that's why my daughter's name is Alexandria. My grandmother's name was Frances Morin, so I made sure that her name wasn't forgotten, by also naming one of my children after her. I realize now that I did a lot of the things that my grandmother did with her children. For example, I made this Indian swing and I had them outside while I worked in the garden.

I was delivered by my grandmother in a house, or cabin, I guess you could say, but that sounds kind of rustic. Really it was the house that they lived in when they went fishing on the lake. So my mother went into labour and they delivered me. I was raised by my grandparents, in between when I was at boarding schools. So it's a little complicated. They raised their family and then they inherited me. When I was growing up, my grandmother believed strongly that I should be raised as a well instructed Roman Catholic.

My grandparent's original home, that was on Lake Winnipeg, was log, it was built in 1890, and it was huge. It was two story, it was clay chinked and white washed. It had a plank floor. It would have probably had six bedrooms so that will give you an idea of its size, and it had a large sitting room. And that house was just torn down a little while ago. It lasted a long time and it housed many different people over the years. It stood for a long time, almost a hundred years, and it was hand built.

My grandmother used to look after the travelling priests when they came through on their way to marry and bury and baptize. And they would stop in and stay on their way up north.

⁵At Jean Morin's request extensive editing was done to focus on her grandparents.

And then on their way back they would stop and stay for a few days to rest and this sort of thing and she would house them in her home. She had what my uncle used to call a holy room, which was the priest's room and nobody else could go in there. Because sometimes women were very sick in their pregnancy and they would stay at the house, my grandmother would look after them until they were ready to deliver. That's what the holy room in the house was for.

There was always more than one person in any given bedroom at any given time except for that holy room which nobody occupied. And then when we moved to Fort Alexander, it was much smaller. We moved nearby because I was in school. My grandparents moved back and forth to the old homestead for a number of years. It's really hard to give one location because they were in Traverse Bay and then they'd be back at Black River and Fort Alexander, and then back to Black River and then Traverse Bay. That's basically the three places they went back and forth to. I remember the yard really well. The fence was made out of white washed planks that looked very much like the house. You know sort of sitting on 'X's' like that. And there were a lot of sunflowers in the backyard. That I do remember. A lot of birdhouses all over the place because there were martins. If you are ever on a lake you probably remember the martins. And we had martin's bird houses, sort of like bird condos I guess you could say. And then the fish house, the ice house, the boats and the nets. White sand, and miles and miles of lake. Yes, it was very beautiful.

Where I lived there were terrible horrific forest fires though. We used to have dry wells. A dry well is a well but there's no water in it. You have provisions down there and when a fire hit you went down in the ground. Basically I didn't know where they were, but people that were there at that time knew where they were so they could run to safety. We still lost people in the fires. The whole area was forested so you had fires when lightening strikes, and boom! They cleared the land where they were, they had a fire line so to speak.

My grandfather was one-hundred and one when he died and my grandmother, I think was a hundred and two. To give you an idea, she had her first child around 1899. My mother was the youngest of her children. They married around, I think 1899-1898, but I don't know the date. Their first child died, and their second child lived and he was born in 1900. She had about eighteen children all together, and by the time my grandmother died, she had four children left and all the rest had predeceased her. She buried most of her children, a lot of them because of alcohol. So I would say that was the cusp of change right after the Second World War. There were these drastic changes from rural life to the almost enforced city life.

My main interest at that time I was being with my grandfather on the boat. And I just got in his way basically. But I followed him around. I adored my grandfather! I loved my grandfather and I was very close to him. I loved my grandmother too, but I was really connected to my grandfather. I'm a lot like my grandfather in a lot of ways. He was funny, he was quite mischievous, and he was very positive. He used to tell me all sorts of stories about the First World War and stuff like that. My grandmother was raised very strictly I think. Actually my grandmother was a grey nun (a novice) for about two years in St. Boniface Manitoba. And her mother died in childbirth and her father came to St. Boniface and asked the Bishop to dispense her from her vows so she could come home and look after the children because there was a newborn. So she was given dispensation from the order and

sent home. And then she met a man who was a widower who had children much like my mother and she married him. But then he died and she married my grandfather, but took those children with her. Isn't that interesting? Yes, she wouldn't leave his children behind. She took them with her. She had about eighteen children all together. All of those Métis families had big families.

My grandmother was religious but my grandfather wasn't. My grandmother was Roman Catholic but my grandfather didn't convert until his late '70's. He thought he should just to be on the careful side. Plus, he did it to make grandma happy. She was really convinced that she would not be with him on the other side unless he became a Christian. So he thought, 'what the heck I'll do it', and so he did. My grandmother was also superstitious. Well, she was more traditional than my grandfather was. Believe it or not even though she was Roman Catholic, and very staunchly so, she believed a lot of the Indian Religion and stories. My grandfather didn't. He believed a lot of things about taking care of nature and stuff like that but he wasn't into magic or spirits or anything like that. She kept a lot of the Native traditions that she was taught by her mother. It is really hard to explain because she was on one hand a very staunch Roman Catholic and did everything right on that one side, and then there was this other side of her where she practiced Native spirituality and was wary of bad medicine. It wasn't called that then but they called it 'the Indian way' at that time. And my grandfather, myself, and her would go to the Blacker Indian reserve just about every year and see the ceremonies and the shaking tents and stuff like that. So it was forbidden for her to do that, yet she did that anyway. I don't know how she ever came to terms with that, what's the word, dichotomy between the two. Whereas, my grandfather could have probably just went along doing what he'd always done, but she really believed it was important for him to know all that stuff.

In our community everybody was related. My grandfather used to say, "too damn much inbreeding around this place." Grandpa had a real concern about that okay. He didn't believe that people should be inbred. And he'd get my grandmother very upset because it was getting that way back in the forties, you know you were marrying your second or third cousin. And my grandfather was very intelligent and he had no formal education but he knew. He said 'I betcha that's why they have that blood disease in that family because they're marrying their second cousins and they are children of second cousins. And Leukemia was prevalent in that family. He was very concerned about that.

My grandparents had long periods of separation, like the First World War for example. And my grandfather came back and they just picked up their relationship where they left off. He was overseas in the First World War for seven years. He was there at the beginning of the war and then he stayed behind because of employment. You see it was really hard for Native people at that time to get work as it was, so it was an opportunity for him to make money cleaning up the mess they made in Europe. They used so many horses and stuff like that in the First World War and the trenches and all that stuff. So he stayed behind and was respectably employed for a couple of years.

During those seven years that he was in Europe he lived with a woman. And I think it was really difficult for him to come back because he loved the freedom over there that he had. And the fact that he was employed and he felt respected and all this other stuff. He had a

child with her and he used to talk about that when I was older. And he told my grandmother. You see, they were not dealing with the same set of mores that were in mainstream society. I mean it was something normal that happened and you'd go away for four or five years at a time. And you would never expect them to live alone. So that was one thing I thought about for him. It was hard for him and it was hard for my grandmother being left behind, looking after all those children. But she lived on the lake so it was very fruitful back then, lots of fish. You see, she inherited six children but they were basically grown and they worked and fished on the lake and that sort of thing, and the older ones moved west. Being alone I think would have been hard for her, but the community was very supportive. I think as far as your husband being away for seven years, as an adult that she must of known that there would be somebody in his life overseas. And I'm sure she must have wondered when he was coming back. But, he did.

I think my first memory is of this little stick and there was a little wooden man at the end of it. And you'd hang it on your knee and bang the stick and this little man would dance. Also, people would visit, play the fiddle and spoons, jig and play guitar. That I remember. That's about it, that's my first memory probably. Second one after that of course would be on the water with my grandfather. The boat was a great big fish freighter. They are about twenty-two feet long, they are kinda narrow, and they had a deep hull.

Basically once a year we went by boat with my uncle, to Norway House. My uncle and my grandfather, and that was really fun. We had relatives in Norway House on my grandfathers side. And we would stop at different camps and there'd be people there that they knew. And everybody welcomed him and it was a big deal. It was a lot of fun. Then when we were at Norway House, we'd meet all these other kids. Interestingly enough I used to say, "Grandfather are those Indians ever dark!"

All my uncles went to war and my grandfather fished for hire for an Icelandic Fishing company from Gimli. We would stop at fishing camps all the way up to Norway House. As an example, Hecla Island at one time was a fishing camp on the Northwest side of the lake. On the northeast side of the lake we'd stop at various camps. And there were probably camps that had been there for thousands of years actually, on our way up to Norway House. So we did that in the summer on occasion. My grandfather went there in the winter and with another man. He usually went with one of his son's or a friend but not with my grandmother. I was on a fishing boat with my grandfather when I took trips with him in those two years.

My grandfather was the person that most influenced my life, because he never saw barriers only opportunities. For instance when I was very young we used to sit on the beach and we'd look across the lake and we'd have deep moments. When I see this on TV sometimes and somebody's having a deep moment, I think of my grandfather. He'd give me a cigarette, well a rollie, and I'd be sitting there and couldn't smoke. Listening to Grandfather, and sit and have a thought. He'd say, "When you go to Paris I want you to climb on top of the Eiffel tower and spit off it, because on D-day I was on the very top of the Eiffel tower, and we were so happy we spit off the tower and threw our hats off the top." I probably never would have went to Paris if it wasn't for my grandfather telling me that. So I did. But, I couldn't get to the top, they were repairing it, and so it was sort of mid-way where I spit. I don't think the French were impressed.

... My grandma Fisher was a very quiet person and kept to herself a lot. She came from France. She was very French. And then on the other side, they were a more lively type of people. Grandma Ross and Grandpa Ross. And it was there that we learned how to jig. Every after school we had to go over to their house. He'd play the fiddle and we'd learn to jig. There was not only our family, the Hanley's those children had to go over too, because they were also grandchildren. There was quite a few of us. She'd serve us tea and bannock for a lunch after school. Then we had to get on with the business of learning to jig.

Jerline Doucette

Interviewed in Prince George, by Aaron Crowe and Sarah Ramage (March 1997), and Mike Evans (July 13, 1998)⁶.

I was born at Batoche, Saskatchewan. And then raised in Duck Lake. Which is just across the river from Batoche. My mom was Mary Fisher, she was a Ross (daughter of Louis Ross). And her mom was a Dumont.

Did you spend much time with your grandparents?

Oh yes. Well they always lived next door to us.

Both sets, or the Ross'?

Both sets. Well my grandfather Charles Fisher, I didn't really know because he died very young. You know, he was the M.P. for Batoche, Saskatchewan region. Liberal M.P. for that region. And he travelled a lot so we didn't get to know him and he died, he was what, 39 when he died. But my grandmother Fisher, she lived until she was 93 or 94. Something like that. That was on my dad's side. She had three boys and one girl. But one died in action in France, in the First World War. And then my dad was always in the services. He was in the First and Second World War. And so my Aunt Corrine, she grew up with her, with my grandma. And my grandma always stayed close to us because my dad always made a point

⁶Mrs. Doucette was interviewed initially by Aaron Crowe and Sarah Ramage in March 1997. This interview was not taped, but notes were taken. These notes shaped a follow up interview conducted by Mike Evans. The following is an edited transcript of tapes made during this later interview. The interview questions were left in the transcript as they vary considerably from the standard interview schedule (see Appendix One).

that we looked after her. She had her own house and all that. And uh, one of the brothers he never married so he stayed with my grandmother all the time.

So then your uncle and your aunt stayed with your grandmother?

They stayed in their own house, and we had our house, and then the other grandparents lived right the other side of us. They were the ones who were closer to as children.

That is the Ross' ?

Yes. On Fisher's side, my grandma Fisher was a very quiet person and kept to herself a lot. She came from France. She was very French. And then on the other side, they were a more lively type of people. Grandma Ross and Grandpa Ross. And it was there that we learned how to jig. Every after school we had to go over to their house. He'd play the fiddle and we'd learn to jig. There was not only our family, the Hanley's those children had to go over too, because they were also grandchildren. There was quite a few of us. She'd serve us tea and bannock for a lunch after school. Then we had to get on with the business of learning to jig.

You must have been a pretty good jigger by the time you got out of school?

Oh yeah. Well right up to the time I got sick, I was jigging a lot, all the time.

Did you jig competitively?

No. At that time there wasn't all that big competition because it seems everybody jiggered. Everybody was jigging. Now you know they're few and far between the ones that have kept on jigging. One of our boys I wish he'd kept on. He was small. And oh, could he jig. And now I tell him that and he tells me he can't even dance anymore. We used to visit quite a bit, with Grandma and Grandpa. And then when he died, well we looked after her too. When Grandpa Ross died. We just kept looking after Grandma Ross. My grandmother was Louis Ross' second wife. So we don't really know that much about his relatives because... he married his cousin. And you know in those days they were banished, from the family if you married into your relatives. So he was banned from his family so we never really followed up on his family too much. And then when she died he married our grandma.

The land that you lived on Duck Lake, who's land was that?

Oh, we always lived in town. We were raised right in, I would say with white people. You know we were never raised any other way because my father was always in business. When he wasn't in war, he was running the Imperial Oil. And then he was Postmaster. When I was born in Batoche, that's when he was farm instructor. For the government. Like at the reserve there. You know they had farm instructors to teach those Indians how to do their farming.

Did he speak Cree? (My mother did). What about your dad?

He understood it. He understood Cree. You see my mother knew Cree because Grandma Ross that's all she spoke. She spoke Cree, and she spoke Michif., she spoke a mixture of half French and half English. That's why we could understand her because we were fluent in French. So we could always understand when she was speaking to us but we couldn't answer her in her... language. But Mom and her always spoke it.

You didn't learn?

No. None of us did. Well my parents were so insistent that we get the proper education, and things like that. So that we never really followed any culture. And in those days... there, you didn't, there was, well that was the years when I said, you know the 'Unknown Years'. The years when the Métis were just subdued, there was nothing going on for the Métis. The 'Lost Years' those were the years we grew up.

So you didn't pay too much attention to the fact that you were Métis?

No. Well we were always called, we weren't called Métis at school, we were called half-breeds. You know that was a term the French kids called us. They used to always call us half-breeds at school.

They would use the English word "half-breed"?

Yes. That's what they used to call us at school.

So, now your mom's father Louis Ross was Métis as well?

Oh, yes.

Your mom's mom, Dumont, she would be Métis. Both your mom's mom and your mom's dad they would have spoken Michif then?

Yes.

But your mom spoke Michif but your dad didn't?

No.

Now your Dad's name Fisher, that's a pretty famous Métis name too?

Yes. See that's another thing. He went away to college and had his education with the Jesuit Priests.

Did he speak French?

Yes. Oh Yes. My grandmother Fisher, that's all she spoke was French. Yes, she was a

Brabant. You know she hardly ever spoke English. She wasn't fluent in English, just fluent in French.

How was her Cree?

She never spoke Cree.

But your grandfather Fisher did speak Cree?

Yes. Oh yes.

So those are both pretty prominent families, the Fisher's and the Ross'.

Yes. My great-grandfather Isadore got shot as soon as the rebellion started there. And then we laughed because we are good friends with the Unruhs' and that's gentleman Joe McKay that shot him and that's their grandfather. So I said, "oh yeah your great-grandfather shot my great-grandfather." When the rebellion first started and I mean we're good friends with all Unruhs' and Rahier's. And old lady Unruhs used to be a good friend of ours.

Unruhs, I don't know that name. Is that from here or from Duck Lake?

Duck Lake, but there's some from around here. There's a lot of Métis in Prince George that don't belong to any association or don't belong to anything. Now it's too bad, but I guess that's the way it goes.

So when you were living in Duck Lake you were jigging, did you do anything else that was traditional? Your grandma Ross did she bead?

Oh yes. Well she sewed. She always sewed moccasins and stuff like that. And made mitts, gauntlets. She did a lot of that.

When you went to school were you wearing your moccasins?

No. We never wore our moccasins to school. That's uh... well we weren't allowed to in those days because we went to school and it was a public school, but the Nuns taught at the school. It was almost like a residential school where you dressed properly. There was no such thing as wearing slacks. Even in the cold of winter they wouldn't let you wear ski pants or anything, you just had to wear stockings and that. So you always wore the old felts or mukluks. Oh no, they were very strict about the way we dressed at that school. But at home we always wore moccasins and stuff. But my grandparents always wore them. My grandfather was always dressed like that. He had what they called "un capeau de rat" that's a muskrat coat. You know. But we didn't even know; a "capeau" isn't even really French. It's slang for coat. But they always used to call them les capeau de rat. That was muskrat. Then they had the buffalo coats. Buffalo blankets, buffalo hides and stuff like that. We had a buffalo coat a few years ago. Sid Poser donated it to the museum. He brought it over to our

place because we were going to the prairies to bring it to the museum. And I tried it on and it just knocked me flat over onto the chesterfield. I was standing by the couch and when he put it on me let me go I was just rolling over. [laugh] It was so heavy. I don't know how they ever wore those things, my gosh they are heavy. So there's one there at the museum at Duck Lake.

Did you have lots of brothers and sisters?

I had three brothers and a sister... well there were two girls that were born but they died when they were about fifteen or eighteen months. In those times pneumonia came and you were a goner. It's not like today. We were raised as five children and we grew up together. My mom got cancer in 50 or 52, but she always prayed that she would live long enough to see us all finish school. And we all graduated. She died the year after my youngest brother graduated. In those days if you had your grade 12, you had a fairly good education. But then besides that we all took commercial courses, furthered our education. But we all finished, the five of us. And then we raised another boy. We adopted a little boy, when we were just all grown up.

From where?

From the Social Welfare in Saskatoon. She adopted a little boy there, and he lives in Vancouver now. He's still not married, he hit fifty years old this year but he's still not married. He works for Air Canada. He says oh well, too many of his friends break up. Forget about it.

Where are your siblings now?

My youngest brother passed away. He had an aneurysm. He was in the Navy, and then he came out of the Navy and worked on the docks and so on. And he's passed away. My sister is retired in Penticton. And one brother is retired in Calgary. He was a bank manager and worked for Alberta Treasury. He worked for years for them. And he's retired. And then I have a brother in Saskatoon, he worked at Intercon for years and years. He was in the Navy also and then when he came out of the Navy, he worked there at Intercon. He's retired also. So we are all more or less retired.

Are any of them political like you?

Not really. I'm not really political. A little bit, pushing. No none of them are active in Métis politics. My sister would like to be but she says oh well. She's tried at different times in Penticton to get to know the people. She says they don't really group well together. She says they're not well organized or anything like that and she'd like to get into it and work with them but she doesn't want to be the leader. [laugh] One of those things, one of those situations. And my brother in Saskatoon, he says there's so many leaders there's no room for one more. In Saskatoon there's lots, lots of politics there. Big city. In Calgary, my brother in Calgary, he's too busy to be bothered. His children I think will eventually be more involved than he will. They are well on their way to getting more involved. His son is

anyway.

How did you get to Prince George?

Oh, Aurele, when we got married we got married here. We were going out together a lot and he was my next-door neighbour. In Duck Lake. Our family was all close together and his family... there are ten in the family and they were all close. And it seems there was a marriage and a marriage and a marriage, and our parents were going through all that so we said forget it. And we got married up here instead of putting them through another wedding down there. Because it seems at that time you had to have a big wedding, and they were costly. So we said forget it, and we took the money and run. [laugh] Whatever they spend it on the wedding they would allot you. You either got the wedding or the money, whatever it was. [laugh] So we got married over here and raised our family over here and been here ever since.

Did you meet in Duck Lake?

Well Aurele was working in Prince George for a couple of years before that. He was working at a sawmill out here. So when we got married we went to live out at the sawmill. Alex Moldowan's sawmill. It was twenty-five miles from town on the pilot mountain road. Up in that area. And that's where I first met Mickey [Margaret Jaffray]. I first knew her then. She lived up there too. She was at Sinclair Mills. But then after she married someone who worked at Alex Moldowan's mill, and I knew her like that. Her kids were really little when we met. And at that time I didn't really get involved with the Métis in Prince George because I didn't really know how it was going. You'd hear all kinds of stories. So I didn't really get into it. Until after we got into the Elders and then we got more involved to try and change things and make things better... hopefully they will in time... for everybody concerned.

When you moved to Prince George did you know there was a large Métis community?

Oh yes. One thing about Prince George there is all kinds of nationalities here. And there is not the prejudice of other cities. I don't think there is anyway, doesn't seem to be. Everybody seems to mix regardless. Which was really nice. It was good for the children. At school there didn't seem to be all that hostility that you have in some of the older schools, what we went through. Things like that.

Well Duck Lake, that community would be about half Métis?

Oh yes. More than half Métis. French and Métis.

When you were in Duck Lake who did you spend time with outside your family?

Just our friends. There was a lot of relatives there too. And we mixed with everybody because our parents were always in business. So we got to mix with a lot of people. And they had groups. Like there was Girl Guides, and we belonged to that when we were

younger. We organized a sports group. All of us young people got together and organized a sports club.

What would you share with your grandchildren from your experiences?

All my grandchildren are proud of their heritage. They all realize they are Métis. And they enjoy being Métis... let's put it that way. We get together and talk about old times. What we went through. And we get together and make bannock and we make traditional foods. Sometimes when I go to the prairies, they bring out the chokecherries and we make the traditional Métis food. You grind them up then you fry them, in a frying pan, all the stones and everything. They have a special flavour, you know how pits almost have an almond flavour. They are good like that. And we've taught them how to smoke fish. The one grandson especially. When we were out fishing we dug a hole in the ground, and we smoke right at the lake, right in the ground. But otherwise we just took four chunks of metal, made shelves and smoked our fish right at the lake. They all know about fishing and hunting and they all hunt. Get their moose and deer. They are very Métis. And they all make dried meat. They've all learned to do that. Oh they like camping, that's what they really like to do. And in the winter time they do a lot of ice fishing.

That's something you did when you they were little?

Oh yes. Now like I was telling John's little boys (her grandchildren), they were waiting in the cold for John to load everything up and I told them to get off their butts, they are ten and twelve years old, to help load the stuff. I told them that when I went camping, when Aurele came home from the bush Friday, everything was packed and ready to go, there was no Mom and Dad to load up. The kids loaded everything. Everybody had their little job. And they didn't bring tons of stuff. They had a little pack. Just the bare necessities. They rinsed out their stuff in the lake and hung it on the line. [laugh] And we brought them to pick berries, that's a comedy act. [laugh] They just run through the bush those kids. The grandkids do okay, but the great-grandchildren... the little ones. Nowadays they don't do stuff like that. I was out to the bush yesterday and I came home and I told Aurele that I thought that my berry picking days were over. My tongue was hanging out. [laugh] I think that's it for me, I'm getting too old to pick berries anymore. But I still enjoy going to the bush. The smell in the bush, the leaves and the foliage and that fresh smell in the bush. That's great, I just love going out there. Sitting in the bush while the girls pick, I picked a bucket and a half. I picked a bucket of saskatoons and then a half of huckleberries. The huckleberries weren't too plentiful. We went out yesterday on EMNK road, the old logging road by Summit Lake and the cars were bumper to bumper. [laugh] Berry pickers. You were walking in the bush and you could see them in the bush. [laugh] I guess it was Sunday and the berries were ready. I told the girls that this wasn't a very good place to pick berries. So many people.

We spend a lot of time with our grandchildren. Mind you now our grandchildren are all grown up. The older grandchildren and then we have bunch of little ones again. We now have three great-grandchildren. And they are growing up with our smaller grandchildren. We ourselves had an older family and a younger family. That's why we get different age groups

of grandchildren. But we are close to our children and grandchildren, and they are also all close together. They did not grow up all separate. The one girl is in Edmonton. Cheryl, but the rest are all here. But she comes quite a bit. One of her sons is here and one with her, and she comes quite a bit.

The things you missed as a kid, they've picked up?

The things I should have been doing as a kid, I do now.

Did your kids ever find it hard because they didn't look Métis?

Oh yes, because all our kids are fair. There is just on the one side, Leo's boy is darker like myself, and Paul. But all the girls are all fair. And that one grandson we have, well Aurele was a white blond. Well we have one grandchild with white blond and he's so white with curly hair. Big blond curls at the back. They would never know that he was Métis. No, the girls are all fair. Except Michelle, she's more like the boys. Darker skin. But like I said Prince George was never a place where you had to be ashamed of your heritage. They all made out fine in school, with friends and all that.

The last thing I would like to ask you is if you had to give one piece of advice to your grandchildren, what would it be?

I always tell them to stand tall, walk straight, go forward, put one foot ahead of the other. Go straight forward. I tell them to learn something new everyday. At the end of the day, if you haven't learned something new, open your dictionary and learn a new word. You know because that's the way, we've always lived that way. And they do. They're always learning something smart. And they, a lot of them haven't had a great education, they've all finished grade twelve. But they learn something new, like machinery or they try to self-educate themselves into learning something new. Or they learn from each other how to do things. Which is very good. Be generous, be forgiving and have a bit of humility, and you shall succeed.

Jerline A Doucette

written by Jerline Doucette⁷

I was born in Batoche, Saskatchewan on January 27, 1933. The fourth child of seven to Joseph Fisher and Mary Ross. Shortly after we moved to Duck Lake where we were raised and educated. My father was the son of Charles Fisher, Liberal Member of Parliament for the Territories in 1885. His mother was Elise Brabant who emigrated from France. They lived in St. Boniface, Manitoba, then emigrated to Lebret, Saskatchewan. My father went to the First World War and won several medals, amongst them the D.C.M. and the M.M. He was also a Veteran Guard in the Second World War. When he came back he took the position of Postmaster in Duck Lake, which he served until he passed away in 1964. My mother was the daughter of Louis Ross and Mathilde Dumont. We do not know much about grandfather Ross as he was banished from his family for marrying his first cousin. My grandmother Mathilde was his second wife. She was the daughter of Isadore Dumont, the brother of Gabriel Dumont. They were quiet people and enjoyed one another's company. They raised one grandson, Regis Ross which couldn't have been very easy. Gran used to make braided rugs and she knitted socks, toques, scarfs and mitts for everyone. Grandfather played the fiddle and after school we all went over and they taught us to jig. It sure was a lot of fun.

My mom was the best person, she was a very proud woman. She was generous, caring, devoted, and could never seem to do enough for us children or anyone else she knew. She loved curling. When we were young they used to take us berry picking and on a lot of picnics. We would go down to the river to watch them fish, throw stones in the river, and walk just along the edge of the water. We used to take in the pow-wow at the reserve. And sometimes camped out for the three day affair, as my father was an excellent football player and was always in a game. We also got to attend the St. Laurent Shrine to our Lady of Lourdes. They used to make the lunch the night before, because we left for St. Laurent at 5 a.m. as it was seven miles and we went with the horses and wagon.

Our parents were very good to us but they were still strict. They taught us respect, humility, and honesty. To stand tall and walk proud.

In April 1954 I came to Prince George, BC and married Aurele Doucette. He was someone I had always known and lived next door to in Duck Lake. He came from a family of ten so we decide to get married quietly in Prince George, as it seemed our parents were going through one marriage after another.

⁷The following was written by Mrs. Doucette for inclusion in this volume.

We have seven children and ten grandchildren plus two adopted grandchildren. It sure keeps us busy, but we are a close knit family. The men and boys in the family all liked to work outdoors like their father and are either in the bush or on construction. I worked off and on during our married life. I retired from managing the Good Time Bingo Hall in 1995. On Mother's day 1995 I was the recipient of a new liver, which is why I can still write a bit about my family. The prayers of my family and friends are really what saved my life.

To my children and grandchildren I always say: live one day at a time, always put one foot forward never backwards. Learn something new every day even if it is a new word out of the dictionary.

God Bless
Jeri

A school was started at Clover Bar, about a mile and a half cross country from home, and we started there, Willie, Gloria, and I. I was about ten years old. We didn't speak very good English. We went there for about two years, then both sides of my grandparents moved into town, and we soon followed. Living was hard in town, as we had to buy wood and water. The rationing of certain foods, flannel, and meat was in effect. Living on the farm was much better.

Lawrence Gervais

Written by Lawrence Gervais

Interviewed by Kristy Andersen and Andrew Embree in Prince George BC, on March 14, 1997⁸.

I was born in a small town in Saskatchewan called Meadow Lake (*Paskwaw Sakahigan* in Cree), on May 30, 1937. I grew up on my grandfather Gervais' farm. Grandpa Gervais was William and my grandmother was Beatrice. He and Gramma had a small farm about six miles west of town. They had livestock: chickens, milk cows, horses, pigs, and even a few goats. They had a hay meadow, grain fields of oats and barley, and they always had a big garden that we helped look after. Our family lived in a house close by my grandparents. This was on my dad's side. Dad had eight brothers and two sisters. Of Dad's immediate family there is only one sister and a brother left. Dad passed away in 1971, and Mom passed away in 1991.

Being the oldest of eight boys and four girls, I had some of the responsibility for looking after them. I had to cut wood and haul water, plus other chores because Dad was always out working. He had to be out working from dawn to dusk so he didn't travel home every night. In the winter time we used snow water to wash clothes and clean, because the snow water was soft, and soap was expensive. Mom did a lot of canning. Sometimes two or three families would go out and pick blueberries and cranberries. There was always a lot of saskatoons, chokecherries, pincherries, raspberries, strawberries, and nuts close to home. We sold some of the berries to buy the things we needed. These berry picking trips were done on horse drawn wagons. These trips always seemed like a picnic to us kids. We lived in tents, or lean-tos, or just slept under the stars. I remember there were lots of mosquitos and flies, but it was fun.

⁸The following was written by Mr. Gervais himself, in part from transcripts of earlier interviews. Mr. Gervais was uncomfortable with the version of his story initially produced, and therefore decided to do a rewrite from the transcript in July of 1998.

My mother was also the oldest in her family, the Kings. She had five sisters and three brothers. They also lived close by the farm, about a block and a half away, just on the other side of the road. It was just like a little colony there. Grandpa Albert King was away from home working a lot. He travelled far to work, but Gramma Helen looked after the family pretty well. I was pretty close to both sides of my family. They spoke Métis (Michif), French, Cree, and a little English. My dad's parents were French, mostly French, but they talked Cree and French. They mixed it up (Michif). On my mom's side there was more English, but she also was good at Cree, so that's where I learnt more Cree than French.

I helped Dad with his trapping in the winter. We only went in a two mile radius of the farm. My uncles took me along to go and cut wood in the bush, and we'd do a little hunting of squirrels, rabbits, and deer. From those experiences, I like to explore. I had fun. I liked doing that, living on the farm was great for me. Even with all the chores I had, there were times when I could ride a horse, or just go into the bush with my dog.

A school was started at Clover Bar, about a mile and a half cross country from home, and we started there, Willie, Gloria, and I. I was about ten years old. We didn't speak very good English. We went there for about two years, then both sides of my grandparents moved into town, and we soon followed. Living was hard in town, as we had to buy wood and water. The rationing of certain foods, flannel, and meat was in effect. Living on the farm was much better. I had about three years of school in town, and then I thought it was enough. I was too big for grade five. I couldn't take the teasing, prejudice, and fighting, so I quit school and went to work.

I helped Dad unload box cars of coal for about two years. I got seventy-five cents an hour. Dad got more. Mom and Dad were hard workers. Mom sewed most of our clothing, she knitted our mitts, toques, and socks. She washed clothes by hand and scrub board until we moved to town. Dad was a hard worker also, until his death at the age of fifty-eight. He loved to play the fiddle, and we loved to hear him play.

In the winter of 1957, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis along with two of my sisters and two of my brothers. We were sent to the Prince Albert Sanatorium for treatment. My sisters stayed for about nine months, I was there a year, and my brothers about two years.

In the spring of 1958 I left home to go to work in Alberta. There were four or five of us travelling around working. We helped each other when we had money, and we had fun. We worked at various jobs like construction, farming, fencing, putting up telephone poles. I went home in 1961 and got married, then I went to Ft. St. John to look for work. I couldn't find a

Lawrence Gervais

job there so I came here to Prince George. When I arrived here in February 1962 it was pouring with rain, but I did get a job two days later with Joe Martin. He had a sawmill camp about sixty miles out on the Buckhorn Road. I came out of there in the spring breakup. I wasn't sure we would make it, it was so muddy. Then I worked for another sawmill about thirty miles out on the Buckhorn, just past Buckhorn Lake. From there I went to the Department of Highways to drive truck. Then I worked on the construction of the Intercon and Northwood Pulp mills. When these were finished I drove taxi for a while. My last and longest job was working for Clear Lake Sawmill, that lasted about fourteen years.

I was diagnosed with diabetes in 1975. I lost sight in one eye in 1988, then got a leg amputated in 1989, and the other in 1990. It will be seven years, July 24, 1998, since I received my kidney transplant, and I feel much better. I was on dialysis for about two years before that. My diabetes is a struggle everyday. I have to exercise every day (walking), though sometimes I ride my wheel chair. Flora and I got married on March 4, 1995. She was Mrs. Benny Paul before. All her children are grown up. She's a loving and caring person and we are happy.

My dad, his name is Morin. That was our name. And, where we lived in the farm, they used to call that Morin Creek. 'Cause we were the first one... on the farm there. It wasn't bad. That was the only thing, no work. The only work we had, in the summer, picking berries and selling them... We sold them and Mom used to can... for the winter. She used to make moccasins too, I know she used to do beadwork. I never had time. I used to bake bread lots, 'cause there was so many of us we had to do our baking. That's why I never went to school, stay home and do all the work.

Lena Loveng

Interviewed by Stephanie Capyk and Heidi Standeven in Prince George, on May 21, 1997.

I was born in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, in November '22. I lived there until I moved here. In '56. My husband came to work here and he sent for me. At Willow River, they had a mill there, that was a while ago. He worked at the mill. I lived in Willow River first and when my kids started school, high school. I moved to Prince George.

I didn't even know that there was much of a community out in Willow River.

It was when I first moved here, lots of work, but that's all gone. And then when we moved to Prince George, he had his own work, you know, construction. He had his own job.

Did you know anybody here when you moved here?

Just one. My cousin lived here. The only one. We moved here only downtown and South Fort George. No houses around here. Nothing. We lived there for a long time.

So what did you think of Prince George when you moved here?

Oh, I didn't mind it 'cause I was working too. First I was working in, in a motel, the Queensway Motel. I cleaned the rooms for thirty-five cents an hour. Then I left the Motel and worked at the Bus depot. I was cooking, in the kitchen, long days, made seventy-five cents an hour. Oh, there was lots of work, we didn't have much in Saskatchewan. I never worked out there until I moved here. I like it here. Better than Saskatchewan, I wouldn't live there no time. All my cousins, my uncles, my aunties are still there.

Lena Loveng

How do you think, how do you feel it is to be a Métis in Prince George?

It's okay, something to do. It's better here.

So, were you born at home or in a hospital?

At home. There were sixteen of us, all born at home. Eight boys and eight girls. Half of them, gone now, died. Six girls living and three boys. Out of sixteen. I'm the second oldest.

What did your house look like where you grew up?

Oh, it was a nice log house, three bedrooms. This one's small for me (referring to present house). I always live in a big house, you know, so this one's small. I like log houses. It was sort of in the woods. Wood stove too. Now everything is easy. We had to haul water. From a lake a mile and a half away. We used to haul water with horses. We used to have a big garden too.

How did the Depression affect your family?

Well, we were on that farm, so we always had food, we grew it.

Do you remember your grandparents?

They didn't live with us, but they lived close. We used to go visit from our place. Umm, my mom's side uh, J.B. Fiddler and... Veronica Gervais. On my mom's side there was seven girls and three brothers. But let's see. None of them made it. You know, dead. All my uncles my mom's side. My dad's side too. My dad's parents... I never seen my grandma on my dad's side. She died before I was born, my dad's mom. My dad's dad used to run the Hudson Bay in Saskatchewan. My dad's side it was two brothers and three sisters. Yeah. My dad, he was 71 when he died. My mom, 84. But my mom was in a wheelchair for a long time. Eight years. She had three strokes. The last one blinded. She was blind in the wheelchair. She died four years ago.

My dad is from Saskatchewan... Green Lake. The First World War my dad went to overseas. We were young when he went away. And the Second War he was in London, like a guard. My mom was born in Manitoba. My dad, he was a trapper, and they did some fishing too. And he used to work in the bush. He used to, he used to use his horses to haul logs. When I was, after I got married I wasn't with them, you know. We lived far apart all the time. I moved away, way, way up, way up north. Ile a la Crosse. My husband was fishing, so I moved up there. It's not far from Meadow Lake, but it was hard for them, you know. My

oldest brother lives in Hay River all his life. All his kids grew up there. He was a fisherman. I went up there to see him twice, boy that was far. It took us two days by bus. Nothing comes, uh, of that place. Nothing but bush... until you get to Hay River. Now it's quite a few, you know... but at that time there wasn't anything there. Just fishermen. Now it's quite big. I like it. Four years ago I went to his funeral. He moved up there when he first got married and he didn't have no kids, when he moved up there. And then he had three girls and three boys. They are all grown up. He died up there. His wife passed away first. She had cancer. But they're all alone up there now, no parents. But they're all grown up. Two of them live in Edmonton. One works for the airport, they other one is in school. And the other ones, they all are fishermen up there.

And, did your mom raise the kids? (Yeah.) I guess with sixteen kids that would be quite a handful right there. (That's right). [laugh] Were they strict?

No. They were nice.

What were some of the things that they taught you, while you were growing up?

Lots of things. Like, when I go outside, you know, milk cows, and feed the pigs.

So you lived on a homestead then?

At first, yeah. And then, and then we lived in Meadow Lake town. We used to like it on the farm. My dad was, his name is Morin. That was our name. And, where we lived in the farm, they used to call that Morin Creek. 'Cause we were the first ones on the farm there. It wasn't bad. That was the only thing, no work. The only work we had, in the summer, picking berries and selling them. There was enough of us to pick, but some of them were lazy.

[laugh] We sold them and Mom (Florence Fiddler) used to can. Used to can for the winter. Blueberries, raspberries, uh, cranberries. The kind of cranberries you used to make jelly, jelly. Yeah. She used to make moccasins too, I know she used to do beadwork. I never had time. I used to bake bread lots, because there was so many of us we had to do our baking. That's why I never went to school, stay home and do all the work. I used to babysit a lot.

We used to go dancing all the time. Anywhere. House dances. I used to go with my brothers. But we used to use the horses, not like now, you jump in the car or, you know. We used to use the horses to go dancing. [laughs] And a wagon in the summer. I used to have fun. But you know, long time ago they don't have to drink, now they have to drink. Us, we never drink, we had a good time. No drinking them times.

What was the most important thing that happened to you before you were 21?

I don't know. I had to stay at home all the time. Going, looking after your sisters. I was married at 21. I married Joe Aubichon, in Meadow Lake. And then I started having my kids. Four all together. And I didn't do nothing until they were old enough to, you know. Well, with my kids we didn't have no television. So we had to come up with ways to keep busy. We used to play games. They didn't pay enough to hire a sitter, that's for sure. That's all I guess.

I got married when I was 21. And had my kids. When I moved here they were all going to school. I started to work, nobody at home. I was in that old bus depot, I was there 15 years. This new one here, new bus depot, I worked there two years. When I worked in that old bus depot we washed dishes by hand. And we had a machine here, everything was so easy. And then I had a heart attack. They wouldn't, they wouldn't hire me after that. Just stay home. I wanted to work part time, but they wouldn't let me, they said no.

Could you give us the names of your brothers and sisters?

Jules, one of my brothers, used to live here. He died, heart attack. All his family is here. Let's see, four girls and three boys All my nieces, my nephews, his wife. They come and see me all the time. Yeah. They got a big family too. Edna, my sister, had three girls and one boy, that's what I have. Three girls and a boy. And my sister Lillian, she had seven boys and one girl. Martha, she had nine girls, no boys. Stanley's nine. Edwin, three boys and three girls. They all have big families. Everybody said you gotta big family you know, we got lots in just one house eh. All my sisters live in Vancouver. I was there last month. I was there one month, you know, "Let me come home!" [laugh] My son lives down there. Finally I said, "I'm going home! Nobody's going to stop me!" I have to go back, I see a specialist on my eye.

I sure played bingo when I was over there. [laugh] I just win enough to go back to bingo. I come home, I come home my son said, "you won nothing the whole night?" "No, Edna first." I got home here on Saturday, stayed home Sunday, went to bingo Monday, I won \$500.00. I went the next night I won \$250.00. Two nights in a row I won. \$185.00 once. Just about \$1000.00 I won.

Margaret Jaffray

I would have never, ever thought about my past if I hadn't joined the Métis Elders, because they start talking and you start reminiscing and next you know we've got a story to tell... Most of them have the same story, you know like the way we lived.

Margaret Jaffray

Interviewed by Joanne Burrows and Joanne Enders (March 10 and April 22, 1997), and Mike Evans (July 10, 1998)⁹.

Margaret, I wanted to start by asking you about Young's Point. What was Young's Point?

It was a Métis settlement. Outside of The Pas, Manitoba. My grandfather and grandmother had a homestead there and they raised their children there. Four daughters and two sons. We were all born there, in her little house, and then when we got bigger my dad took us up north. But that was always our home base was the Point. We all gathered there and lived there whenever there was out of season for trapping and hunting and berry picking. All the things you need to live.

So was it all Young's at Young's Point?

No, there was Ducharme's, Young's, Grymonprez. A lot of Young's I remember... Josiah Young and Sarah Cook were my grandparents.

Was your grandfather the first person to live at Young's Point?

He was one of the first ones, him and his brother. And they married and that's where they raised their children. And there are still some there, there's not too many. A lot of Young's from the younger generation are there. But, from our generation they are gone.

Do you go back?

Oh yes, every time I go there I always go to The Pas. Not too many familiar faces. But once they tell me their names I can connect them to which family they come from.

⁹The following is the result of a series of interviews. First Mrs. Jaffray was interviewed twice by Joanne Burrows and Joanne Enders, though these were not taped. After doing some research on her own, Mrs. Jaffray was interviewed again by Mike Evans. It is this interview (which was taped and transcribed), informed by the first, from which the following narrative was produced. The interview questions were left in the transcript as they vary considerably from the standard interview schedule (see Appendix One).

How far away is The Pas from Young's Point?

It's just about four miles. There was no highway there when I lived there, we used to travel by canoe to The Pas. Or by foot on little trails or on the railroad tracks.

Do you know where Josiah came from?

Apparently he came from Red Earth. There are quite a few Métis there too at Red Earth. There are McCauley's and ones that migrated to The Pas and some migrated to Cumberland House. The connections in Red Earth is from those lines. And that was their stopping place for hunting, fishing and trapping because it's sort of in the middle of Cumberland House and you if don't navigate by canoe you can go to The Pas. But that was where their trap lines were, at Red Earth.

Why did they leave Red Earth?

Well, trapping and then finding their families... raising their families somewhere else.

Is Red Earth a reserve or a Métis settlement?

Shoal Lake is the reserve and Red Earth has some housing in there, like Manitoba housing. But I haven't been there for ten years, so I don't really know.

And Sarah Cook, where did she come from?

She came from The Pas. She was a Cook, and her mother was a Lathlin. Her dad was a Cook, her mother was a Lathlin. Those names are all still in The Pas, all of them.

Are those Cree names or Métis names?

Well, some are missionary names, probably French or Scotch or English, I know Horsefield was an English missionary. But I don't recall. It didn't really interest me at the time. I didn't realize that one day I would need that information.

Was Josiah Young a Métis? (Yes, he's got ancestry that says he's Métis). And did he speak Cree or English?

Both. He spoke Michif and Ojibway and Another language from Montana... Saulteau, maybe. I was quite small. I remember he used to be able to talk with anyone in their language. I thought it was all the same language as far as I was concerned. [laugh]

And Sarah, what did she speak? (Just the Cree and English). And she was a Métis as well?

No, she wasn't a Métis. She wasn't a Treaty either. In fact most of them had Scrip. In that Settlement most of them had the land given to them. That's where they homesteaded.

So, your grandfather and his brother got Scrip, what about Sarah?

Well, she was married to my grandpa so, I'm not sure if she did or not. I know my grandpa did. None of my aunties, their children were never Treaty. Except the ones that married back into the reservation, they became Treaty. There was no law there I guess. [laugh]

It used to be that if you married an Indian man you became Treaty or Status, not anymore.

They make up their own rules according to the situation I guess. This is a picture of my grandpa's brother's daughter. She was ninety when she died just a few years ago. Her name was Rachel Ducharme. And they just had the one boy. They didn't have anymore family. But she raised a lot of children. That's a picture of my grandma and my sister Helena. And my grandpa. (*Your grandma looks pretty Native.*) Yes, and I guess Grandpa looks the same. But, I don't know I never ever bothered to ask. I always thought that's the way we were, I didn't know there was a difference.

So Sarah and Josiah had four girls and two boys, and your mom was obviously one of them.

Yes, my mom was the youngest one. Her name was Isabelle. Isabelle, Sophia, Harriet and Jane. Those were the four girls. Amazing where they got those names.

And when did your mom meet your father?

In 1924. It was one of those weddings where you ask if you can have that certain daughter, and if it's agreed you get married. My father asked my grandfather and grandmother. I didn't know that until lately. I saw their marriage certificate. They were married in Christ's Church in The Pas. By the river. It's still there.

What did they do after they got married?

Well, they farmed and my dad did a lot of trapping and hunting, just about for everyone. Grandma and Grandpa and other families that needed it. He used to go up north and trap for furs. One time during the Depression, in the thirties, he took all of us from the Young's Point way up north by canoe and then by dog team. Every way he knew how, he took us there. All of us, except my oldest sister Mary, who stayed with my grandma. But Helena and Antonia, Florence, Rachel and me.

How did you like travelling?

Well I was pretty small. It's just a way of life. I didn't even know what trapping was. [laugh] I know they went out all the time. There was Antonia and my dad that used to go out. My mom stayed at home and looked after the rest of the kids. We were by a lake and a creek and a lot of danger, like animals. We always had a loaded gun... I was never a hunter. I did go snaring once with Antonia, but that's about all I did.

So you would spend part of the time in Young's Point and part of the time in the bush?

Yes. Then the War came and my dad went overseas. And then we moved back to Young's Point. But he worked all over, anywhere he got a job he took the family with him. He never left us behind. So we moved quite a bit. Like Sherridon, Cold Lake and The Pas, I don't know how many times. Back and forth. And we had our little house in Young's Point but it got too small. We were all living in there after my grandpa died because my grandma didn't want to live alone in their house, and so she came and lived with us when my dad was overseas. Then we started school. We used to go there by a little sleigh. A one-horse sleigh. And then finally we moved into town and then we all went to school there. My grandma didn't move with us, it was at the time when she passed away.

Who took the homestead? (We just left it there. It's still there). Who owns it now?

Nobody it's just there. [laugh] (*Maybe you own it?*) Well... [laugh] I don't know that part. You see, people never made wills, we didn't own land. It was just rented to us. And so you never wrote wills. The wills were no good to us. You didn't own this and you didn't own that. The only thing you owned was your own possessions. That's not very much.

But your grandpa had Scrip so it must be registered under his name?

It's still registered under his name. But now they built a trailer court there. We went to the Land Office and they told us it was still our land. But that's all they said. They didn't give us any title. That was a long time ago, before Ricky passed away. Fifteen years ago. Actually none of us want to go back there. But it may be something for the children if they wanted to do something with it or even sell it. I didn't think we ever owned the land to sell, because that's the way it is with everyone else. Like in the reserves. They can live there as long as they want but they can't sell it. I thought that the same goes for us too. (*No*). Really? See there you go, I didn't know that.

Margaret Jaffray

That was the whole idea behind Scrip. You could do whatever you wanted with it. That is why so many people got swindled out of the Red River Scrip, because they could sell it. There was a lot of corruption and a lot of people lost their Scrip because of it.

No my grandfather never sold his.

After the death of your grandparents, what year was it that you moved to The Pas?

1940. Sometime around there. I don't recall the years because they didn't mean anything to me. I was in school. Let's see I started grade one, but I don't know how old I was, and I went right up to grade ten. And then I finished my schooling in Calgary. I did my last two years and then I did one year of college.

How did you get to Calgary?

I went with my aunt. She took me there, she was going to move there and we were still pretty poor. My dad came back but took off again. They didn't stay together after the War. My dad took two of us with him, but we got too lonesome so we came back. We went to school for a while in Toronto. But we didn't stay. He was working in Toronto. I don't know I just follow everybody around. [laugh] I can't say I regret any of my childhood, we were pretty innocent, we didn't know what was going on outside our own home. We were never in want of anything. We just did whatever my mom told us to do, like go to church, go dancing. She was always taking us somewhere. Even in the summertime we would go camping along the river, gather eggs, berries, picnics, whatever. She found a lot of time for us.

After your dad left did you have someone to hunt for you?

My cousin, the only boy that was in our family was Cyril Grymonprez, he just passed away. He was my Auntie Sophia's son. He was the one who provided us with meat, grain, potatoes, wood, in the winter time. And that's what they did in those days. They looked after each other. If the father is gone, or abandoned his children, everybody took in someone. And that's the same if a person, like drank or neglected their children, they would just go right in the house and take the children. And they can't say anything. We had no laws. We just had our own laws.

Which Aunt did you go to Calgary with?

Aunt Blanche. She was distant, distant aunt. Well, we call everyone auntie, so I don't even know... [laugh] Her name was Blanche Caron. I went to school two more years there. Then I

ended up getting married, I thought it was smart. [laugh] I still went to school after I got married.

And how was being married?

Well I don't know about that. Those are the things that come natural... you don't plan them. I don't regret getting married young. But I had children. I had two boys. That wasn't my kind of life. I didn't want to settle in a big city. Politics, and always going out to different charities. I guess that's where I get my basic ideas from. I used to do a lot of charity work for the crippled Children's Hospital. CGIT leader for the United Church. I taught English to kids from... that didn't know how to speak English. German and Chinese. There was some other ones that I don't remember. They wanted to learn basic English, and I used to spare my time twice a week for them. Did all kinds of charity work. I'm still doing it.

Were you working as well, or taking care of your children?

Well no, I didn't have any children yet. And then after I had my children I still continued to teach Sunday school and I loved going to the crippled Children's Hospital. I used to write letters for the children and mail them. Tell stories. Take them for walks. And then I had my own. I was there for about ten years. And then my sister passed away and I came out here to look after seven of her children.

Did you bring your boys with you?

No, I left them with my husband I was only going to stay for [laugh] a while until they got settled down. I mean seven children to leave behind and they're just small. Oldest one was sixteen and the youngest one was four. So... they finished school, and I didn't go back. My kids, the two boys went to Vernon school for boys, St. Michael's. Very good school and then I would see them in the summertime. We both did, the parents. And they went there until they went into college.

And the boys?

George and Greg. George is here he works for the Lheidli T'enneh Nation. And Greg is in Calgary, that's where he stayed. And then after I left Sinclair Mills the kids were pretty big. I spent ten years there and then I got married again and I had Teresa and Laura. When my baby was seven months old my husband got hurt. In the bush. A tree fell on him, and then a couple of years later he passed away. I had to raise my own kids. And then all my sisters

came out. That's how come they're all here now. After all their kids had grown up. Ricky had a little girl that she brought with her. Florence didn't have any, so she came out, and Antonia she brought her little girl. And you know they didn't have husbands, they were all gone, died. So I don't know what we got, maybe we were all black widow spiders. [laugh]

Did you all live together?

Oh no. We had our own little houses. In Willow River, we were all there. And then when my husband died, they helped me raise the kids and I went to work. I had to do something to make a living, I didn't have any pensions whatsoever. It took me a long time to get compensation for him. He never left a will or anything like that. So I had to start right from scratch. It's been a hard life, but I can't complain. I like what I'm doing. Helping other people. I like doing crafts. I'm always doing crafts.

Which sister was it that lived in Sinclair Mills?

Helena, the oldest one. And she had seven children. She was married to Fred Beaudet. And then her kids are all alive, except for the one boy, Raymond. He drowned around Bear Lake. The same time as my husband died, so I had two funerals in one week. (*The Beaudets?*) There were four boys and three girls. Just the one boy is gone and so there are three boys and three girls.

Was it just you that raised them?

Well, I had a little house right next door to their house. And... their dad did a good job raising them. He passed away in the Simon Fraser Lodge a couple of years ago. But the little one Bobby, used to always call me "Mom," he still does.

I lived in Willow River. We were going to build a house there. We had a lot and we put a little shack there, really. And we were going to pull in a double trailer and live there. But those plans didn't work out. All the people who are still there remember John really good.

Was he working in the mill?

No, he was a faller. A tree fell on him. It wasn't his regular job, he was fighting fires and a burning tree top fell on him. He was a quadriplegic. I don't even know how he made it. He must have been very strong, all broken bones, everyone of them. But that's all I've been doing; seems to me, raising kids. Now I babysit now and then Corey, he's three years old. Laura's boy.

After Willow River, when did you move to town?

In... he got hurt in 1972... shortly after he came out of the hospital in 1974. He passed away in 1975. I've been here since.

You moved to town after he passed away?

No, we lived in town. We moved in here after he came out of the hospital, 1973 or 1974.

When did you get involved in politics?

Way back in my first marriage. George Ho Lem was an Alderman, MLA all those things in Calgary. Business man, that's what I mean, it wasn't my way of life. And I had to get into politics, and I couldn't. Their lifestyle is all together different. He was away a lot... so when I had the chance to come... it's a funny way to put it, but I got away.

It seems that you have been pretty active in Prince George since you arrived?

Oh yes. Right away when I moved into town I got involved in the Friendship Center with Winnie Marcellais. That's how I got to know Winnie, because she used to be married to my cousin. And the Marcellais' were in the Young's Point settlement. When they moved up here he married Winnie. I used to go and visit her there on Sixth Avenue, when they had the little house for the Friendship Center. And then from there on, I went into UNN (United Native Nations) in 1974... 75. I don't really know about all that. I just, all my life I've never been aware, I just walk straight. I don't put my nose in places. [laugh] But that's true.

So you were one of the founding members of UNN?

Yes, local 112. Just this local here. And we worked at it, all my three sisters and I and some other friends. Bourgeois', Mabel George and Ray Prince...

Those are Carrier names?

Mabel George and Ray Prince are Carrier, and Bourgeois' are Métis. The organization was to help Status, Non-Status, Métis and Inuit. Because they had no place to go because they had no, we had no station for them for information, a Center or anything. That was our goal was to get someplace for information for them. And we started that and that was how we got UNN started. And then I got into the Friendship Center and I used to help out there and I became a member. We had our meetings there, we had our bingo's there. It just went off

from there, we got bigger and bigger.

You were also a founding member of the Elders Society as well?

Yes. I'm one of the founding members. Why we started the Elders Society was that the Elders had no place to go. There was actually no place for them to meet, or talk or whatever. So we stated that we were going to start up one, and we had a meeting and we elected a president, vice-president, secretary, board members, and it just went from there. We just met and then we... I don't know how we found all the Elders. Word of mouth, things get around so fast and the first meeting we had, we had fifteen. And then they kept coming and coming and coming. A lot of the members... we've lost about fifteen that have passed away, and we've had some that moved away and some that are too busy. Quite a few active ones. We wanted to... what we really wanted to do was enhance our culture and our language.

Everybody was talking English and not Cree because we are all from different parts and our Cree is all different. But now that we are all here and all together our Crees mix. You know we can understand each other pretty good, and no one is shy to speak out. And now they are learning to say their prayers in Cree. So it's coming pretty good. Lac Ste. Anne, they have fund raising to go to Lac Ste. Anne. They'd like to go to that once a year. But we manage to go once every two years. And then we do our crafts. they love doing their crafts. And we find homes for them if they can't find any. We just work together and help each other and talk. I would have never, ever thought about my past if I hadn't joined the Métis Elders, because they start talking and you start reminiscing and next you know we've got a story to tell. And it's really nice. Most of them have the same story, you know like the way we lived. No one to really tell us which way to go except our Elders. I don't know, we were pretty free spirited, now we're not very free.

Why not?

Well, I think society is so fast lane. Everything is so expensive and your money is not valuable. No jobs. You know, just the real desperation. You know when we had this situation before in the Depression you could go in the wilderness and find something, but you can't anymore. You've got to have a license for this and a license for that, permit for this, not the same. And the Elders are all feeling that. We need a lot of education. It's not wisdom anymore.

Margaret Jaffray

If you could share your wisdom, your experiences with your grandchildren, what would you tell them?

I do share my wisdom with them now. With Corey I teach him good things, to speak his language, to be good and that. But that's not going to stay with him when he gets to school and that. There is a lot of influence in those schools. It has to start the way we started to learn to realize that you can't be greedy and you've got to be truthful and love and stuff like that. I don't think they know that because TV is one of the bad influences. My grandma always taught us to obey your mother and father and never to lie, not be greedy and love one another most of all, and same way my mom taught us to share what you have, love one another.

Do you have any advice for your grandchildren?

Probably to live the same way as my grandmother taught me. But Corey has grown to be that way. He's learning to dance and jig, sing, he tries to sing so hard. [laugh] Oh, he'll be all right.

I've got another grandson too. George's son. But he has a father so his father is going to have to teach him those things. They won't let me handle him now. They're scared I might keel over. When we went to Queen Charlotte Island, we were walking on the rocks and Corey got tired and he asked me to carry him across this puddle, so I got him on my back and I went to step on a slippery rock and down I went. And I went down and my glasses flew off and I couldn't find them so I just laid there. Twisted my ankle so I just laid there. You should have heard those kids. Amanda and Brittany, they were screaming, "Granny, Granny." And my sister Florence she was barefooted and she couldn't walk fast enough on the rocks to get to me. But I yelled out that I was all right, but they were all... [laugh] Poor little Corey, I just dropped like rock.

Anything else you want to talk about?

I think the best way to get the Elders to speak is to get them around the table doing crafts. One will think of something and then there it goes, like wild fire. They'll laugh and talk and sometimes cry and we have lots of fun. And they are quite humorous, in Cree, but the translation into English is not the same. The joke is not the same, it's not as funny.

... I used to stook (hay). I used to stack it up. I don't know how many days I worked in the field. I used to have great big horses. Two of them. One owned and one loaned. Oh, she didn't like me. I used to bait them to be harnessed. One old mare, old thing and... one young horse. Oh, I used to work lots on the farm. Even the wintertime you had to haul hay. I used to haul hay to feed my horses. I used to keep oats to feed the pigs and horses. Oh, I used to do lots of work.

Marie Jobin

with translation and assistance from Leona Neilson
Interviewed by Lisa Krebs and Leona Neilson in Prince George BC, on July 24, 1998.

When were you born?

1914. On November 27th.

Before you came to Prince George, where did you live?

Well I was born in Prairieaco. And I grew up there and then we lived in High Prairie. And I moved here. The oldest was 14 months and Darryl was six months old when I moved to BC.

And did you come straight to Prince George?

No, no, no. I lived in Dawson Creek and from Dawson Creek to Chetwynd. And from there I used to be a camp cook, I used to cook at camps all over. On the highway. That's my trip. And when Darryl was six years old and had to go to school; I used to put Darryl on the bus. My boy. And, he had to go to school so I moved to Chetwynd. And I worked there at the Chetwynd Hotel and Darryl would go to school. Darryl was twelve years old and then I moved back to Fort St. John.

Fort St. John?

Yes, and then I had to be in town when Darryl would go to school. And I would work at the hotel there. No more cooking in the bush for me. . [laugh] And he was twelve years old and I moved back to Fort St. John and I stayed there for twenty years.

And then you came to Prince George? (Yeah). What year was that?

[laugh] Oh, I don't know. But my daughter moved here. They were living here. All my kids. And I was all alone in Fort St. John and they want me to move back here. Oh, but I hate this place. Prince George, [laugh] oh, I used to cry. [laugh] I wanted to go back to Fort St. John, my friends were all there. And finally I still can't really happy in Prince George. [laugh]

What was happening in Prince George when you came here?

Nothing, my daughter was working already in managing, hotel. She's still managing.

Which one?

Oh! 1717 Spruce.

What do you think is the best thing about Prince George?

[laugh] Oh, I don't know what...to say. Lots of things nice, things now, since I've been here. Like the Friendship Center and Leona's office. I like it you know.

The Métis Elders then?

Yeah. The Elders. BC Elders. Leona's the one who is looking after old ladies. [laugh]

Do you want to add anything to that Leona? [laugh] What is the worst thing about Prince George?

Oh, nothing now, I getting there that I like everything. Everything is good now.

How is it to be Métis in Prince George?

Métis? (Yes). Oh, that's pretty good too. I like it. It used to be in Fort St. John too you know. Métis. Louis Riel. I used to go to camps and camps and all over. And I joined Native Woman's Society. And she used to take me because I'm old. She used to take me all over. I travelled to big uh, Ontario. To Hawaii. I just go all over. Fort St. John, Vancouver. Little towns, Fort Nelson. I go all over. I fly where they take me. Old ladies always go.

And that was when you were in Fort St. John, or here? (Here, yes). Is it different being Métis in Prince George than Fort St. John?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's better here.

This is the part when we start talking about when you were a kid.

[laugh] I don't what I did when I was a kid.

Were you born at home?

Yeah. In a little house. You know I was born there. My grandmother looking after me. There was two, my great-grandmother. And my dad's sister. And that where my doctors and nurses come from. [laugh] I only got one kid you know. That's it. I still only got one kid. I never had no more. Yeah that's Rita, my daughter. And uh...

Did your grandparents live with you?

Yeah. My mother and my dad and you sleep together, otherwise I wouldn't be here. Yeah, my grandparents were close too.

Do you remember their names?

That's my dad there (points to a picture), sitting there. William Laboucan. I was Laboucan before I was married.

So you were born in High Prairie?

Yeah - no. I was twenty miles north of High Prairie. They called it Prairieaco. That's where I was born. Prairieaco, they called it Big Prairie.

Do you remember anything about your parents or grandparents?

My grandma I don't remember really. Because I was small I guess and my grandma died. But my granddad lived a good long time. His name was Jacques Laboucan.

And he lived close by to you?

Hmm. We used to, my mother used to keep him for a long time, my grandpa was sick you know. until he died. He lived a long time. But my grandma I guess died first. I don't hardly remember my grandma. Yeah.

How old were you when your grandpa died?

Oh, about twelve years old or eight years old when my grandpa died. I don't exactly know. But I was really young anyway.

Were your parents born in Big Prairie?

Oh, McLennan Alberta. Most of us used to stay in McLennan Alberta. That's where my dad and mom died, in McLennan.

What do remember about your mother and your father?

Oh, not really, when I was about eight years old and that I remember my dad and my mom.

Were they nice?

Oh yes. You know my dad, I must have been good, my dad never whooped me. He died like that. Once, [laugh] I was fighting with my brother. I don't know what I got. We went and got the meat. And I hit my brother and he was bleeding. [laugh] My dad used to have a violin. And when he came home he used to grab that violin and play and us we used to dance and jigging around. [laugh] That's about all I remember when I was small.

What was your mom like?

Oh, my mom was good to me. We used to be eleven as a family. They all died when they were kids. Sick, pneumonia. One was a baby and they had pneumonia.

How many lived to grow up?

My brother just died not that long ago. He was seventy years old. And my sister is still living.

The three of you then?

No, there's just two of us now. My sister and me. Her name is Emma. We call her just Emmy. My brother's name was Joseph Daniel. That was just about two months ago now. And Rita and I went over there.

What were the things that your parents taught you?

So many sewing and beadwork. When I was ten years old all ready I was doing beadwork. My mother would show me how to do the sewing and when I was married my mother-in-law showed me more sewing, cutting gloves and sewing all those things. [laugh] But after that I didn't do much sewing. I used to cook in the camps you know.

Was it good money?

Oh, I used to make good money. You used to cook about fifteen or twenty men, truckers too. I used to get busy. Yeah. And they wanted a cook and I was in town and they would come and look for a cook, their cook left them, in the camp. And I was so sick with a cough and sweating and just sick. And really they wanted to take me and I went like that. And after I went and seen the doctor I had pneumonia. [laugh] And I was cooking too! Oh yeah, really they wanted a cook. Yeah I used to make lots of money. I bought and everything myself. [laugh] And my husband worked in town and about six miles, I was cooking in the bush. And just for him to come out once and a while when he wasn't working too much. [laugh] Oh my, I was busy. That's my excitement. [laugh]

What did you like to do when you were a kid, besides beating up on your brother?

We used to play you know, like skipping rope and I was the oldest. We counted you know, I was the bad one. [laugh] We played lots. My eyes were bad, I was pretty near blind one time. When I was small, about seven years old, I remember anyway. And my mom, you know when you...they used lots of water and snow and my mother filled up tubs because she was going to wash blankets, you washed them by hand at that time. And my mother put all the water in there and we used to have no soap or bleach, along time ago, just lye in the cans. And my mother such a deal to put the lye way up there so us kids wouldn't get it. And my mother was washing and we were playing and I had these little red gloves, mittens, I remember [laugh], and we went in the house—my mother was busy outside, hauling water. And I throw my mitten, and it was stuck over there in that lye there. And before my mom came in, we piled up the boxes to get my mittens before my mom come in. Here I guess the

lye was on the cupboard, little piece of lye. And some got in my eye, oh; I cried “my eye, my eye.” My mom came in and I said, “some bug bit me on the eye.” [laugh] He knows though, he grabbed me and he soaked me in that tub. And Mom washed my eyes. [laugh] Pretty near drowned me. [laugh] I was a bad one. [laugh] Oh, my eyes were just running and I covered my face, nobody to see, just water running all day. Finally, he went outside, my grandpa, it was still froze heh, but he went and anyway and got some root and he boiled some root and that’s the medicine. And still I got that eye medicine! Still good. And they put it on my eye. That’s what cured me. That’s why I didn’t get blind. Good thing my grandpa made that. My eyes were just like water running.

Leona: Was that rose hip root?

Yes, it was rose hip root; it’s good for the eyes.

When you were a kid do you remember any really bad winters?

Oh, yeah we used to be bad winters, you know us kids. And we never used no gas no nothing, just burning wood. And we’d haul some wood, even when I was a kid, you know. That’s it I only remember these little kids, I wasn’t big you know. I remember some of those kids dying, sick with TB, you know.

Were you the oldest of the eleven kids?

Yeah, I was the oldest, but not really the oldest. I had a sister that was older but died when she was born. And that’s why I didn’t learn anything, schooling anything. I pretty near died too. I was so skinny. Those kids that are skin and bone, their knees are so skinny. You know.

Ethiopians?¹⁰

Yeah. That’s what I looked like. My bones, I was so sick. That’s right. And I stayed in the mission maybe one month or two months, the mission. And I couldn’t handle it, diarrhea. Their food, they feed you, and I just couldn’t, I just was sick. I had to go home. That’s why I didn’t learn anything. I can’t stand diarrhea so much in the mission. I couldn’t go to school. So they just take me and go back again. I just about died.

¹⁰Referring to the appearance of victims of the Ethiopian famines of the 1980s.

That was when they wanted to take you school?

Yeah. And I was sick when I was married. I was just bone and skinny. But I was okay, I just couldn't gain. When I got married, my husband was tall and had long fingers, and he just about could reach around my waist with his long hands. My waist, I was that skinny.

How old were you when you got married?

I was just turned seventeen when I got married. October 19.

Was it a nice wedding?

Oh yes, it was a nice wedding.

Leona: It was an arranged wedding.

Was it?

Oh yes. And I was sorry after. I had two dresses, one wedding dress and one kind of bluish. After I would think why in the hell didn't I keep them things. But they decide to them. [laugh]

What was his name?

Bob Jobin. Robert Jobin.

How much older was he than you?

Ten years older. Yeah. [laugh] He was robbing the cradle. [laugh]

Did your mom or dad arrange that?

My dad said anything. It was my mom. When I start like go with some boyfriend. And my mom was scared that I would pregnant. And they got me married right away.

So she just arranged it?

Yeah, they arrange everything to get married. They used to have a stopping place, these Jobins you know. Big place, everybody used to stop there to have coffee to have lunch, you know. And I used to hate to go there and I used to sit in the wagon at the back, crying that I don't want to stop at that place. I hate that where I'm supposed to get married. Oh, I used to hate that and I used to cry, "I don't want to stop there, why the hell to you have stop there." [laugh]

What did he say to you?

Nothing, he didn't say much, he knows that I hate them. [laugh] Maybe when I stopped there, my eyes all red, I've been crying on the road.

So you just had one child?

Yes, I pretty near died. Everytime I wanted to have kids I would have a miscarriage. Finally I was just about dead, he was hunting, in the spring you know. And I was sick and my sister-in-law come there. They lived about half a mile and I sent Rita, she was about eight years old. My daughter. Go and tell someone I was so sick. I couldn't even get up and I was so sick. And they came and it was deep snow too, and they saw how sick I was and I had to go to the hospital. There was a guy with an old car. Here my husband come, he rushed me to that car to take me into town because I was dying. [laugh] They rushed me, she said my husband said to sign, I didn't know nothing to operated on right away. It's serious. Here everytime I guess I had a miscarriage all the time the tubes...big tubes?

Your fallopian tubes?

Yeah, I used to have it feeding there, and the last time I just about died. That big tube bust, I just made it. And since that time they cleaned me, there. [laugh]

So your husband signed for a hysterectomy? (Yeah).

Leona: But tell us about when you married, when you lived by your in-laws.

My mother-in-law and sister-in-laws love me, because, I guess, they thought I wouldn't live long. I was so skinny, sick and everybody even my husband's dad told us not to get married. They said when we were married for about a month I'll die. Here I'm still sitting here. [laugh]

Marie Jobin

Leona: But remember when you were young and so shy?

Oh yeah, he used to come and I'd go.

You mean he used to come home and you'd go to your own cabin?

Yeah. [laugh] I was shy so when he come I'd hide... I don't know how my sister-in-laws loved me.

You get used to him?

No, no, still I didn't love him you know when he died. Still we not really to love.

You didn't know him when you got married?

No. He used to come on and off. But a few times. My mother make arrangements for us to marry and I'd just turned sixteen. I just turned seventeen when I got married. I was so young.

Leona: You see in those days people were afraid of having an illegitimate child. So when you started courting they would start arranging a marriage.

So you were dating before?

[laugh] No. He would come by.

Leona: Her mother probably though that this guy was good for her. So that was it, they got married. She wanted to come home. [laugh] Never mind sleeping with him. [laugh] So many women now are widows because the men were at least ten years older. It's coming back too, on TV, you see young women with an older guy.

I don't know a younger man wouldn't be too bad either? [laugh]

So I guess you were happy when he was out of town?

Yeah. [laugh] Still we never used to get along, fight a lot. He used to hit me, put me in the hospital a couple of times. One time he just about kill me, and I went to hospital and I was terrible looking and the police come and the police told him not to stay together. Just divorce or something. He gonna kill you anyway, might as well not stay together. It was me, I hate him. [laugh]

Leona: He wouldn't let her have visitors, he was controlling. If a man came around, he'd say it was her fault.

Yeah. Drinking, drinking, drinking, when he used to make lots of money, good carpenter. Made lots of money. And her bosses told him save the money. When he died not even five cents in the bank. I got a hell of a time to bury him.

When did he die?

Oh, '77 I think, when he died.

In Fort St. John or Chetwynd?

Fort St. John. (Marie produces her marriage certificate and other documents)

So by your marriage certificate you got married in Grouard?

Yes, the Grouard Mission. That was a big town at that time.

Did they spell your name right? It says Maria.

Leona: She uses Marie.

Yeah I use Marie. Maria is my real name.

Here are some important letters for Darryl. (Shows some documents) My husband's buried in Fort St. John. Oh, I don't know how many times he used to be sick, having a stroke. I used to go to the hospital lots. Drinking too much. He wasn't that old, only 77. Drinking too much. That's what finally killed him. And we bought a stone, me and...I want to be buried there too. He paid the lot already, my boy.

This is your husband's baptism document.

Yeah, when they were born you had to take them right away to get baptized. My sister-in-law's daughter about twelve or fourteen held Darryl when he was baptized. That was when we gave him the name Darryl Wayne, Joseph, you got to use that Catholic name, Jobin.
[laugh]

Where did Rita get baptized?

Big Prairie. The little church there is where Rita was baptized. You know that Bourgeois; Mr. Bourgeois is her godfather. Them Bourgeois used to be at Big Prairie. And they even give her a name. Leona Rita. Baptized...and then my grandmother and Dad's sister were looking after me when Rita was born. In the little house. You know a house, no hospital. I remember at twelve o'clock waiting for Rita to be born, and I still remember I was making bannock! [laugh] At exactly twelve o'clock she was born. Oh, no. My mother was making bannock, I was watching. I was watching, laying in bed and my mom was at the table making bannock. A long time ago they were just wooden shacks, no bedrooms. [laugh] When I looked after the farm, I looked after the pigs and cows and that husband of mine worked in town. And me at the farm alone. Rita used to go school on horseback. And we lived there. When I finished packing the pigs to be sold, a truck come. Backing up here goes my pigs. I never had a cent. I looked after them then he sold them right away. The same with cows. I milked three and I used to have a good dog as a helper. Here one time a big truck was backing up, I had a good milk cow; here he wanted that cow! He told me that my husband sent the truck. I said, "to hell with that, that's my milking cow." Anyway, when he come home I got a lickin. [laugh] And I used to have that dog, and I used to stook. I used to stack it up. I don't know how many days I worked in the field. I used to have great big horses. Two of them. One owned and one loaned. Oh, she didn't like me. I used to bait them to be harnessed. One old mare, old thing and I used to hit that one and one young horse. Oh, I used to work lots on the farm. Even the wintertime you had to haul hay. I used to haul hay to feed my horses. I used to keep oats to feed the pigs and horses. Oh, I used to do lots of work. That's why I'm suffering now. No wonder I used to cry.

Do you remember events like the Depression or World War II?

Depression. Hmm. We used to trap when I wasn't big, about twelve or ten years old. We used to trap weasels and squirrels. That's why I guess I was sick. Because I didn't look after myself and wet, wet, wet everyday. And the snow too.

Was it you and your mom, or the whole family?

Oh no, not my mom, just us kids, my brother and the oldest boy too. Phillip, he died a long time ago. We used to have a big garden and towards spring when the rabbits were out. Skins were expensive you know. And we used to go where my dad was hunting rabbits and we used to go there and camp over there and stay one week. When my dad was hunting rabbits. And then we come home. And in the fall again, when the moose is there. That's how we used to live, moose meat and deer meat. [laugh] Wild meat. And we used to go

there and my mom used to dry some meat. Pounding meat, to do us all winter you know. And make some hides to do some sewing. That's what we used to do.

She did her own hides?

I didn't do my own. [laugh] I can do that, scrape that meat, but now to dry it to take the hair, with the scraping thing. And I wanted to do it and my mother showed me, what to do. The first thing I do with that, I cut the hide. [laugh] My mother was so mad. Since that time I never scrape the hide. Since that time I quit. [laugh]

Do you have grandchildren?

I got twenty-one or twenty-two grandchildren. Oh, that's my great-grandchildren. Twenty-one now. That's my great-granddaughter. We're not a big family and this one here this yappy one born. [laugh] And Brandy, that's my great-granddaughter. My grandchildren just two boys and one girl. And one boy died. Four in the family. He was sick when he was six years old. He had rheumatic fever, he died. That's one we lost that one.

Do you have advice you'd like to tell your grandkids?

Yeah, like my great-granddaughter he likes to do what I am doing, like sewing and beadwork. He's got lots of beads, but not now, not since he's started school. I got a picture there when he was sewing, doing the beadwork. That one was only one interested in sewing.

(Leona speaks to Marie in Cree about advice for grandkids).

I tried to teach them how to live. Oh, they used to listen to me.

What did you tell them?

I told them not to be too mean. I'd tell them to do the work, do something. What they like to do the work. I tell them what they like to do. And one of the boys used to like to be a carpenter. She used to be helping to make houses, you know. That's the oldest one.

When my grandkids were born, they were in the hospital and I was working for this schoolteacher, taking care of her girl. When the teacher was working. Teaching school. And I used to look after her kid and do the housework. And I heard that my grandson was born and I was kind of hurt, he was born at twelve o'clock in the daytime. My daughter. And I didn't go right away until I finished my job, and I went the nuns was looking after her, there

was no nurses. And I come there and I seen two kids in there, one was really black, lots of hair and one of them no hair, bald. [laugh] And I said to this sister, "I come to see my grandkid, which one is that?" And he took me over there, and there was this black one and one with no hair, and they brought that one. Bald headed thing! [laugh] "Sister did you make a mistake," I said. I didn't think that white boy was him. Oh no this one is Jobin. And since that time I looked after him. That one is staying in Vancouver, Darryl.

Did he get more hair?

[laugh] Oh, he's got lots of hair! Blond. When he was small, start walking, he used to go all over on the farm. And you know those foxtails, plants. When you went out to look for him you couldn't find him in the foxtails. He was so blond! [laugh] And he used to do all kinds of things. He never used to be scared of anything. And one time he come and he used to go and be with the big pigs and cows, he was never scared of anything when he was small. I asked him once, "what did you do now?" He said, "I just stepped in the cow shit." [laugh]

So he used to call you 'Mom'? (Yeah).

Leona: A lot of times in the olden days, your first grandchild was looked after by the grandparents.

This farm that you were looking after, was it yours?

No, no, that's my sister-in-law's husband; they got a big farm. That's where we used stay and my husband used to do carpenter work.

Where was your daughter at the time?

Well, working all over, even used to go travelling around White Horse and all over. [laugh]

How long did you look after Darryl?

All his life. He still calls me 'Mom'. He's in Vancouver. He's got a good job there. He paints BC Ferries. Yeah. He went to school for carpenter. And he passed and he don't like that. And all that time the carpenters were always strike, strike. "I'm gonna learn painting." And he went to school painting. And that's what he finished school. He's been painting, decorating. And now he's working for the BC Ferries. Government job. He's got a good job.

Mary Gervais

Interviewed by Joanne Enders and Joanne Burrows in Prince George BC on April 12, 1997¹¹.

Mary's parents, Charles Delaronde, from Snake Plain, Saskatchewan and Celina Moran, from Green Lake, had six children: Mulvina, Alec, Antoinette, **Mary**, Joe and Victoria.

Mary was delivered on August 30, 1923, in a tent in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan by an Elder in the community. The family lived in an one room log house by Birch Lake, built by their father. The cracks in between the logs were packed with mud and had to be maintained every fall to keep the heat in during the long, cold prairie winters. The house was heated by an old wood cook stove in the corner fuelled by wood and the beds were against the walls. Outside the house was a big garden where they grew all of their own vegetables. Cows, pigs and chickens were also raised for butcher and trade. Charles Delaronde also trapped and fished to subsidize the family's income. Mary remembers as a child that if people dropped by unexpectedly, her father or uncle would just go out and kill a chicken for dinner.

At the age of three, Mary went to live with her aunt and uncle, Agnes and Ernest Moran in Island Hill, Saskatchewan. Her parents had so many kids to take care of, and her aunt and uncle had only one child of their own (Elmo) and needed some help on their farm. As a girl, Mary was a hard worker. She helped out on her aunt and uncle's ranch milking cows, cleaning barns, and doing the endless other daily farm chores. Farm life didn't leave too much time for playing and lack of money didn't provide for toys. So the children of Mary's time relied heavily on their imaginations and creativity, using anything that was around as toys and entertainment. They drew hopscotch patterns in the dirt and played ball and hide-and-go seek.

Mary's first memory was when she was about five or six years old. A man in a buggy pulled by two horses pulled up beside her and gave her a dime. She remembers this clearly as it

¹¹The interview from which this story was written was not taped. The story was written from notes taken during the interview.

was the first money that she had ever had to spend in the store.

Mary didn't know her maternal grandparents at all and has only faint memories from her paternal side. Her grandmother was born in Snake Plain and her grandfather, Joe Delaronde, was from Debden, Saskatchewan. Mary didn't see them very often because they lived so far away. Her grandfather was blind and she remembers taking him around when he came to visit. Both sets of grandparents were devout Roman Catholics as were Mary's parents and aunt and uncle and Mary herself.

Mary started school in grade one. It was in school that Mary first learnt English, although she continued to speak Cree at home and with her family. She remembers having someone sit by her in school to help her understand English and the lessons. Although she liked school, when she went to live with her aunt and uncle she never returned to continue in grade two. So with a grade one education Mary taught herself to read using comic books and anything else that was around. Mary continued to live with her aunt and uncle until she was 13.

At this point Mary got her first job and moved to work on a farm. She milked the cows, did the housework and other chores for \$1.00 a week. She continued to work there until she met and married her husband at the age of 16. Mary met August Gervais at a dance in 1937, and they were married on December 26, 1939. Mary remembers her wedding celebration vividly and as one of her fondest memories before 21. The day was a frigid, minus 52, it was so cold that the car wouldn't start, so they had to borrow a truck to get there on time. The bride and groom's mothers prepared the feast of beef and pork and made cakes and pies for everyone to eat. They danced and celebrated for three days to fiddlers and guitarists playing in the background. The first night celebrated the union of Mary and August Gervais. The next night was to thank the bridesmaid and the best man. The last night was a general celebration for everyone else. Mary recalls having to return to work the day after her wedding to babysit, while the women that she worked for went into the hospital to have a baby. She managed to find someone to take over so that she could return to the festivities and enjoy the celebration.

Mary and August's first home was a 10 by 12 foot shack, built by August, beside her mother's house. From there they both got work on farms and lived in the housing provided by their employers. By the time Mary was 21, she had five children; Vernon, Marlene, Stanley and the twins, Charlie and Chester. Then in later years completed the family with seven more children; Bernice, Kenny, Louise, Greg, Sheila, Jim and Maureen. Mary said raising children was difficult back then, but they made do with what they had and got by. The family had picnics, played ball and horseshoes and made homemade ice cream. People would come around from all over every Sunday for picnics and socializing. In the winter there were

dances, cake walks and pie socials. In 1950, August got a job in a box factory and the Gervais's moved to Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. The job was supposed to only be for two weeks but August ended up working there for 22 years until the factory closed. In 1967, after coming to visit August's brother, John Batisse, and liking it, August and Mary decided to move to Prince George with their five youngest children. They arrived by train with only their clothes, blankets and dishes. August's brother and his family helped them set up by giving them beds, clothes, a TV, a couch and other household items. Their first house in Prince George was on the site of the present Kentucky Fried Chicken, on 5th Avenue. They lived there for two years for ten dollars a months rent.

Mary recalls Prince George being a "raw hardworking town." People in need of labourers would come into the bars on Friday nights looking for people to start work as crane operators, construction workers and mill workers. The average wage at that time was \$2.60 an hour. When she first arrived, Mary got a job working as a chambermaid. Then August and Mary worked at the Simon Fraser Hotel as janitors for the next three years. They then worked at the Prince George Hotel for four years. By that time the children were old enough to take care of themselves, so when Mary got home from working the night shift the children were waking up and getting ready for school. After they left Mary slept until they got home in the afternoon. Returning to work when the children had gone to bed for the night. Mary and her family had lots of friends and visitors in Prince George and they attended lots of dances and socials.

August passed away in 1991. Mary still lives in Prince George surrounded by her children and their families. To date Mary has 33 grandchildren and 38 great-grandchildren. When asked if Mary had an advice to pass on to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren... she replied, "People have to learn for themselves and from their experiences. They have to learn to take care of themselves and show respect for others."

My son said, "I'm so proud of my name, I'll never change it."... He came home and said, "Mom, I had a fight today." "Why," I asked, "you're not supposed to fight in school." He replied, "Mom, I was just so tired of that boy calling me names and making fun of our name. That boy said, "Why don't you guys change your name, it's such a funny name" and that is when I hit him. I will never change my name." I said, "Don't fight again in school."

Mary Ghostkeeper

Interviewed by Heidi Standeven and Craig Mitchell in Prince George, on March 26, 1997.

I was born July 8, 1930 at Sturgeon Lake, a place called Calais, Alberta. It's a small community. I went to school in a convent. I used to go everyday, I even used to eat there but I would still go home. It was just a little ways from where we lived.

After I was married we moved to BC. I got married very young, I was 16 years old. My husband was 27 I think. He was just about ten years older than me. My aunt used to tell my mother, "That marriage will never work. Mary's so young and getting married already." But I loved him and I stayed right by his side until he died. We had a wonderful marriage. He died of cancer. I would go and spend time with him at the hospital and he used to send me home, "Sweetheart you're tired, go home." And I thought to myself I'll have lots of time to rest when he's gone. I loved him and I just wanted to be beside him.

We moved to Dawson Creek. My husband had a job there and my aunt came and got me, and I went to Cameron Lake. My aunt was a trapper and sometimes she's in the bush by herself for two weeks. She was looking after a lady that was 127 years old. She could move around, but her mind had gone. My aunt got me to look after her when she was gone trapping.

I lived there for a whole year, and then we moved to Chetwynd in 1954. It was called Little Prairie at the time. I was there working at the hotel. I used to work all the time. When I was working at the hotel they changed the town's name to Chetwynd. There was a big gathering and the hotel supplied the food. We lived there until 1963. Then my husband was transferred here and I followed him. My husband was a superintendent for BC Hydro line construction for 29 years. When he got sick, that was the end of his work. He was only sick for two years and then he was gone. To me he went so fast. I tried to hang onto him as long as I could. I used to say that I wouldn't trade him for the world. He was such a nice guy, he had a lot of respect for women.

We came to Prince George in 1963. In 1965 my husband was transferred to the West Kootenays. He phoned me and I asked him how long he would be there and he said, "About three or four years." I told him, "Find me a place, I'm moving." He said, "You won't like it, it's such a tiny place." It's called Nakusps Arrow Lakes. Beautiful place, the people are so friendly. So I told him, "I'll like it as long as I'm with you." So the next day he phoned and told me he got a company house. It didn't take me long to pack. I loaded my kids, got a three tonne truck, I got a driver, and he took me there. The house was beautiful. We stayed there for four years and then we moved back to Prince George.

There wasn't very much in Prince George when we first moved here. We lived on the Hart Hwy. It's not even near what it used to be when we first came here. This place is growing. I don't think it was even classified as a city yet, but it's a pretty big place now. There was lots going on after we moved back from the west Kootenays. There was lots of new places. My husband's cousins lived here and I was very close to them, I am right to this day.

I went to work for a little while, I did house cleaning. Apartment cleaning, like when people moved out. The lady I used to clean with is gone now. I mostly just stayed home and looked after my kids. They were still teenagers and I practically raised them myself because my husband was never home. My husband's friend used to tell me, "Your kids are so good, how could you manage to raise them yourself?" I told him, "Because I put my foot down. If I say no, it means no." When we were in Sturgeon Lake, I took the five kids of this one family. There was no welfare in those days, but their mother had passed away and she was a friend of mine. She was way older than me, I was very young. Her husband died in 16 days, the doctors said he had a heart attack, he died of loneliness. So they asked me if I could take their kids. The boys were only with me for about four months, but the girl stayed with me until she was married. She still calls me Mom. I love kids. I had to let the boys go. I couldn't handle them. Plus, I had two of my own small ones. I took in my nephew, Graham when my daughter was three years old. He was three when I took him. He used to cry for us when we left him. My sister had 11 kids and he was right in the middle. We went to see them in when we were living in the West Kootenays and when we left he cried and cried for us. A week later my sister phoned and told us that Graham was sick, the doctor said there was nothing wrong with him, he was just lonely. I asked her if she wanted to give him to us. She agreed and we went right over to pick him up. It must have been about 500, 600 miles. [laugh] We brought him home and he was so happy. We had a three year old and everybody thought they were twins. My adopted son. I adopted another one, well, not really adopted, but I took him, my grandson. He was only eight months old when I took him. He is such a wonderful boy. He is working. He wanted to continue going to school but we didn't have the money. He graduated and right after he went to work at Slave Lake on an oil rig. My son-in-law's brother is the big boss there and he got him the job. He stayed there for a

year and then came back for three weeks when the camp closed down. After three weeks here he got a call to work in Grande Prairie. He worked there for a few months and then got laid off. He put a resume in at Chetwynd and the next day they phoned him for a job. He has been there ever since. He's got a good job.

He's such a wonderful boy. When I was raising him I used to say "my son." My son that lives in Surrey said, "you're just going overboard on him." I'll give him anything he wants. He doesn't ask for too much, but he likes sports. He likes skiing and he had an old pair of skis, and I told him, "I'll buy you new ones when you think that you will be able to take care of them." When he was 15 I took him to a sporting goods store and got him skis for 50% off, but I still paid \$1400.00. My son said, "You're always doing something." I told him, "Of course I am, I don't want him standing on the street doing nothing. And he loves sports and I'll spend my last penny to give it to him." He's well behaved, and he doesn't drink. He's got a sports car, a Mustang, and that's paid for, and three weeks ago he came here and showed off his brand new truck. And he bought two horses. He is going to start riding, he wants to go to rodeo school. He says he's going to ride the Brahma bull. I told him that I don't like that, but he's been a cowboy ever since he was a little guy. He wore riding boots and all that.

One thing I didn't allow him was a dog. Most places we lived didn't allow pets. He phoned me here one time and said, "Mom, I bought myself a dog. I paid \$100.00 for it in Dawson Creek in the pet shop. Now I have a dog and two horses." He parked his sports car all winter I guess, but it's nice. It wasn't brand new when he bought it, but it looks like brand new. He sends me a little bit of money. I tell him I'll get by and that he should look after himself, but he just says, "No Mom, I want to do this for you. You looked after me, it's my turn to look after you." I told him, "I'm glad you feel that way." He's such nice boy. I like Prince George because I find that the people are very friendly here. I have lots of friends. My husband used to say, "I'll die here, I love Prince George", and that he did. After my husband passed away my family tried to move me up north to Chetwynd. I have two daughters living there and a son and his wife that live in Cache Creek. I'm very close with my daughter-in-law. She's from Ontario. She tried to move me to Cache Creek. One time I started to cry and I said, "I wouldn't mind living there, but I will never leave Prince George." If I leave I'll think that I left Dad behind because he loved Prince George. Even when I go someplace I always hurry back because I'm missing something when I go away. We had a wonderful marriage and wonderful kids. They're all married now. My daughter died a year before my husband. It wasn't even a year because my husband died on the 25th of October and my daughter died on the 24th of December. I just about went crazy. I was in the hospital, I don't know how many times. Three months after my husband died I couldn't eat, I couldn't do anything. I just sat there drinking my coffee, not making a move. I lost twenty pounds in two weeks. I was wobbly and weak. The doctor put me in the hospital after my

daughter took me to see him. They put me in the hospital so I could eat. Now I eat too much, I just gain and gain.

Ever since I was born, ever since I could remember, I've always been a Métis. My dad was trying to get us status, but there was no way. Our background was Métis, even with his great-grandfathers. We've always been Métis. My grandfather (Ambrose Desjarlais) came from Manitoba and they made their home in Lac la Biche. That is where my dad and them were born. There was only three brothers on my dad's side, no girls. My dad's mother, I wish I knew now. My grandmother (Clarice Belcourt) always used to talk about Chicago. She would say, "We just about got smoked to death when the whole town of Chicago burned right down to the ground." She must have been North American Indian. My dad would say that he could remember reading a book about that in school, about when Chicago burned down. People were moving away because of the smoke. That really bothers me, I'll bet that is where they came from long time ago. She was a Belcourt, there are lots of Belcourts in Alberta. She used to say that she wasn't related to them. But we always used to call them cousins because we were all Natives, we are all related, brothers and sisters.

I met my father's first cousins about four years ago; two of his cousins from Manitoba. We sat there a long time and talked about Grandpa. They said, "We haven't seen him since he moved away from over there, but we know he came to Alberta and from there we used to contact him. He moved to BC and after that we lost track of him." I've met these old timers in the meetings, I think it was in Vancouver. I used to be active in all kinds of meetings, but after I lost my husband I sort of just dropped everything. My daughter said, "Mom you should keep going because Dad used to be so proud of you, all the meetings you went to." I was on the provincial board for the BC Native Women's Society for six years. But it has fallen apart now, there's nothing, no money.

My dad always had a good job. But a long time ago we used to go out in the bush. My mother used to make dry meat and stock up for the winter. We fished and dried the fish too. And my mother always had a beautiful garden. It was nothing to live in those days, everything was there. We lived in a little old log home. It was only two bedrooms, but we managed with all of us in there. I had seven brothers and sisters.

My mother used to can blueberries and saskatoons. She used to dry them. She would dry them and put them in big bags and when you wanted to cook them they would be fresh as can be. You can do that with blueberries too. My friends in Burns Lake do theirs differently. They get a ply board and they put plastic on it and the men roll it with a big rolling pin. And they put another plastic sheet over it and they throw raspberries there and they just dry them in the sun. When they dry they fold them up and put them in the deep freeze. It's just like

that stuff you buy in the store... fruit leather. My mother used to make moccasins. I can remember this guy coming to get Mom to make moccasins for him at Rio Grande, a store. My mother was making moccasins for thirty-five cents a pair. He supplied the hide, but that's a lot of work for thirty-five cents a pair. They're \$50.00 now, slippers.

We lived on a homestead. It was out in the country. We had cows and geese, we had everything. We had little chickens. We lived off the land. I used to go to school. I used to help my mother when I was very small because my aunt passed away. She gave birth to a girl and on the way back home, she died. My mother took in those kids, three boys and a girl. That's all they can remember, my mom as their mom. We had a hard time. I was small and we had four cows that took off. It was in the fall. My mother had one kid in a pack and the other one in her arms and then I had the other two by the hands. We were looking for these cows by the lake and this big bull moose was coming towards us. We had a dog with us and the big bull moose had it's head down and Mom hollered and screamed. It was windy so nothing happened. All of a sudden it jumped and ran the other way. [laugh] Oh, we were scared. We found our cows and brought them home. But my mother had a handful of kids.

My mother used to make hide. I can remember my mother sewing all night, like when Christmas was coming, and we would all have brand new moccasins. And my dad had a moose hide coat, gloves and moccasins. My mother sewed a lot. I guess I take after her, I sew a lot. I do a lot of moccasins and beadwork and stuff.

On my mom's side my grandparents came from Grande Prairie, Alberta. But they moved to Moberley Lake and that is where they both died. My grandfather's name was William Callihou and my grandma's was Angelique Gauchet. At Moberley Lake one time I remember the people were just dying, about two or three every night. It was some flu that went around. I was small at that time, but I can remember. We stayed at my grandfather's and my grandmothers house. My dad was the only one that wasn't sick and he used to take turns going around to make fires for everyone. I was about six years old. We were all sick, but Dad looked after us. He looked after all the family around there, anyway.

My grandmother never used to do too much, but picking roots, red willow was her favourite thing. Grandmother picked roots in the summer, and in the fall my grandfather was stooking. They went from farmer to farmer and they stack bale hay, they call them stooks. They cut, like wheat or something like that and it comes to the machine for it and there's shooks, and you staked them so they dry. That's all I can remember my grandfather doing. But my dad was a logger. He logged for quite a few years. He had a logging outfit.

My mom's parents came from north of Grande Prairie, well, my grandmother did, and my

grandfather came from Lake St. Anne. There used to be a big Métis settlement there. They don't buy land or anything, they just homestead any place. Back then, people just go and live someplace. I don't know how they met, but they got married and moved to Moberley Lake, BC, and they had ten children. On my mother's side there were five girls and five boys, but they've all passed away.

The only thing I can remember was that my grandmother used to make dry meat and stuff like that. When they killed a moose there was nothing wasted. Inside there was some kind of balloon that they would blow up and make grease out of fat. They would wash it up really good and put it in there and it would harden. And that is where you had your lard. My grandmother used to say that long time ago, we were never sick, nobody got sick, like the Natives. Because we live off the land. We don't follow the white people. Like what they eat now, and we try to follow them. They try to doctor themselves with roots that they believe in. Like there's something for a cold and cough. They boil their own roots, but I don't have a clue what it is. My mother used to do stuff like that.

As I was growing up I was taught to be a good Christian, for one thing. Don't do this, don't do that. My mother was against smoking. When my mother died she never knew what the inside of a beer parlour looked like. She never drank, but my dad drank.

We always had chores. When my sisters were living at home, one did the dishes, one swept the floor, and one did the beds. There were three of us, there were four of us but one was too small to do anything. One of my sisters was a logger. She would help Dad logging. She would go and pull those logs. In those days there was no bulldozer or anything like that. They used to use horses. There was no power saws. I used to help my husband pull the cross-cut when I finished my work inside. I would go and help him log. My youngest sister used to come and stay with the kids. I remember one time I told my sister, "I feel sorry for my husband. When he comes home he has to cut and split wood. I going to do that today myself." "How are you going to manage that?" she said. I said, "I'll, oh, there's no wood there. I'll go cut that dry one over there." "You had better watch it. Do you know how to cut through?" she said. So I went and cut it down with the axe, but it didn't fall all the way down. I turned around and there was my sister and another lady standing there. I was going to walk towards them and all of a sudden it gave a kick and the tree kicked me and I flew in the air. The log hit me. My sister came running there and I guess it knocked me right out. I woke up and she was crying. I said, "I'm fine. I'm okay." So they pulled me up. I told my husband. "You never do that again. I going to do that" he said. But I said, "No, I wanted to do that, you work so hard. I'll do anything anyway, I'm going to cut wood." So that was the end of my cutting wood.

When I was growing up I liked to work in the house. I would do the laundry sometimes. I was just a little girl. We didn't have a washing machine in them days. We scrubbed on a scrubbing board. And I liked to do house work. I always kept our house clean. I used to tell my mom, "Mom, give me some beads, I want to do beadwork." My sister and I would be standing there watching my mother do beadwork. She would always say no because beads were too expensive. She never taught us. I said to my sister, "Just wait until I get married and I'll buy my own." So it wasn't until I got married that I bought hide, beads and needles. And we told Mom to teach us. "You guys sit there and watch me, what I do." she said. I picked it up right away. My sister can do beautiful beadwork. We made moccasins and beadwork. We sold our first pair right away. My sister used to be really good at it too, but she died a few years ago.

When I don't have hide I do beadwork. I make a hard struggle to buy hide. Sometimes I break my payment to buy the hide. It is so expensive. I just do beadwork. When I have hide I sew them together. I taught my granddaughter. She's pretty good. I showed her how to make moccasins, but she said, "Grandma, I don't have the patience to do that."

Iva Noskye was my sister. She died here. She came and visited from Chetwynd and for two weeks there she had been just coming for a day, go back and then come back again. One day she came and we were up until three o'clock in the morning talking. She looked at me and she said, "Sister, if anything ever happens to me take over my kids. Act like a mother to them." "My God," I said, "Don't talk like that. What's wrong?" "Oh, you never know." she said. Sure enough, that next week she died. And those kids are really close to me. She must have said something to her kids too. They call me Mom, my nieces and nephews.

All my brothers and sisters are dead now. Florence Gladue, she died of kidney failure. Another one is Harvey Desjarlais, he was murdered that one. He was such a wonderful guy. He always used to stay with us and he worked for my husband at BC Hydro. One time he couldn't keep still, "I want to go and see Mom". My daughter and them were going to Chetwynd so I said, "Caroline and John are going to Chetwynd. Why don't you phone then, and they'll give you a ride." So he phoned them and they came and picked him up right away and they took off on Friday. On Saturday he was murdered. Drinking, I guess he wasn't drunk but he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. When they phoned me at two o'clock in the morning I was sewing. I just started yelling and screaming and my husband came running in and asked me what was wrong. I just handed him the phone. The priest said, "I don't know why anybody would want to do this to Harvey, he wouldn't hurt a fly. I baptized him when he was a baby." He was such a good boy my brother. We had to go there and make the funeral arrangements.

There was Harvey and Howard, my sister Florence and my sister Iva. Four of them. Two were gone a long time ago. These boys from Chetwynd... my dad had a habit. My husband was working in Prince Rupert and I was living in Dawson Creek. He phoned me up one day and told me that he was going to be in Prince George for a big meeting. He said, "Why don't you come down and meet me?" We had a brand new car at the time, so I said, "Okay. I'll do that sweetheart. I'll be there in the morning." So at eight o'clock the next morning I loaded my kids up and I took them to my mother's in Chetwynd.

We were staying at the MacDonald Hotel that time. We had just ordered something to eat and there was page for my husband. He got up and answered the page, he was gone for a long time. In the meantime our food arrived, I just sat there and waited for him. I wasn't going to start until he came. When he came he said "Let's go. We'll just leave everything. Let's go. I have bad news. A death in the family."

Here it was that my dad got killed. He had a habit of going to get the newspaper. The Vancouver Sun was his favourite. And he went to get his paper in the evening that day. He was coming home and I guess these three teenage boys, I guess they were smart-alecks, said, "Let's scare this big Indian." And they did this and they hit my dad and killed him right away. I was so hurt at my dad's funeral. The priest said, "You're hurt, but in a short period of time this boy is going to say the same thing as you see now today." Not even a year and that boy's dad got killed in Squamish. Same thing, run over by teenagers. I don't know why he said that, but that is what happened.

Sturgeon Lake was nice. There was a lot of Natives, it was a reserve there. It was one part reserve and one part non-status, Métis. You couldn't even tell who was a Métis and who was not. They were all mixed. We never lived on the reserve. My dad wanted to become a status Indian. On our background on both sides, my husbands and mine, nobody. Two of my boys sat down and we talked about this a lot because they wanted to go, they wanted to be reinstated. I told them, "You can work on this for thousands and thousands of years because there is no way, we're Métis ever since your great, great, great-grandfathers on both sides." That's why we could never be treaty. We don't belong on the reserve, we're off reserve people. I told my sons, "We're not classified as whites, we're not classified as Indians. We're in between. We're no name brand Indians." . [laugh] There are Métis colonies in Alberta, they must be like reserves. They call them colonies. There is one in Battle Prairie, it's big, it's all farming country. [sigh] That's where my husband's first cousin passed away. George Ghostkeeper. There was three of them from here that went to the funeral. But I couldn't make it, it was such a long ways. I'm always making a hard struggle for money.

I remember one time when we were living at the homestead. It snowed so much we were snowed in. My dad always put up lots of groceries, we were never short of anything. There were no snowploughs in those days, just sleigh horses. My dad made a path. I remember that, it took him a long time because we lived off the road. Dad shovelled a path so we could go to midnight mass on Christmas. It must have taken him four or five days. It quit snowing, but it was very, very cold. I was so proud because my dad went to the store and bought me a brand new parka. That was the first time I ever saw a blue parka, with a hood and fur around the face. My friends in Sturgeon Lake said, "Aren't you ever lucky, your dad's always doing something for you, like buying this brand new coat." They were just trying it on. I was so proud. I went to church and wore my coat. I was only about eight.

I had lots of friends. I remember long time ago. We saw this guy going into my house. My friend, Justine and I were playing dolls, not too far from my place. I said, "I'm going to find out who that is. I'll be right back." So I ran to the house and here my husband was sitting there having tea or coffee. He was on his way to join the army. He was older than me, I think he joined the army when he was 18. So I came back to my friend and she asked, "Who was that?" "Oh, that was only Nelson Ghostkeeper." I said . [laugh] I married the guy when he came home from the army . [laugh] Fortune.

I was working at the Hudson Bay when he came back. He stopped in after he got discharged. My cousin, he was ashamed of his tongue or something. He was a friend of my husband's I guess and they got discharged at the same time. They went to the Hudson Bay Company and applied for a job. My cousin went in first and he never got the job, so my husband went in for an interview and my husband got the job. I guess my cousin asked him why he got the job when he had gone in first. "Because, you didn't talk Cree. That's what they needed over there by Sturgeon Lake because there is lots of them old timers that can't talk English. That's why I got the job. But you don't speak it so you didn't get it." He can speak it, he just didn't want to.

That's my language. I get very lonely for my language if I don't speak it for a while. Like, we were up in the west Kootenays and there was no Cree there whatsoever. There was no Natives there of any kind. Just Japanese and Whites. They went and dumped the Japanese there when the war broke out. They took truck loads of them and dumped them all over the place. That is all Japanese country in West Kootenay. Nakusp, Slokan, New Denver, Trail. Trail is not as much. I have a lot of Japanese friends. Sue used to say, "We were just small when we were..." She owns her own beauty shop there and I used to go in once a week. "They just dumped us all over the place and we just left our homes there." What a pitiful thing.

My oldest children speak Cree. Loretta, Elvina, Caroline and Phillip. Four of them speak Cree. Pat speaks some, but not very much. Willy too, the one that lives in Cache Creek. They speak a little bit, but not very much, but they understand. One of my grandsons from Cache Creek can speak Shuswap. A guy from Kamloops came and taught them. That is all Shuswap in that area. My daughter-in-law said, "I would love very much to speak Cree." My daughter-in-law is from Ontario. "I would be so proud if my kids could speak your language Mom. "Well," I said, "lend me your kids for three months and I'll move way out in the bush and that's all I'll speak to them." In this town, you can't, there is no way that you could speak Cree, only English, even Native kids, that's all they speak. Very seldom you will hear one that talks Cree. One time they came here from all over to play ball. Some people were from Augusta. A group of kids had formed around this one little guy who couldn't speak English, only Cree. All the other kids didn't understand him. So they called me over, "Grandma, come here and speak with this little guy. We don't know what he's saying. He speaks your language." So I went over and the little guy said, "I was just telling them that my brothers are here playing ball." But he couldn't speak English. I guess they don't start speaking English until they go to school.

I learned English in school, but I did know a few words when I got there. My mom and dad could talk pretty good English, but they would talk to us in Cree. Sometimes my grandchildren, the little ones and the big ones, would sit around me and they would want to know everything from way back. "Grandma, how big were you when you got married?" "I was this big" "And what did you wear?" I said, "I wore a white dress and it was a size 12. "And what did Grandpa wear?" "Grandpa wore a navy pant suit with a light blue shirt, with a beaded vest my mother made for him, it was Native." And they said, "Grandpa wear a vest?" I said, "Yes, he did wear a vest at that time."

I loved going to school and yet I quit. I quit early because I was so lonely and I ran away. I was staying with my aunt, I was in grade three when I quit. My family were in the trap line and I was lonesome for my mom and dad. I stayed with my aunt while I was in school. These people came from the trap line to get groceries and they had to camp over night. I told my aunt, "I see Mary and Dave and I guess my mom wanted me to go." "Are you sure now?" she kept saying to me. "Yes." "Well, I guess you if you want you can go," and Dave said, "We'll be here to pick you up if you want to go." In those days you could just go, you could quit school anytime, not like now. I was in grade three and I quit. They pulled in there with the sleigh and horses and we went. When I got there my mom just opened her eyes, "What did you come and get here?" And then I started to cry, "Mom, I missed you. I miss Dad and I miss you and I miss my little sister." And my dad said, "Oh, never mind, let her stay. Well, I guess she has to stay, she's got no other way to go home." That was a long ways. Ninety-eight miles.

The trap line was towards spring because that's when they have the beaver. The fur wasn't much at that time. Not like now, I guess fur is worth something. The fur buyer used to sell the fur to the Bay. In those days they used to measure the fur up to the gun. That's when you used to be able to buy a pound of coffee. Before you could buy sugar or flour they measured to the gun with beaver or whatever furs you had. That's how they got their food. My grandmother used to say, "We don't need all that, the main things are flour, sugar, and tea." The rest could come from the land. Moose meat, rabbits, whatever.

My mother made lots of hide. She made moccasins, she made everything. Nobody makes hide on my side of the family except my daughter, Elvina. Her hides are just like blankets, they are so soft. I asked her, "What do you do to make them that soft?"

I used to help my mother a long time ago, but I never used to do it by myself. She said, "I put in Downey." When they soak the hide. Her husband, he wouldn't allow her to make a hide. My daughter said, "Sometimes I could just cry, I wanted to make a hide."

I don't interfere with my kids' marriages. They got married, not me. I was married to my husband for 45 wonderful years and I never saw him swear at a woman. He had a lot of respect for women. He used to say, "There's no end to a woman's job. Not like a man. A man does his eight hour job and he is finished. But a woman, from morning until bedtime, there's no end for work for a woman. Unless a guy wants to do something, but that's his job, provide food on the table." Which is true, but some women, "Oh, we have nothing to do, let's go for coffee." One of my friends used to phone me here, she hasn't phoned me for a long time, "Let's go for coffee." I said, "I have lots at home, come for coffee, I'll make some." I can't see myself sitting in a café drinking coffee and not doing anything.

My husband always used to say to me, "Sweetheart, go back to school. You're a very smart woman. It's not too late for you." When my husband passed away I was so mixed up, I want to do this, I want do that. And then I would sit there and cry. One day I thought to myself, "Well, my husband wanted me to go back to school, I'm going to go back to school." So I went to the college and told them I wanted to go back to school. I wanted to start from the beginning and work my way up. They told me they would have to find me a tutor. They gave me some books and I went through them really quickly. After that they gave me a test and they told me that they didn't need to get me a tutor, they told me I was ready to go to school in September. They told me that when I finished I would have grade nine. But I never went back after that. I told my daughter that I wanted to finish my grade 12. I wanted to take up Toastmasters, I wanted to learn how to public speak. But my daughter told me, "You don't need that Mom." She comes with me sometimes when I go to meetings. Big crowds don't bother me, whenever I spoke at the BC Natives Women's Society, it's just like talking to anyone else. At first I was shy, but now I just speak. My son said to me one time, the one

that lives in Surrey, "Well, Mom, how did you make out at the meeting you went to?" I said, "I got back in again as a director. That's six years now." "How did you do that Mom? You were only grade three." I said, "I don't need a pen in my hand, what I'm going to say and what I think, it's all up here. I have a big dictionary if I don't understand something. But that was what I wanted to do when I lost my husband. I was so mixed up. And yet it's just like yesterday that it happened. I'll never forget as long as I live. My daughter too. My mother used to say, "That's the hardest thing there is to lose your partner, like your husband." My dad died a long time ago, he got killed actually. My mother was so lonely for the longest time, I think she died like that. She never got over it. She said that's the hardest thing, and I believe her now. You know, it is the hardest thing, especially when you have a good marriage. I went downtown with my granddaughter and we saw this couple holding hands and I looked at my granddaughter, "See, that was me and Grandpa." No matter where we went we were holding hands. I'll never trade him for the world, but that didn't happen.

At our wedding our friends came and played the music for us. They were Natives. She played the guitar and he played the violin and that was all the music we had, but it was good, a good crowd. There was no hall at that time, if anybody wanted to dance it was in a house. My wedding was at my aunt's house. They moved everything, all the furniture, she had a great big log home. That was where we had our dance. My cousin lived right beside it, she had a big home too, and that was where we had our dinner. Everybody bought everything. We didn't spend anything on our wedding.

In those days nobody drank. Well, some people did, but not many. Everybody was so happy, and we danced all night. It was nice, good music. Lots of people came from all over. In them days you didn't have to send invitations. Mouth by mouth, you know. "Mary's getting married." We have some friends from High Prairie come to the wedding dance. They said that their car had broken down many times before they had gotten there, but they made it. That was the main thing, that they had gotten there. It was nice.

I have had a handful of kids in my time. I love kids though. I feel sorry for kids. Sometimes somebody will come here and I'll just give them my groceries. I just loved raising my kids. There's not one time that I can remember that I spanked my kids, or hit them, same with my husband. We would talk to them, you can't beat your kids. You tell them what is right and wrong and they listen. And if you say "no", it's no. They never came back and asked for anything. But one time Ricky, he was just a small little thing, I was sewing and he went outside and picked some dandelions for me. "Oh, they're beautiful my boy!" I kissed him and put them in a glass in the water beside me. He came back in again, never asked for anything, and he climbed up on the cupboard. He was looking for something. I told him "Get down my boy, you're going to fall and hurt yourself!" He got down, but he couldn't forget

what it was, so he climbed up again and started looking. I said, "Get down!" and I raised my voice. "You're going to hurt yourself!" So he got down and he came beside me, "Mom, did you like those flowers I brought you?" I said, "I love them my boy." "Why did you holler at me for?" I said, "Because I didn't want you to get hurt." One time I told my sister that was why kids were so sneaky these days. They get beat up by their families. You don't have to hit a kid, they listen. But we were not too strict with our kids. We used to let them go dancing and stuff like that. But we always hated to see them go with the wrong crowd. If we knew they were going to do that we put a stop to it.

My first job was dish washing. I washed there for about seven years at the Chetwynd Hotel. After I was married. We had kids. After that I went chamber-maiding and after that I went to the laundry. Seven years all together. I didn't wash dishes seven years, but all together I was at the hotel for seven years. One time in the evening my husband said, "Joe is coming. I wonder what he wants." He was the manager of the hotel. He knocked on the door and came in. "Is Mary home?" "Yes," I said. And he said, "We want you to come and open up the café in the morning at six o'clock to come and cook." "Cook! Oh my God!" I said. I could crawl under the table. "Well, you know where everything is and all that. It's not much to cook for a crowd." My husband said, "You can do it Sweetheart, you can do it. Come on." I said, "I can do it. Okay, I'll go." So, I went to open up in the morning and the very first order I got was an omelet, a cheese and tomato omelet they wanted. I was trying to make it real nice. After that the waitress, Anne said, "Mary that's great. That's just the way it looks." I looked over and sneaked to see who it was that got it. Here it was this woman and this guy who were always drinking. They were still half cut when they came in. "Oh, I could have slapped everything together and they wouldn't have known the difference." I was never so nervous.

I got paid sixty-five cents an hour for a while, and then they raised it to \$1.25 an hour. When the hospital in Chetwynd opened I went and applied for a job there. I was the first one to go in and apply for a housekeeping job. I got kind of mad because the administrator came over to my place and told me, "Very sorry Mary, but these applications were ahead of you and see, this one is going to work, and that one. I got really mad and I said, "I was way ahead of her and you gave her a job? This white woman right there from Chetwynd." And then he said, "Don't feel bad, I'll keep you in mind." I said, "Don't even keep me in mind, I won't go to work." That same day he came back and he got me, "You come to work tomorrow." They needed a Native woman there for sure because there is lots of old people, like from Moberley Lake, that don't speak English and you have to interpret for them. They weren't going to hire me at first. I said, "Do you go by colours?" I was mad. There was hardly any Métis around Chetwynd. Moberley Lake is 14 miles north, that's the big reserve. There was a few Métis there and I think we were the first ones to move to Little Prairie. They changed the name to Chetwynd. They named it after the first settler in Chetwynd, his name was Mr. Chetwynd.

He must have been gone a long time ago, I don't even know who he is.

Education has always been a different pressing thing for us because we had no status. They stand a chance because their education is paid for, that's what I told them when I was at a BC Native Women's Society meeting and somebody brought this up. I got up and said, "The status people have a chance to go to school because everything is paid for, they get their houses free. And they don't have to pay anything, not like us. We pay taxes we pay for everything we get. That's why we have so many dropouts with our children. Because they haven't got a chance to go to school." Like my boy, he wanted to continue going to school, I guess he can apply for that student loan, but he didn't want to because he would just have to pay it back anyway. I said, "My boy, you go work for a year and save up and think about going back to school then." But, that didn't happen, he made good money right off the bat. He won't go back now. But he's got his grade 12. Lot's of them, they go to school and they don't have a job. I said, "That's good, as long as you work." But he wanted to go so bad, and he used to have good grades. Now he's making over \$20.00 an hour. He sends me a few odd cents. But I said, "You've got your truck financed now, you have to think about your truck payments. You have to look after yourself too." "Mom," he said, "I think I owe you this. You've done a lot for me when I was going to school, you were right there for me Mom. I owe you this. It's my turn to look after you." I used to tell him, "When you get married, think about your kids, look after them like I look after you."

But my grandchildren now, sometimes they used to come and when they were all here they would ask me questions. I said, "One thing, never be ashamed of who you are. Never be ashamed to speak your own tongue." And this one little one, my granddaughter said, "How can we when we don't even understand you when you're talking?" I said, "You will now." I sent for a book, a Cree book and I said, "You guys are going to learn Cree now." But after that everybody just moved around. My daughter ordered a book and I guess they know a few words now. But it's so simple, and that Cree book I ordered is English words and Cree words. I'm not educated, but I know a lot of things. I've been around. I used to attend all kinds of meetings, I would go to Vancouver and all over. One time my husband was sick and I didn't want to leave him, the meeting was in Vancouver. "No Sweetheart," he said, "I want you to go. They must have thought something of you when they voted you onto the board of directors." My daughter said, "Go Mom, we'll look after him." My daughter looked after him. I went, but when I was on my way on the road I cried because I had left him behind. But he wanted me to, that's what my daughter said to me, "Mom, you know Dad, he always wanted you to go, he was so proud of you, he said. And you attended all kinds of meetings. You should continue." But I sort of dropped everything after I lost my husband. I was chosen as a Métis Elder at that time, the Métis were going strong here, but it kind of fell through. But I think they are back up there now with the new ones that got in. I attend the odd meeting, but

not as much as I used to. They called me sometimes to say the opening prayer, not even a Métis meeting. I went to a meeting here one time, a UNN meeting. They came and got me to say the opening prayer. I love doing it you know.

I thought my kids would get married and live right with their children. Raise them like I did with them. And they were pretty good. My son in Cache Creek, he works at that chipper plant just outside of Cache Creek. He's been there since the plant opened. They have been married for 17 years and have three kids. My other son, Pat and his wife Monica adopted two newborns. Cody is seven now, and the baby is just a year and a half. My other daughter, Loretta, she adopted a girl too. Rachel is 16 now. We love kids. I have 18 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. *Nimiss*, that means sister in Cree, all my great-grandchildren call me *Nimiss*.

My advice for them is to go to church. I said, "It doesn't take long. All it takes is one hour to go sit in church." I'm a church person. I pray. When good things happen to me, "Thanks Lord." If you ask for something you get it if you believe in him. That's my thinking. I have bibles. When my mother passed away I was sent a bible by the nuns of Canada. They were going to pray for my mother. Because I was a good Catholic I got this bible.

The happiest time for me was when my kids were grown up and I was living with my husband. Those were happy days for me. We used to go dancing, my husband and I. We'd go miles and miles to dance. We didn't drink, we just loved to dance.

The people I admired most were my mother and my Aunt Florence; Florentine. That's the one that we used to talk until two or three o'clock in the morning. She told my mother, one time that I took her back to Moberley Lake, "I'll never go visit her again, she makes me stay up all night for the whole week I was there!" But she was just laughing. I guess it seems like that was our favourite aunt because my sister Florence and Iva, they were close to her too. I don't know why, we had other aunts, but it seems like she was the only one. My sister Florence, they used to wrestle a lot. Sometimes they were just sweating and they used to wrestle. "Now it's your turn." I said, "No, I'm not going to wrestle."

A long time ago, my husband's great-grandfather was an undertaker. So, when they got money to buy their land, they had to purchase it using their nickname. My husband's great-grandfather used to be called *oginow chukatu*, that means *ghostkeeper*. They had to go by their nickname before they got this money. Their real name is Richards and I think one or two went back to their real name. The children in my family will never use the name Richards. They love the name Ghostkeeper, they are proud of it. So that's where the name comes from, it comes from a nickname. I guess this happened to a lot of Natives. Lot of

people are curious about the name. Yesterday I phoned a 1-800 number to find out about taxes. I was on the phone for a good 15-20 minutes with a women who was curious about my name.

Sometimes people make fun of my name. They ask "do you keep a ghost?" One time we were living on Ewert street. We owned a home there. We sold because my husband said, "we'll just rent." The kids had left, so we rented a small place. I moved here after he died. But while we were living on Ewert, my daughter Gail said, "Mom, these kids keep phoning and phoning. They are making fun of our name." I said, "Next time, let me answer." So the phone rang and a wee little boy asked, "Where do you keep your ghosts?" I told him, "Just keep talking, the police know who you are already, they're tracing this call. I've reported you already, so just keep talking so they know where you're at." "Oh no," he said, and hung up. "A few minutes later, my daughter was looking outside, and said, "There's three boys coming." One was tall, and the other two were just small boys. My daughter said, "They're looking at our address." So my daughter went to ask them, "Is there anything you want?" The tall boy answered, "These boys have come to apologize to your mom, they are the boys making the phone calls." My daughter called, "Mom, these boys want to apologize to you for making the phone calls." I went outside and saw the little boy, his pants were shaking like he was blowing in the wind. He asked me, "Does my mom and dad have to know about this?" I said, "Of course they have to know." "They're not home," he said, "it is just the babysitter." I asked him, "Do you guys live over there?" just pointing in a direction. "Yeah, on Carney street over there," he said. "Yeah, the police know already," I said. He pleaded with me, "Could you tell them to cancel it, I don't want my mom to know, we'll be in deep trouble." So I said, "Okay, this time, but don't you do this again to anyone." "No I won't," he said, "Thank you very much Mrs. Ghostkeeper. Thank you very much." I asked him, "How did you get our name?" He answered, "Through the phone book." I told him, "Okay, this time I will phone the police and tell them to cancel it and not go to your place." "Thanks a lot Mrs. Ghostkeeper," he said. "Don't thank me," I said, "thank the Lord you didn't go to jail." [laugh] My daughter was laughing so hard when she came in. I told my daughter, they used to call me all kinds of names, like "housekeeper." But my son said, "I'm so proud of my name, I'll never change it." When Pat was at school, he came home and said, "Mom, I had a fight today." "Why," I asked, "you're not supposed to fight in school." Pat replied, "Mom, I was just so tired of that boy calling me names and making fun of our name. That boy said, "Why don't you guys change your name, it's such a funny name" and that is when I hit him. I will never change my name." I said, "Don't fight again in school."

Roseanne: *Oh yeah (some winters it was) 60, 40 below. We're used to it though. The only thing that my mom and dad told me, we were beaver hunting. And there was this lake 'eh.*

Leo: *Oh, this beaver pond was what it was. And uh, it was so cold up there, well, the water escaped from the, from the dam, and they used to chop a hole in the ice and they would walk under the ice... hunting beavers.*

Leo and Roseanne Goulet

Interviewed by Heidi Standeven and Joanne Burrows in Prince George, on May 27, 1997.

Roseanne: I was born in Alberta, Whitefish Lake, on the reserve, on 22nd of September 1933. I grew up there. I was in a Catholic convent when I was six years old, until I was 15. Then I went to school in Whitefish Lake for about a year.

Leo: That's why she's got such big knees 'eh. 'Cause she prays too much. [laugh]

So you've had quite a bit of education then?

Roseanne: Not really that much, just... I don't even remember half of what I learned in high school.

Do you remember them quite a bit, your grandparents?

Roseanne: Well, going in and out of the convent, yeah. And we got to come home the end of June, and then we'd go back in September. We used to travel in wagons. It's a long ways, Forty-five miles. My parents used to come down too, not all the time. Of course we had other brothers and sisters at the school. Yeah, and we used to go out and, they'd take us out and we'd go and visit... [laugh]. I have five sisters, we were 15 all together. There's six of us left.

We lived near Little Whitefish lake. Whitefish Lake is called Utikima, but there's a smaller lake. It was a log house. About, let's see... two rooms. One big bedroom, the living room, and the kitchen were all together 'eh.

Leo: It's Atikamae actually, but you pronounce it Utikima. Yeah, the white man try to put "atikimae" on there... spelled it in them old days, 'eh.

So how did your parents support all the kids?

Roseanne: Hunting and trapping. There's no town there. But my Dad had went and work on the Alaska highway, when they made that highway up there. That's the only time that I know where he went and work, otherwise, he was not there all the time. He was out trapping.

I used to help my Mom dry moose hides, how the dry them... Oh yes, I tried scraping them and that, but when they dried it and they had it all just about done and they dry it...

Were all of your brothers and sisters at the convent?

Roseanne: Most of them. The younger ones weren't, like my, let's see here, about the fifth one, they weren't in the convent. I'm the oldest of the girls I am, yeah. I got two older brothers. We used to play in the yard and that, skating all the time. I don't remember ever going anyplace, just staying there.

Where did you sleep at your house?

Roseanne: In the bedroom.

Leo: On the floor. [laugh]

Roseanne: In a bedroom! We all had beds, just like we were in the convent.

15, that's kind of hard to fit into two rooms.

Roseanne: Well, some of them had passed away before, 'eh.

Did your grandparents live with you?

Roseanne: No. They lived in a different house. Not too far away.

They trapped and hunted too? Your grandpa?

Leo: That's how you survived in those years because there was nothing, there was no work. Even me, I worked for a farmer for a dollar a day, sunrise to sunset, six days a week, that's at least. Yeah. I know this couple, this one guy here in Prince George that they, when they turned him out of the convent, well, we were bunch enough kids, there was three of them, they stopped at my dad's little farm full of this and bread, and they slept in the hay loft, just so

they could eat. And they worked in the fall for just their groceries. Now where do you expect to go and make money? Well we had, we had a bunch of chickens and we'd have egg fights with the eggs. You can't get rid of them. Five cents a dozen if your lucky. We used to have egg fights. And then the chickens would come out in the fall, in the summer. And the chicks would come and lay in the bush all over, like, like grouse.

Roseanne: In the summertime, like, when we went home, I guess you'd call that camping, we'd all go in the bush. Camping, hunting. My dad had a boat, canoe, like a birch canoe. That's where some of us travelled and my dad used to walk. In the summer we used to race, like my mom and dad would watch and they would make us race. Running, racing and that. And swimming. And then in the winter... we used to play hockey. We used to have horse manure as a puck.

It was tough. Ate lots of bannock and lard and dry moose meat. I used to like it when we used to go out in the bush like. Camping and that. We used to help trying to make dry meat. Cut the meat and that. My mom used to show us how to cut it. She made hides and moccasins and that.

My mom's parents were Thomas Bone and Maggie. My dad, I don't remember his, his dad (He was a Gray), but I remember his Mom was Agnes. Agnes... I don't know what her maiden name was... it was Gladue. My grandfather, my mom's dad was born in, it was either Manitoba or Ontario. I think it's Manitoba. My grandmother (Mom's Mom) was born... I think it's in Wabiskaw. It's half Métis and half reserve.

My other grandma I don't know, I don't know where they were. Like, my grandma, my grandma's mom, she was 16 when they had that war... Riel, or whatever his name is... she was Agnes' mother, was 16 when they had that... She lived to be, I think about over 100 years old. They never eat canned food or store boughten food.

I got married in '52. I was... 19, or 18. We have three. The oldest one is Glen... and the middle one is Loretta... the youngest one is 32 so... that's Karl. Born in '58, and '63 and '65. There was two that were born in High Prairie, Alberta. The third one was born in the Okanagan, in Salmon Arm.

How did you decide on their names?

Roseanne: Oh, we just, I just picked them. He didn't, he didn't help me, but I just pick them [laugh]

I never had a job, I never went to work. My first job was in Quesnel planting trees. I planted for 9 years. That was in the 80's. Let's see, 70's and 80's I think. When I first started we used one of those uh, how do you call them... callasky? And then we went to shovels, and then to dibbles. A dibble is just a little thing that's heavy and it makes a hole in it and you put your tree in it. In the 70's or the 80's. Early, no late 70's early 80's.

Leo: Hey. I seen where you guys tree planted and they were planted in 1972, right along that Barkerville road.

Roseanne: Well, that's what I said, the 70's and the 80's. (Leo: Okay) Okay. [laugh]

What did you think you would do when you grew up?

Roseanne: Oh, I don't know. I, I didn't think I'd anything. [laugh]

What was the most important thing that happened to you before 21?

Roseanne: Before I was 21. That's when I made my first communion and confirmation. My favourite teacher was Sister Helen. She was a nun. She was nice, she was kind and understanding. If I had a problem I talked to her, and things like that.

Did you ever get into trouble at school?

Roseanne: Oh yeah. Well, it's just not at, right at the school, it's at the convent was all the girls there 'eh. And uh, when I got in trouble with is, we didn't go in when all the girls are supposed to go in. My friend and I stayed behind and played. And Mary got 'click, click click' on her hand 'eh. In the, in the convent I had lots of girlfriends.

Is there someone in your mind that uh, sticks out as like, inspiring you the most? Someone that taught you a lot, or that you remember as being really special?

Roseanne: My grandfather. He was special to me, I don't know, it was just that I was so close to him and he used to do things for us.

Leo: Her grandfather used to say honey, "Hello marmalade jam" 'cause he likes it. [laugh]

What was school like back then compared to now, do you think?

Roseanne: Well, they have more, more, better education I think, now, than they did back then. It was just simple like, you know.

What did you do that you were most proud of before 21? So you said the communion...

What I was proud of was when I had my first baby.

Leo: I knew she was gonna say that. [laugh]

Do you remember any harsh winters when you were growing up?

Roseanne: Oh yeah... 60, 40 below. We're used to it though. The only thing that my mom and dad told me, we were beaver hunting. And there was this lake 'eh.

Leo: Oh, this beaver pond was what it was. And uh, it was so cold up there, well, the water escaped from the, from the dam and they used to chop a hole in the ice and they would walk under the ice... hunting beavers.

And what kind of stuff did they trap for?

Roseanne: Muskrats they trapped. Squirrels. Weasels. Martins.

At one of the first interviews that we were at one of the women was talking about bitch lamps. Do you remember those?

Roseanne: Oh yeah, You put salt in a rag 'eh, and braid it. You can just tie it too. You just soak it in lard or whatever you got and just light it up. Last for a while.

Leo: When the grease is gone then the light go out. I don't know where the hell they got that, that little bitch lamp. I heard your Mom, your mother say one time it was dark you know, they stayed up late, and she says something, she says, "Tell one of the girls to make a little bitch." In Cree. So she just got some lard and a little saucepan. She never even use any salt, she just put the rag in there until she made a rope and just hang it over.

You add the salt to the lard?

Roseanne: In a rag and put it in there and you just tie it like, in the middle. (Leo: It just acts like a wick). That's the easiest way, wrap salt in a rag and just, just tie it.

So did you speak Cree at home? Did your parents speak Michif at home?

Roseanne: Oh yeah. They talk Cree, but they could talk English too.

Leo: When they see a white man.

Do you guys still speak Cree?

Roseanne: Oh yeah. We used to fight in Cree all the time so the kids wouldn't understand, now... Or if it's Christmas. Or when it's gonna be Christmas we talk in Cree so they wouldn't know what we were gonna get 'em for Christmas.

When did you guys move to Prince George?

Roseanne: When we first moved in B.C., it was to Salmon Arm, for about a year. That was in '65.

Leo: I was working in forestry. Then I got transferred to 100 Mile House. For four years altogether but we moved to Forest Grove, that's only 14 miles out, so might as well include Forest Grove. Then Williams Lake, Willy's Puddle... then Horsefly.

Roseanne: Two years there. Then Quesnel. 11 years we lived in Quesnel my dear. (*laughter*) And then we moved to Upper Fraser. That's here. For five years we lived up there. Four or five years.

You got transferred here for work, is that why you moved?

Leo: I just, I just quit my job and go. Quit and go. Well not quit, but then the job runs out and I find another one. I end up over here at the mill right up in Upper Fraser 'eh. So... when uh, in Prince George I, I had already retired by then. (Roseanne: Leo, you worked in Upper Fraser.) Yeah. That's where I retired from. Remember that guy he wants me to jump that high and I thought, "Oh I'll get my pension and you'll go (gesture)." (*laughter*) That's when I quit. I would have stayed another 5 years there 'eh. 'Cause I get pension at 60 instead of waiting at 65 because I was in the army. I might as well slide around for another 5 years 'cause I was making 23,000 a year 'eh. And this way I only get down to about 13,000 a year, that's only half. And I like to work.

Roseanne: And uh, our grandson had to go to uh, had to go to uh, kindergarten. Well, he lived with us all his life.

Did you know people here when you moved?

Roseanne: Yeah. He was working and all that.

Leo: We knew lots of people. I had a cousin here too. He died.

What do you think is the best thing about Prince George?

Leo: Prince George? Nothing. I can't see myself here, I want to go back to Alberta. And maybe I can go look after a ranch or something. 'Cause there's nothing for me here to do.

Except get the barbeque all sorted out there.

Leo: Well, that was... that was thrown away and the guy gave it to me and I told him I was fixing it. "Oh," he said, "throw it away and buy a new one." I said, "Well," I says, "\$200.00 for a new one. I can't find a job for someone to hire me for two days at \$100.00 a day, I might as well work on that thing for a few hours."

What do you think is the best thing about Prince George?

Leo: There is nothing in here that is the best. I can't see anything. The only thing that I like to do once in a while in Prince George is go to the Legion. Go and watch the, go to the dance. There's nothing here that interests me anymore. You are young, maybe you find some entertainment or something like that, but us old...

Roseanne: Like us, the only entertainment I have is going to bingos, because I don't drink, I don't go to bars.

So where, where would you want to move, if you moved back to Alberta?

Leo: I want to go back to Alberta always.

Roseanne: You want to but I don't. He can move, I'll stay here.

Leo: Yeah, there's guys in there, ranchers and they look after stock in winter while they go to Hawaii 'eh. Like, I can handle any machinery they got and look after stock. You know. And then they can plant a good garden in a , in summer. I like gardening. That's the only thing I keeps me right now, is that, we got a garden coming up over here. I've been roto-tilling that thing for the past couple of days, uh weeks... (Roseanne: Months) Months. But yeah, when they want lawn like this she wants a garden out of it, so...

What's the worst thing about Prince George?

Roseanne: Worst thing is that smell I guess. [laugh]

Leo: The worst thing? I don't know if there's anything in Prince George. Smell is not too bad, 'cause I worked in pulp mills. Doesn't bother me. When I smell that I can smell money....

I never heard that saying until I moved up here. The smell of money. And they use that in uh, Kamloops too. Because they've got a mill there.

Leo: They went on strike here... when they went on strike here, the pulp mill... these merchants they don't know, they go around building this you know, and where in the hell is our customers gonna buy groceries? And then the pulp mill starts. Aaaaah! Now we can smell it!

Roseanne: The worst I think is the, the crimes. (Leo: Oh, they all got it, all over. It's all across Canada.) You can't even walk down the street anymore, you get hit over the head or something. [laugh]

Leo: It's all over Mother, you can't put that worst no matter where you go you get hit over the head.

Roseanne: But that's what I think about it, not just everybody, it's me.

Leo: They're even using baseball bats now.

How is being Métis here? Do you find that people treat you differently or... ?

Roseanne: He's Métis, I'm status.

Leo: That's their house I'm living in. (Roseanne: Métis housing). I had applied for a house oh, oh about 15 years ago, 12 years ago. And here we've been renting out. Before we got this they sold that place 15 miles out, that farm there. I liked it there 'cause I was working... I was working on the goddamn days, I go and buy a \$100.00 vehicle and I fix it up, sell it for six, seven, eight, nine hundred. All of a sudden they sold the place right under me. So we had to find a place, so I phoned the Métis housing. "Oh hell," they said, "we've had a house here for you since 1992." So I said, "I'll take it now."

What were your dreams for your children?

Roseanne: Uh, to get their education and, and have a good job or whatever.

What are your best family memories?

Roseanne: I go camping with, you know, the kids and they used to enjoy themselves.

Leo: Boy they scared me one time, the kids, I didn't have no fishing license and we was camped and there was this burglar going on over here, Nazko area. Cops are running around there all night. Finally they stopped anyway, of course one of them that was on the phone there, "We got some fish." [laugh]

Do you have advice that you would want to give your grandkids?

Leo: Stay out of trouble.

Roseanne: Yeah, that's a good one, stay out of trouble, and try and finish their education.

I guess we can move to you Leo. Are you ready, it's your turn.

Leo: If it's my turn I'm gonna contradict everything she said. [laugh]

Roseanne: Tell them about when you got into the army.

Where were you born?

Buffalo Bay. April the 2nd 1925. Near Grouard. We had a log house, mud thing. The kids slept in one room and Mom and Dad live in the other room where the dining building. Lived there nine years if I remember, and then we moved to Salt Prairie.

Lots of animals, mixed farm. We all had our chores to do. As you get older you go to the next step higher. Horses, cattle, chickens, pigs, turkeys, geese. Wheat, barley, and oats.

How many kids did you guys have?

Roseanne: 15 they had.

Leo: One, last one never made it. That made it seven girls and seven boys. Half of them are gone, there's only about nine left.

So what is your first memory of childhood?

Leo: Burning my knee. On the stove. I was cold, and you know the wood furnace, and I fell asleep I guess and I... was about eight years old. [laugh]

Did your grandparents live with you?

Leo: No. I only seen them about three times in my life. August, Mom's side, my mom's dad is August Carifelle. Augustine Carifelle... My grandmother was uh, Caroline. Her maiden name was Noskiey. (Roseanne: This is his grandfather's picture. His grandfather). He's about 85 there, it looks like. All his teeth are still in his jaw. They didn't likely know he was 108, but uh, the family was telling me he was probably 118. It says 108 in his death certificate, but he was 118. My mom's still alive, she 97. My dad's dad, Rosse Goulet...

Were your parents strict?

Leo: Uh, I don't know, yes and no. I don't know. They were just... well, we listened, maybe, I don't know. I guess it's the way we was brought up 'eh.

There must have been a lot of work to do on the farm?

Leo: Uh, not that much when there's that many of us. See, the girls took after the milking, there, they make the cream, make butter and all that etcetera. Some of us look after the chickens, some of us look after the cattle. The ones that you milk, you know, you feed them in the barn and you clean out the barns. Some look after the horses, the work horses, they do the plowing. One guy gets to do that job, or two of them. That's why everybody wants to work on the horses then 'cause you can have your own pickup. I mean you saddle a horse, horse, saddle horse 'eh. That's when you get promoted to have that job.

Did your dad teach you how to work all the machinery?

Leo: No, we automatically come to that see, 'cause it happened when you were a kid. You grab a hammer and try and knock it in yourself, your not supposed to, well then you know how it's done. It's uh, it's what they call uh, how do you say it now, instead of teaching somebody? Experience is best teacher.

What did you like to do when you weren't working?

We go riding, we, we usually have a little stampede ourselves, young calves like that, you know. Especially on Sunday, 'eh. Neighbours would come an' we'd go riding. (Roseanne: Tease. Teases all his brothers). [laugh] I bug everybody I can.

Where you grew up, was that a town or a village?

Leo: On the farm. There was a General Store about seven miles out. Just a store and a post office.

Did you have lots of friends and girlfriends?

Roseanne: Oh yeah, he had lots of girlfriends, he never passed Grouard. [laugh]

Leo: What was it the other, oh, they had heard that, my uh, sister's younger nephew, there, he had a boy there. They were not very old, about 12 years old, and he says uh, somebody was asking his dad, my nephew, "How many illegitimate children have you got here, you lived here, there's Drift Pile and Jousard?" Oh no, Sucker Creek and Drift Pile. They were all, this one says "Hey, How many illegitimate children have you got in Sucker Creek?" And the little guy said, "Hey, he never got past Drift Pile." [laugh]

What did you think you were gonna be when you grew up?

Leo: Farmer or rancher or something was the only thing I had in mind.

What's the most important thing that happened to you before you were 21?

Leo: Important thing happen to me? When I got home in Canada in 1945.

Did you go to school?

Leo: That's a long story. (Roseanne: Had to build to his own school to go to school). I had to when I was 14 years old, I had to skid logs, house logs to go to school. To build a school so we could learn something. We were gonna get a teacher. I wanted to go to school. All the community built it. But I had to skid the logs. My dad had, there was only one that had the horses around there to pull the, skid the logs. After the school was built we got a teacher from Calgary. His name was Cole. And I went to school for two years. Then they, my friend and I got kicked out 'cause we were too old. We was over 16. We had one old uh,

neighbour there whose uh, daughters, they took out this friend of mine when I do something to them. So they got the guy to kick us out. My teacher was good. He even offered me a snuff or cigarette once in a while. Can't do that any more in school. Get court marshalled now.

So, did you get in trouble in school?

Leo: No. Cole and all them John, used to, all the boys our, my age, close to my age, we were all, we all liked to compete one another in school... see who could learn the most the fastest. So in two years I made it through uh, just one grade, going on grade five. My math was seven. That's why I wanted to school some more. Another year and I would've kicked two of them asses. [laugh] It's mixed school then because the teacher, we only had the one teacher and he, from the little, you know from the beginners all the way to seven. Same building, each one does his own work. There's two blackboards in there an'... three blackboards. I don't know, I haven't went to school here so I wouldn't know what the hell is gonna happen. I think I started that, you know, I'm gonna learn this, I'm gonna do that, until everybody kind of followed the leader. I think that's, I think that's why Cole there, the teacher always, "hey, you want a break?" Yeah. I was the ring leader. Yeah. So I was the ring leader for the whole school. We played soccer a little bit, ball an' we taught the kids how to play ball, make up the teams. Making all the little ones on your side and half over there. That teacher caught me one time, my math there, I would just go through it and there's nothing to do, so these other two kids they were in grade seven, I used to do their, I used to do their math. You know, on the sly... one day he, Cole, sneaked up behind me and he seen what I was doing, doing seven work. So of course I had to, my sister took that note to my teacher, to my dad, is it okay to push me up in math seven? Dad says, "Go ahead."

And when did you, when did you first leave home?

Leo: I left home when I was 17? No, pardon me, yeah 17. I went to work up in the, in the Alaska Highway when they were afraid of Russians were coming. Seventy-five cents an hour. From a dollar a day to seventy-five cents an hour, that was a big hike. On that, they wanted some volunteers they, but they had a sign up for about 3 months before they could get their return fare back. So I signed for it too. That's when her dad came later. But it was an isolated area and the only thing we could, it's a good thing they piled up food that time, enough to do for the spring. And all our mail and everything we, it was, they load dropped it with a parachute, so we could get our mail, up there on the Alaska. Even parts, they used to drop the parts way out so nobody get clunked on the head. Yeah, I got to be a cat, cat operator there.

Roseanne: Tell them when you were going up there about uh,...

Leo: Oh yeah, we was going up there, I don't know if you heard about that explosion in Dawson Creek? I don't know if you ever hear about it. It was in 1943. Yeah, you probably heard some old timers that went through that there. They unloaded the dynamite in Dawson Creek there, that was the end of the railroad one time 'eh. You couldn't go any father than that. And all that dynamite blew up in there, someone sabotaged that barn. A whole, a whole car load, a whole car load of it, almost a car load. I was there too, I was helping and all of a sudden somebody say, "Hey there's dynamite in there." And this old guy I was working with, ol' Willy Hamlin, he was from Grouard, "Dynamite? Let's get out of here." he says. So we did. We went about, oh, I don't know, damn near a block, there was Wake's Café there, that's where we eat. Some of the boys were already eating, the hell with the fire. Oh God, all of a sudden, Boom! I had a cap, you know one of them caps with, geez, I looked around I shot in the air I see this cap, my cap coming down. I looked over at Willy, Willy's feet were sticking out, it blew him right through the window. Well, there was glass all over, even in Pouce Coupe there was glass and the shelves fell off the store there. There was always some guy sabotaging when the war was going on.

That was when you were 17 that you went?

Leo: Yeah. But you see what happened, the registration day, you had to get registered that time so you have a... and my momma had forgot what day when everybody was born and she figured I was born in 1924. So, of course the government took advantage of that and called me, called me to go join the army when I got 19. I was only 18, but I didn't know. I was told I was born in 1924. In fact, on my drivers license I think it still says 1924. They called you and the give you a choice whether you want to sign up or if you want to go for, go overseas or you wanted to stay at home, you know. So I joined up , I might as well get it over with.

So you were five in the 30s? You would have been in the Depression, you were quite old then?

Leo: Yeah, I remember, I remember a little bit of that, I was kid then 'eh. You see, when Canada declared war on Germany that is in '39. I remember all that because we just come off the Depression after the war was over. Things started booming then, \$1.00 a day now. Instead of working just for your food.

So what was the Depression like? Do you remember that being hard times?

Leo: Not so much because we had that mix farm. They had milk, butter, an'... there wasn't much there that Dad had to buy. See, we, we lived right off the farm.

So you went to Germany in the war?

Leo: Yeah, we went and uh, I had what, 5 months training? And then overseas. Camrose, Alberta the first two months. Camrose, the rose of Alberta. And then Curry Barracks. They get them all my advance training there. And field training is Ultrashot, England. We boarded, we boarded the boats on June the 5th. In uh, Folk, Folkstone. So, we went across on the uh, what was it, D-Day there? Norman Day? Took the boat, took the landing crafts and, my company and one of the rest had to take the trickle boxes in. At that time, at that time they gave me a machine gun. To go and invade the Germans in France. But anyway, four of us made it from the barge alive, out of 30-35 of us.

Two days after, Winnipeg rifle regiment, there's 450 men, there's only 48 of us left. And if anybody say he wasn't scared, the guys, some of them say, "I wasn't scared." They are goddamn liars. And I said my prayers too. I know I can say that, I didn't know how at first, I thought... so anyway, he marched us all to Mancee after we got captured. Mancee in France. Mancee. That's the name of the town. From there we, we got to some box cars, for a month, try to take us to uh, Nuremberg. We did make it to Nuremberg...

You got captured by the Germans?

Leo: About a month and a half after we got there, they had to have a plane come over every goddamn night and drop a bomb in front of the train and the bomb behind it. And then we got to get the Russians, prisoners to come and build the track so we can move again. And he done that and we had to uh, then we got out from the spitfires 'eh? They were out, they didn't have enough fuel to catch that train again. Then from there we stayed there, our playground had 4,000 Jews buried in there...

From there we, we trans... from there he uh, they moved us to a Falkland, that's not too, that's taking part of Czechoslovakia. We went to work in the surface coal mine there. And the Death March, they started out from Nuremberg, they call it the Death March because if you can't make it they just shoot you. We joined that in April 5th? No, 28th of April we joined that Death March. And uh, we were, they were taking us to Prague, Czechoslovakia on foot. So I don't know. If they'd of kept on walking there wouldn't be anybody left. They would have been down shot on the road anyway. So anyway, the Russians and the ally, they got kinda, closed the gap there one place, close to Edgar. That's where we were liberated by the American army.

Well, what happened is uh, uh, we hid, I hid in a barn, 'cause that Death March, I wasn't gonna go any farther neither. So, we took it in, "Might as well get shot, I ain't walking." There was in about, in about 50 of us, I guess. We hid all over in the corn field and we didn't want to go. They were moving us at night, and raining and miserable. But anyway, next day, two days after, there was a German guy there, a soldier walking around, he says, "I know you guys are here," he says. He says, "You might as well come out," he says, "I'm trying to help you guys. Here's my rifle," he says, "you wanna shoot me, shoot me, but" he says, "I'll try the best I can." Somebody had gave us a pig, and of course a pig is only one, one bite. We was all hungry, starving. From there, what the hell? Yeah. That one morning there, the fourth, fourth day, a British guy came, came back and he says, "You know," he says, "I was just talking to the Americans," he says, "they are only about three, four miles from here." "Oh you lying, bullshitting, lying, go swallow your prunce 'eh." "Oh no," he says. So he starts pulling out Chesterfields, Lucky Strikes... Anyway, he says, "They're just rigging up a platoon," he says, "they're gonna come up and pick us up in a truck." And then comes a big tank with a big star. Sorry... that's why I don't want to talk about it, I break down. (Recorder turned off).

Leo: I could have hit New York. No, I stayed stubborn. I wanna get my uh, my, I got to use all my discharges and papers, all the paper, book work 'eh. So I stayed in France but oh, about a month, three weeks I guess. So I hung around in the harbour there for awhile in France. I was looked after though, the American army was there, I lived in their headquarters. Then I stayed in a hospital in England. When I got there, after eating with those Americans for a damn near a month I weighed 95 pounds. When I got discharged, the right to come home, I weighed 182. Double, amost double. And then, he said okay, you go and run away home. But the boats were busy. I wanted to get on Queen Mary, I wound up with the God darn *Isle de France*, leaky old tub. I came home with the same God darn tub.

How was it when you got home? Were you really happy to be home?

Leo: Well, I guess 'eh. When I was starving and thinking about all them eggs, all the fights we had, I could've ate the whole works. Instead of throwing them. It was nice to get back to Halifax after sailing four about four days, three and half, four days. And then we had our leave. Lots of bits and pieces you're not interested in.

So when you got back you started working on forestry?

Leo: Not right away. I worked up in Fort St. John for about four years. Sawmill most of the time. I came home, and then I met her. After Fort St. John. She wasn't old enough when I

come back from the war.

When I was working for the forestry. The forestry that time they were all, especially them two other, three other guys, they all came back from the army too. They were all helping make as much as they can. Oh, it's just like a big family reunion.

Roseanne: Now our boys are working for the forestry.

Leo: They're in with the forestry too. I don't know, I never taught 'em.

Your (Rosanne's) brother introduced you?

Leo: He was a kind of a cousin of mine, well, he was a cousin, see, what happened is there, is uh, my dad, my uncle had married her mother. And he drowned, so he left two, he left two boys, Russell and Clarence. And Russell is the one that used to come to our place, 'cause he wants to meet his cousins. That was my mom's brother's son. When he got, when she remarried Mr. Gray, my father-in-law, so that's how come I got to know her. I used to go and visit them too. I used to check up on her but... I kind of felt sorry for her too, she was getting, she wanted to get out too and, so I guess I helped her, I helped her out.

So you were saying that you lived with on your parents farm for a while, when you first got married, or... ?

Leo: Well, yeah. We did for a few days until I got some lumber and built a little cabin.

Roseanne: That little cabin is still up there. I remember putting the last little board, like, on the peak. I put the last little board on.

Do you have any advice that you would give your grandchildren?

Leo: Grandchildren? I don't know what the hell I'd give advice. Stay out of trouble. Best way you can. Yeah. Get educated too. You gotta be a grade 12 to be a janitor in an administration building. Even where I worked in here, there was, you can't be a lumber piler unless you were grade 12. You started, when I was working Upper Fraser. And here I'm a head millwright with grade 5. With experience. I was offered jobs like that up in High Level there, after I retired, looking after, making me superintendent. I told that guy I says, "I haven't got no education." And I see there was two secretaries in there. The personnel man said, "What the hell you think we got them two... there for?" Talk about them poor girls, they just... that wasn't too long ago neither.

In a lot of the things that we do, it is done pretty much in the Métis way. Like I don't think I'll ever forget where I come from and how I was brought up and the things that my dad taught me and my mom taught me. The Métis way. I'll never, never lose that.

Marie Adele, Leonard, and Cecile Paquette

Interviewed by Heidi Standeven and Kristy Andersen in Prince George BC, on May 27, 1997.

Marie: I was born 1924, March 11th. Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta. First we lived in Sucker Creek. That's where my grandfather was. My great-grandfather, Cashmere Cardinal. My mom and dad raised me. But uh, my mom looked after my great-grandfather. Her grandfather. We had to move out of there because my dad wasn't a... didn't belong there.

Cecile: I guess he was Métis, like, I'm not too sure. My mother comes from a family of 13. How old were you when you went to the mission at Grouard?

Marie: Six or seven. Yeah, the convent was not too far from Lesser Slave Lake, at Grouard. We lived there, and we went home to school there. Yeah. After that we moved to Joussard. My dad went and got a place there.

Cecile: Yeah. Because Grampa couldn't live on a reserve. Mom said they lived in Sucker Creek until Grampa couldn't live on the reserve anymore. And we couldn't... some of us could, but some couldn't.

So, you were born at home?

Marie: They told me I was, I don't know where I was born at.

Okay, so, you went to school at a convent in Grouard.

Leonard: Yeah. And that was like the type of thing that they're battling right now with you know. They had no choice. And, but to be put in these places eh. Like they just took the kids. And put them there. And my mom and dad, before, like it was still happening when I was young, when I was born in Slave Lake and this wasn't about to happen to me. There's no way Dad would allow that, or anything, I mean, we just moved from there, but so, like, Grouard mission is where my mother went to school.

Then you lived in Slave Lake until you got married?

Marie: Yeah. We didn't stay there that long because... we moved close to his parents and that. I said, "Let's stay away from our relations." I wanted out. We got married on the 26th of December, 1939. I was 15 when I got married, when I had my first child I was 17. Leonard was born. My granny Loyie delivered him, my dad's mom.

Cecile: And my mom almost died. They had to rush her to the hospital in High Prairie.

'Cause I didn't know where the baby was supposed to come from. Nobody tells me these things, you know. Leonard and Yvonne were born in Slave Lake.

Cecile: When she got out of the convent, I guess Dad worked on the business and he said to his sister Alvina, he said, "See that woman getting off that train?" he said, "That's gonna be my wife."

So where did you move to after you got married?

Marie: We moved away from everybody. Especially relations and...

Cecile: I don't know if they lived there constantly because my dad... my dad used to trap too so, they'd go live out on a trap line wherever that was, you know.

What was your husband's name?

Marie: Frank. His second name was Napoleon. He was born October the 6th, 1918. We had 18 children.

Cecile: Myself and my brother, younger brother, we were born in Spurfield. Of all the 18 of us, only lost one, he's dead, '73. All of us are still around.

So you were living in Spurfield on a trap line?

Leonard: No, my dad was working in a mill there. But it's between Leonard and Yvonne, like my mom and dad were out on the trap line and, I don't know, going back to have the babies I guess. I'm not really sure. I don't remember too much about living in Alberta when I was a child. I remember going there, but I don't know where we went there from. Probably, 'cause when we were up here in Dome Creek, I don't remember living there,

where I remembered was in Tete Jaune. And I remember there and I was four years old then 'cause I wanted to go to school and I couldn't. 'Cause I was too young, and the school was right across the road because we lived in an old police barracks there. That's what they called it back then. Police barracks. You know, it was a great big house, and that's where we lived like, with my uncle John and Auntie Flora and my mom and dad. Ralph was born in Tete Jaune.

Did you move to BC after living in Spurfield?

Marie: After, yeah. I just decided I wanted to get away from everybody. So, anyways, his parents, my parents.. I couldn't take that... So I just told him, "Let's get away from everybody. Let's move."

So you moved to BC and whereabouts did you move in BC?

Marie: Let's see, just a minute now... I remember when we used to go out hunting... We used to camp lots. Lots of moose meat. We dried it.

Leonard: But at that time, like, when they first got married they gone along trapping. I don't know if she mentioned that to you. We lived in Slave Lake Valley, there's a place there they call Mitsue which is just where uh, the pulp mill is, around pretty much in that area of Slave Lake, and it's called Mitsue Creek.

I remember, I was pretty small, my uncles used to take me all over, like, I remember my mom used to go visit my grandad, like from my father, with a dog team, by dog team, in the winter. And we use to go down the tracks, because at that time there wasn't many trains anyway and so we'd just go down the tracks, the dogs would pull me and my mother and, and we'd go visiting. And I remember my uncles used to tow me around in a sleigh. Like, they'd be skating and it used to be you could go up some of these creeks and whatnot, there was good ice. My dad, they moved from Spurfield back to Slave Lake.

Okay, so about what year would this be then?

Cecile: Probably '45, no '46 'cause Dennis was born in '45. 'Cause when we moved up here it was in '47 was it?

Leonard: '47 I believe it was. 'Cause Dad worked for a short while at Wide Water, which is, about 12 miles, no, about 10 miles, 10-12 miles west of Slave Lake.

Cecil: Where's that place where Dad and them used to stook?

Leonard: That'll come, I'll come to that. My dad worked for, he's a very good friend of mine now, Walter Enkovich's father. And I can't remember his name. Anyway, Walter, a friend of mine, used to be in the trucking business here same time as I was, actually he started here before I did. We worked together before we moved here and we used to talk about times back then and my mother was cooking, were you cooking Mom? Or were you just doing men's laundry?

Marie: Laundry and cooking.

Leonard: And that was at Wide Water, for Enkovich. I don't know what he called himself at that time, it was a sawmill anyway. And then from there, we then went back to Slave Lake and then we went from there to Flatbush, a place they call Flatbush. It's not too far from Peat Rock, a place they call Peat Rock, which is maybe ten miles or so from a little town called Westlock, which is north of Edmonton. And so anyway, when we moved to Flatbush my dad worked there at a mill again. And then things were slowing down so then we went by horse and wagon from there to Peat Rock and we then spent some time, my dad was clearing land with axe for a farmer there. My dad and my uncle Joe cleared a lot of land there and in the fall when harvesting was being done, my dad had a real good team of horses, but also Uncle Joe had a good team of horses, and they were helping in the threshing in the fall for this particular farmer. And when we moved there, I remember, and it's just like today. We were all sitting there after it was, we had dinner, it was quite late, and the sun was starting to set near mainland, I remember just as plain as I'm talking to you here today, without a word of a lie. I wouldn't lie, I would not lie about anything like this. It was like a picture show for us, and we could see where, in the sky like, just, it was, like you could see people and the horses.

Marie: Oh yeah, I remember that.

Leonard:... and it would just be a, like a clash. In the sky... it wasn't high, it was just above the treetops and there, all there was poplar and willow. And anyway, this particular farmer like, my dad asked him questions about this, and he said this was an old battle ground between the Slavey and the Cree, or was it? Fought there I guess, you know, I don't know how many hundred years ago or whatever... And he found arrowheads. He had lots of this stuff. What he's done with them I don't know. But there was arrowheads, he took my dad to his shed and he showed him all this stuff. And there was tomahawks and stuff like that.

Maybe they just threw them away, I don't know. You know, I never heard any more. Another time we used to go to Lac Ste. Anne. Well, we used to go there on the pilgrimage there every year. (Marie: Every year). Leonard: We went by wagon. Horse and wagon. And we went from Peat Rock to Barhead. My mother's uncles both had property there and big farms at that time. And one, I can't remember his name... Vic Loyie. He lived right by that nice little pond, you know, where all that ducks were and everything? Anyway, it was all so beautiful like, where this place was and the farm that he had there. And then from there we went by car, an old Model A, to the pilgrimage which was by Barhead anyway, you went straight across country over to Lac Ste. Anne. And I remember going to the pilgrimage and not only the Métis, but also part of the Cree with status. We were there and we were playing in the water and everything was so nice. Then we moved from Peat Rock to Tete Jaune.

We were a short time at a place called Bend. Which is a mile, maybe a mile and a half from Dome creek. And I remember my dad packing matches for canned goods and everything. We just moved with what little bit we had. And we lived with these people for just a short period of time, and then from there we moved to Tete Jaune and my dad went to work for Hurley Miller. He worked there and I went to school there and... two years. My dad used to play ball with a team. It wasn't a very big place but they had a real good team. They had a real good team, but my dad played such great ball, like I mean, he was a good ball player. He was asked to play ball here, whenever they were having tournaments being held, like Valemont would ask for him, McBride would ask for him, Penny would ask for him and he, these are small places that had real good baseball and softball teams. McBride used to come and pick him up an awful lot. And my dad used to take me all over, whether it was hunting or fishing or whatever, I always went with my dad. This one particular time I couldn't go because this guy came to pick him up on a motorcycle. And I remember when we were living in Tete Jaune, my dad used to go hunting and I'd go with him and I still enjoy it today. As a matter of fact, when I go hunting in the fall that's the one thing I remember the most about my dad is, and that particular time of the year, that reminds me the most of him. I like to be alone sometimes, out in the bush, you know, so I can cry. And we used to go hunting and I remember we used to go in along the Fraser River right where the junction is where you go to Valemont and Kamloops, that way. And Jasper through. Well, just a little ways from where that bridge is, across that Fraser there, just back this way west of the bridge, maybe a half a mile, in that particular area, we used to fish there. You know, just a plain old stick, piece a line and a hook and sinker. And I used to knock squirrels out of the tree because the meat stays red a long time in the water.

And, I didn't know this, but my dad told me. And I'd use a slingshot and I'd get a squirrel

and I'd use the meat for bait. And it worked just great, you know. And I've often thought about it. A matter of fact the other day we went fishing, we took the motor-home and the grandchildren and the wife and I was thinking about that you know, thinking about squirrel meat for bait, because the meat stays red in the water a long time. And anyway, I was pulling these fish like crazy, my dad there and, we'd go home in the dark, just down the trail. And there'd be bear, you could hear them munching on each side of the road because they were fishing salmon, these bear just get right in the water. But they never bothered us. We just walked right on through, go home with the fish. That was one of the best times of my life, living there and being able to just go out fishing whenever you like...

And then from there we then moved to McBride. And my dad worked for... Sig Harstead. My uncle Joe had been, lived also in Tete Jaune, but when we moved my uncle Joe moved as well and we moved and my Uncle Joe went to work for Sam Arbor there and my dad worked for Sig Harstead. He worked there until we moved here, and that would have been... I think it was '55 when we moved here. Yeah in the fall of '55 we moved here.

Cecile: I know there, I had polio in '55.

Leonard: He worked for Jeff Cane, he worked for a good lot of things out of Summit Lake there like, Shields, and then it was just small jobs but there was many jobs at that time. Like you could quit one job today, and go into town and in an hour, you know, an hour, or even half an hour after you got into town, you had another job.

I remember that because I started work young, and I didn't get to go to school because at that time, well, my dad just couldn't afford it. You know, he had to have help. I worked in McBride during the summers and that, I was just a kid, quite young, and my dad got me my first job there with Vic Harstead dry piling lumber, and whatever I made I always gave. I'd keep enough so that I'd buy me a pair of pants or a pair of shoes or whatever, just something, and then I'd give my mother the rest because this went to help feed us. You know, times weren't all that great, at that time but we enjoyed. I mean we enjoyed time, I don't regret one minute of what I've went through, with, you know, grow up to be as old as I am now. If we could go back another 40, 45 years, and start all over again, I wouldn't want it to change. I'd be happy just doing what we were doing then.

How about in some of the other places that you've lived?

We pretty much stayed right here after we moved here. We didn't actually move anywhere other than Willow River, we lived there in '57. We also lived in Longworth. From

Longworth we went, we lived in Willow River. We lived in Longworth for probably about a year. I remember all this because I had bought a cow, so we could have fresh milk and stuff like that. We were living on a nice acreage there, well, it had quite a bit of property there, not too far away from there we could go out hunting. We could go shoot ducks because there was a nice place there where you could shoot ducks. I used to go out hunting with my dad there and then from there we moved to Willow River and my dad then worked for McDermott and Lofting. And then from Willow River we moved to Prince and we've been here ever since. We've been pretty much in this area since about 1947. Like, you know, Tete Jaune, McBride, here, Summit Lake. So it's just been the surrounding area but here mainly for the majority of our life.

The Métis families here in Prince George were the Garneaus, the Carpenters, the Luciers, um... Sowans, I can't remember the names of them all. I've seen this city grow. I remember when there was nothing here. Absolutely nothing, there was nothing on this side of Central. There was a road that was all gravel, you know, it wasn't side-walked. The kids walked in the middle of the road.

So when you, when you moved to Prince George the first time, what did you like about it?

The hunting, the fishing, there was lots of work, you know. And to this day, I don't really have problems with jobs 'cause I think I'm known throughout that community, you know, because of truck driving, which I've done most of my life. I've worked in the bush, I've worked in lumber mills and what not, so it's like these other truckers. But I got the opportunity to learn to drive truck, and I guess where I really got the bug to drive truck was when I used to ride with Eddie Turner, who worked with my dad. He was a trucker, he lives in Bear Lake now. His daughter drives, his son's driving, I think the whole family drives. When he lost his wife then, he's still like, fairly close to his children and that's why, you know, they're so close to him. So I think that's where I got the bug and it's what I do best. I may die doing it. But yeah, I lost my step-son here, and as far as that, I bought a little real estate there just off Highway 16 and that's where I'll be buried.

Cecile: Mom has 56 great-grandchildren. 46 grandchildren and there are 56 great-grandchildren. There's no great-great ones yet.

Cecile: Yeah, during all that time my mother sewed with, well, she made clothes. And she'd knit sweaters.

Leonard: My mother was quite good with her hands like, as far as knitting.

What about stuff like hide work and moccasins?

Cecile: No, she never did.

Leonard: I still have two sweaters that she made for, I believe probably the last ones she made and I'll never part with it. She made one for my wife and one for me. She made a lot of sweaters, as fast as she could make them people would buy them up. So that's what she did like, to make a little extra money. And then some of these places where my dad worked and that she would do laundry for the people, for a lot of the men who worked there. We ate a lot of fish, a lot of moose meat, we talked about it the other day, the wife and I, and I said, "You know," I said, "I can't ever remember," I said, "my dad buying, or my mom, being able to buy beef." We had to eat, you know. And she comes from the same kind of thing. And I can't ever remember eating beef. I do remember once, like after we moved here that we, in McBride, that we had beef, and we used to get, you know, it was a treat. But we had turkey... and we'd have a goose maybe, and chickens. But we never had that much beef, mostly moose meat and, you know, up to this day I'm not sick of moose meat.

Everything I learned from hunting I learned from my dad. I'm teaching my grandson and as a matter of fact, my daughter shot her first moose last fall. And she made a beautiful shot.

Did you have um, gardens in all the places you lived in?

Leonard: Uh, we had gardens. We had one in Tete Jaune, and a little garden there.

Marie: I canned lots.

Leonard: Like berries. We did a lot of picking berries like, raspberries, blueberries, saskatoons...

Cecile: Huckleberries.

Leonard:... huckleberries. We picked every year and we got to be pretty good pickers. We could pick a lot of berries in a short time. And, so we had lots and lots of fruit to last us through the winter until the picking season again come upon us. So we done a lot of that. In fact, we lived mostly off the land.

Your great-grandfather lived with you, or your grandfather?

Marie: My great-grandfather. Cashmere Cardinal. My mother's grandfather.

And what about his wife, do you remember her name?

Cecile: Cashmere Cardinal's wife is Josephine isn't it?

Marie: No, that's my grandmother. His daughter. Josephine Cardinal.

Cecile: Oh. Who was Cashmere Cardinal's wife?

Marie: I don't know. She died, I guess, before I was born.

And then, so your grandma's name was Josephine Cardinal?

Marie: Yeah.

Cecile: She, she married a Ward, his last name was Ward. Leon Joseph Ward is my mother's grandfather.

What about your mom and dad's name? What was your mom's name? (Marie: Philomine Loyie.) And what about your dad's name? (Marie: Louis Loyie.) Did you speak Cree when you were little?

Leonard: No, we never did. Cree was spoken in the house. My mom and dad spoke Cree all the time, we spoke English. My mother still speaks Cree to us once in a while. She says a lot of it in English too. My dad I can't ever remember, well, when I was a kid yeah, he did, but as we moved south from where we were, he didn't speak that much Cree to us. It was mostly English.

One of the things that the Métis did in those days too is they played a lot of deuces wild, like for ten cents, and they'd all put in ten cents. They'd start in the afternoon, they'd have something to eat and then they'd play cards and they'd play cards until about midnight. Me being small, I remember I slept under a table once. You know, probably not only once, I remember this one particular time they was playing cards and I just went to sleep under the table while they were playing cards. But this type of thing was what the Métis liked to do.

Marie: Your dad used to jig.

Leonard: They liked to jig and my dad, he was good. For a big man of 225lbs., he was light on his feet like a feather. And I can say that and I don't think that anybody would dispute that. My dad was very light on his feet for a big man. He played guitar, he played the accordion, mouth organ, harmonica. He used to like to play guitar when he was young, a lot younger and he used to sing to my mom, Mom and Dad. To this day we all sing. My son he likes a lot of music. He wrote a song about my mom and dad before his grandfather passed away. He could see that it was coming and he wrote a song and he sang it at their anniversary.

When did he pass away?

February the 2nd, '92. And my mother-in-law, she passed away '92, November? But she really, really liked my mom and dad and they were very close. I was married once before. And my ex-wife today is my best friend. And she's also a good friend of my wife. My kids call my wife now "Mom", they call them both "Mom." But they, my wife today is she's very understanding. She helped me raise the kids and you know, we done the best we could and I'm proud of my kids. I think I spend a lot more time with my grandchildren than I did with my own kids because I was on the road so much, being a truck driver always gone. And so now I spend a lot of my time with my grandchildren. And also you'll have the oldest one being a boy, I like to show him a lot about hunting and fishing and stuff like that. And call the moose which I think I could probably call with the best of them. You know, that something I learned from my dad. I've got a birch bark horn that I use that my dad made for me before he passed away and I keep that. I have learned, I like the Métis way. It's good. You know, we don't pick berries like we used to anymore, but I still go out whenever I find berries I still pick. My kids well, like my oldest daughter and my son, my oldest boy and the oldest daughter, I don't think they like to pick too much. They can buy the stuff in the store, you know, it's easy.

Marie: I used to can lots.

Leonard: My daughter, my youngest daughter, we go pick them high bush cranberries and Mom makes jam. We can a lot. My wife likes to can moose meat and we take that out in the wild when we go hunting or camping. In a lot of the things that we do, it is done pretty much in the Métis way. Like I don't think I'll ever forget where I come from and how I was brought up and the things that my dad taught me and my mom taught me. The Métis way. I'll never, never lose that.

Rose Bortolon

We grew up very poor in material things, but very rich in love from my mother and my Aunt Rose. She was always a generous person too, my Aunt Rose. I think probably the way I feel is because my grandmother Clara Laderoute, was also a very loving and generous person. So to me, I believe she passed this down to her daughter who then passed it down to us. And I think this is the Métis way.

Rose Bortolon

Interviewed in Prince George by Aaron Crowe and Sarah Ramage (March 1997), and Mike Evans (July 4, 1998)¹².

My mother was Alice Cunningham. Her parents were Clara Laderoute and George Gauthier. My father's parents were Joseph Cunningham and Veronica Gladue.

And were they all from Faust?

No. I think my grandmother Laderoute was born in Lac St. Anne, I believe. My mother was born in Wabmeun, Alberta. My father, Francis was born in Grouard and his father, Joseph in Jossard.

An old Métis settlement, I presume?

I would assume so, I don't know, I guess so. It's close to Edmonton actually.

So your mother was born in Wabmeun and your grandmother, Clara Laderoute was born in Lac St. Anne?

Yes. I'm not really sure where my other grandparents were born, I'm still looking. I think probably around Peavine, in and around Northern Alberta. I'm still doing some research on my family history, so I don't quite have it all.

¹²Mrs. Bortolon was interviewed initially by Aaron Crowe and Sarah Ramage. This interview was not taped, but notes were taken. A follow up interview was conducted by Mike Evans. The following is an edited transcript of tapes made during this later interview. The interview questions were left in the transcript as they vary considerably from the standard interview schedule (see Appendix One).

And you grew up in Faust, how did your family get to Faust?

Because of work my grandfather migrated to Faust. Because there was work in the saw mills. George Gauthier. He was Métis and my grandmother was Cree. From my understanding she spoke Cree and he spoke French when they first married. How they ever communicated is beyond me. But I never met my grandmother, she died before I was born. I met my grandfather, he spoke English when I knew him.

Did you live with him in Faust?

The very first year I can remember is living with my grandfather, my mother and a couple of my sisters. Those are the earliest years of my life, my childhood that I can remember. And after he died my mother was living with, she was single for a while and then she was living with Richard Collins. And they would fight like crazy. You know, they would drink on the weekends and they fight. So I remember my sisters and I running over to my aunt's, come winter, summer, in the middle of the night, to my Aunt Rose's place just to get away. And then we'd come home the next morning and they'd be sleeping in each other's arms, just as though nothing had happened. It was traumatic growing up like that.

Richard Collins lives in Prince George. He's my step-father. They never got legally married cause my mother and father, Francis, were never legally divorced.

Where was your birth father during this time?

Francis, I didn't really know him. But, from what Mom told me they were sort of forced into marriage. You know pre-arranged marriage by both the parents. My grandmother didn't really like my mother at all. And even when I went to live them, she still didn't like my mother or approve of her. He lived with my mother for the first year and I was conceived and then they separated and then they got back together again and my sister Barbara was conceived. My mother had other children. Then she met Richard Collins and they started to live together, so needless to say then there was three other children.

So Barbara is your full sister and the all the rest of your siblings are half?

Yes, and Barbara died of cirrhosis of the liver in about 1987, 88. She was quite young too, about thirty-two years old. She drank herself to death. My own father too, Francis was an alcoholic and so I always assume it tends to run in the family. I don't know if it's hereditary or not, but I think it is. I know that I was on the cusp of being an alcoholic too. Even after I

was married, I was a closet drinker. I think basically it was to do with my insecurities and my low self esteem. Marriage doesn't always mean that you feel secure about yourself. I think you have to deal with your past, all the excess baggage you carry around first. And if you don't deal with that it's going to take a long time for you to really make your marriage work. Or anything else that you do.

Tell me about the first house you remember in Faust? There was your grandfather, your mother and your sister Barbara?

I believe it was my sister Gloria, and Barbara. That's all I really remember. Growing up with just the three of us. It was a small house. It had two bedrooms and one big living room combination kitchen, and it had an old wood stove and it had a pot-belly stove which we used for warmth. We had, we all slept in one great big bed. Kids galore. It was just something that you never... we never thought nothing different, you know. We ate, our grandfather looked after us. We ate good, and we were clothed and my mother loved us. She took care of us. And then after he died, it was different. I'm not even sure if Social Welfare was back then. Do you know?

If there was, it probably wasn't much.

So I'm not sure how we survived. I don't think we were able to get his pension. I'm not sure, but I know we were very poor after that and life was very tough. My mother had various boyfriends that hung around. It was not the kind of environment I would want to go through again.

What do you remember best about your grandfather, George Gauthier?

He was always kind to us. He was a very nice grandfatherly type. I wish I would have known him better. I'm not sure when he died. Maybe I was about six or seven. The last time I remember.

After he died, did you and your mom stay in the same house?

Yes, we stayed there. It was actually, the house didn't belong to us, rather, the house belonged to us, but the land wasn't ours. The way they had it set up was my grandfather worked for McRae lumber and because he was an employee, he was able to live on the land until he died. So we eventually moved out of there, moved to a different house.

Rose Bortolon

They took the house, or the land underneath the house? (Land, yes). Eventually? (Eventually, yes. Oh I would think about five years).

So they didn't just boot you out?

No, no. Well, I'm wrong. It was longer than that, it was when I was thirteen. So say about eight years.

So when you were thirteen you moved again in Faust?

When I was thirteen I ran away from home. And I came back when I was fifteen. We were in a different place.

So Alice was a Cunningham?

Alice was a Gauthier. Her maiden name was Gauthier.

And your grandmother was Cree, what was her last name? (Laderoute). George Gauthier was born at Spruce Grove Alberta. (Yes). And Clara Laderoute in Lac Ste. Anne. (Yes). So you never knew your grandmother. (No). Did you know any of her family?

We knew some, but I wasn't sure how they related. Whether they were sisters or, my mother didn't really say, you know she would just tell us "these are the Laderoutes." They used to send us clothes from Edmonton. It was so neat. Even though they were second hand, I'm not sure where they got them, possibly from the goodwill store. And they would send them by boxes, and it was just like Christmas to us. We had all these clothes that were second hand, but new to us. I don't remember getting new clothes when I was growing up.

So you never visited them in Edmonton?

We could have, but I don't remember. But I knew we had relatives in Edmonton.

Did Alice speak Cree? (Yes). So she learned Cree from her mom?

Yes, and we used to always talk Cree, when they had friends over. Or they'd sing in Cree. But they never spoke to us in Cree. So any Cree that we've learned was just from us listening.

So they spoke to you in English? (Yes). Tell me about Faust.

It was a very small town. When I grew up there, there was one school, there was two churches, a Catholic and Protestant church. There was a hotel with a combination bar and restaurant. And one other restaurant which was Chinese. There was a couple of stores and a post office. We used to live across the tracks and we used to have to walk about half a mile to school everyday.

I never felt any prejudice growing up. I felt hungry all the time. I was always hungry. Sometimes when we were growing up, when Mom was by herself, we didn't have enough food in the house. So we had just porridge soup or potato soup, which we ate quite frequently. She always tried her best for us. She always tried to make sure we had something to eat, even if there wasn't much. She always seemed to look after us and loved us, and we respected her. Even though she used to go out and drink, we always respected her. I remember once when we moved to a different house and I talked back to her, I'll never forget that. I told her to shut up or something like that, and she came chasing me with a stick. She never caught me, but of course I had to go home, eventually. Did I ever get a good lickin from her. But I learned never to talk back to her again.

Did you conceive of yourself as a Métis or a half-breed?

I knew I was a half-breed, but I never admitted it to anybody. I never spoke of my race at all. I just sort of stayed away from the subject. I said I was French until I got about eighteen or nineteen, and then I started saying I was a half-breed. But I really didn't like to say that I was. I was ashamed of my race. I think probably the Indian part. I didn't like to be Indian because there was so much prejudice against them. So I always said I was French.

Wasn't there a fairly large Métis community in Faust?

Yes, but it was never discussed. I don't remember anyone calling me names, unless of course I blocked it out of my mind. I don't remember anyone being prejudiced against me.

Did the Métis hang together at all?

Yes. And I never thought of it as being strange.

I'm just looking at your genealogy, with the exception of the Gauthier side, it's Métis all the way back. Gladue, Bellrose, Berland, Andrews. Those are all really old names?

Well I guess I knew I was always envious of people who were white, because they had what I didn't have. But in reality I probably had more than they had. My mother loved us very much and my Aunt Rose helped raise me, and she loved me very much.

Could you tell me about Rose?

She was a neat old woman. Not old, sorry she would get mad at me. [laugh] I'm sure she still comes and bawls me out periodically. She raised me in conjunction with mother. I think my mother was sick and so my Aunt Rose raised me while I was a baby for a while. And then Mom had me back again. I would always go to my Aunt Rose's when I had problems. I remember my first time when I ever got a doll. My aunt made a Christmas tree for me, she got all the light bulbs and yarn. It was just beautiful and underneath it was a doll, and it had green hair. It was my first doll that I can remember. My first real doll. Otherwise I had wooden dolls. I think it was the best Christmas I ever could have, I've ever had. And my Aunt Rose was the one that gave me the doll and we used to, I used to go there all the time and she'd send me home. She'd say "go home, go home now," but she'd feed us, she had this big garden and horses and all the kids would go there, all the cousins.

Was she married?

Yes. She had one son and a daughter that she adopted. She loved kids and she gave us all nicknames and as I grew up I just hated the nickname she gave me. Which was *Myoke* which meant a frog, she said, or my little swaggies. 'Cause she said that when I was born I had long arms and long legs and I looked like a little frog. [laugh] So I loved her for that. And I have a cousin called Mousy and one called Chickey and Dusty, she gave everybody nicknames. I think that was her legacy towards us.

Was she around when you were born?

Yes. Actually, when I moved to Prince George here, I lived with her. And more so than my mother. She used to come and babysit my kids after I got married. She was a neat woman.

Rose Bortolon

You mentioned your cousins, so you had more cousins than her children?

Yes, we actually came from a great big family, we had a lot of relatives there. We had the Gauthier's, my uncle Albert, his nickname was Bull, and his wife Elizabeth. We had Barney and his wife Caroline, Gauthier. We had my Aunt Rose and her husband, Wilfred Ouelette. There was us the Cunninghams and there was the Carifelles, my Aunt Elizabeth and her husband, Johnny Carifelle. And I think we even had the Augers there for a while too. We also had Nomes. Nomes are our relatives too.

That's half the Métis community you've just named.

Pretty well. [laugh] Those are all brothers and sisters.

So when you moved to Prince George you lived with your Aunt Rose?

I moved here with my mom first. I lived with her for a while, and then I moved in with my Aunt Rose.

When did you first come to Prince George?

In 1969. And they were living in the Cottonwood Island back then. The Cache.

So both Rose and Alice were living in the Cache?

Yes, in fact they were neighbours. So that was kind of neat.

When did Rose and Alice come to Prince George?

I think about 1967 or 1968.

And why did they move?

Work. And the fact that the Carifelles were living here. They were here first and there was my Aunt Rose and Wilfred Ouelette. And then my mom and them came. There wasn't any work in Faust. In Faust, mink farming was one of the industries, fishing and then the saw mills. Basically that was it.

I think both the mink and the fishing industry collapsed. We used to go when we were younger to the fisheries all the time and get fish guts. And then we'd bring them home,

cook them and then we'd eat them. We also ate cooked fish eggs. They are a delicacy. Our main diet, growing up was fish.

You had all those Aunts and Uncles, after George Gauthier died, did they help you out?

No, not really, it was Aunt Rose who helped us more. I think everyone used to drink a lot on weekends. I don't know if all Métis did, but our family sure did. But growing up I always found that we helped our mother because she was a single parent. We'd have to haul the wood, go get ice, haul the fire wood and pile it up. We'd have to go to the saw mill and get mill ends. And carry the water from the lake, that was our drinking water. And when we were able to afford it, we would buy water because there was a guy who sold water by the barrel. So if we had money we would buy water, otherwise we would drink water from the lake. When you're young and a kid, water's, water.

Was anyone hunting or bringing you dry meat?

Yes. But I don't know who came. I know we ate a lot of fish. Jack fish and White fish and Perch. We ate a lot of that. We never grew a garden, yes we did. We grew a small garden.

Alice came in 1968 and you came in 1969?

I think she came in 1968 because I came in October 1969.

Was she with Richard Collins at the time?

When she was living with Richard Collins. We, the girls, were looked after. We ate, he really looked after us, except when they drank. And then they fought. But otherwise he took good care of us, as best he could. And he was always working. The only thing is when we were bad, we'd have to go outside and get our sticks in order to get a good spanking. Once I thought okay, so I went and picked a willow, does that ever hurt. [laugh] I thought that since it was a small stick it wouldn't hurt. That hurts the worst, I tell you. And I just didn't like him because of that. And because of the drinking too. I resented him being there, showing his authority, and whipping us. I know we did a lot of things we shouldn't of but I still resented him being there. I guess because Mom was single for so many years and then having this father figure in our lives, who wasn't our father. Showing authority. And we were hellions. I was the oldest too. I left home when I was thirteen. I ran away from home and I hitch-hiked to Edmonton. And I ended up in home for wayward girls. It was okay. It was, you know, it was probably good for me.

Were you wayward?

Yes I was wayward. [laugh] It was called the Good Shep (Shepard) Home, and it was probably good that I ended up there. It taught me a lot of values and stuff like that. I still had a lot of excess baggage on my back. But it was a start.

What about school?

I went to school with my Aunt Rose's daughter Cookie. I was almost five years old when I started school. I wanted to start so bad. I wanted to go with everybody else. And I really enjoyed it until grade five, and one of the teachers there made fun of me. Because I used to talk a lot. And so I played hooky almost all year. She made some comment and the kids all laughed, I never forgot it. So I failed grade five and I went as far as grade seven, actually. In Faust anyways. But I like school, I like going to school because it was a chance to intermingle with all the other kids. And have fun, and get away from home. But home wasn't so bad when Mom was single. She used to always have people over, they'd play cards and sing and she had a guitar. And they'd have a great old time. She used to love to sing. And even after she lived with Richard Collins, they'd sing and party, until they got mean and ugly. And then she had an accident, they were drinking and he shot her arm... off.

Anyway he ended up going to jail for five years. And in the meantime, she was on her own again. And then I was able to come home from the Shep, actually that was the only way I was able to come home from this school was because she had this accident. When I got home I stayed with her for half a year. She would do things with her one arm, she would sweep the floors, scrub clothes on the washboard, do the dishes and still cook. And she'd even play the guitar and sing. She'd have one of the girls strum for her and then she would sing and chord. That was neat, she had so much determination. She had this will to live. She was a wonderful woman. She got involved with the NDP back then in Faust. She always wanted to help people. She would give you her last dime or the shirt off her back. She was that type of a woman. She loved people, loved to be around people all the time. I think I'm like that too. I have problems with my husband [laugh] "you're never home." [laugh]

So this accident happened before you came to Prince George. How old were you when you came to Prince George?

I was twenty-one or twenty-two.

So you were fifteen when the accident happened to your mother?

Yes. I moved back then for about half a year and stayed there. I just didn't like Faust anymore. I went to Kamloops. My father's parents lived in Kamloops and I went on the train to live with them. I remember my grandmother told me not to send any clothes because she had lots of stuff. So I just went with what I had on my back. When I got there it was a different story. I had all these expectations and they said, "Well you didn't bring anything?" My grandmother had other kids there too. And then of course, they made fun of me because I was the hick from Faust. And I had never seen a TV before. And they said "you don't even know how to turn the TV on." And I told them "Yes I have, I've watched TV before," which I hadn't. And they were trying to get me to turn it on. I didn't know how. That was the start, the beginning.

So how old were you at this point?

I was about twelve I guess. But very naive, in some areas. It was tough, seems to me. And then I came back home and stayed with my mom and Richard and my sisters and they were still fighting. And then I ended up going to the Good Shep. And when I was sixteen I moved to Vancouver Island and stayed with relatives there, the Gauthier's, Barney and Caroline. They had moved to the Island. I worked there for a couple of years until I was eighteen. I always used to travel and I liked to go places.

What were you doing for work?

Waitressing in Ladysmith - waitressing and staying with my cousin. Ladysmith isn't a very big place and we lived on top of the hill. My cousin, actually my Aunt Rose's son lives there. That's where I stayed first. I lived with them and, because I didn't have very much freedom, I moved in with my cousin and her parents, Barney and Caroline Gauthier. I stayed there for a couple of years and then I moved back to Faust for about three months. And then I moved to Edmonton and stayed there and worked there for a while. And then I moved to Prince George in 1969.

So basically, I lived in Faust until I was about eleven or twelve and then stayed with my grandparents for a couple of years in Kamloops. And when I came back, ending up running away from home, then going to the Good Shep, stayed there for about a year and a half, until my mother got into her accident, her arm shot off. And then I left, and I went to live... in Prince George. I actually came to Prince George here when I was sixteen years old. That's when I first met Angelo, my husband. I dated him for about week or so, and then he dropped me. That's another story. [laugh] So I knew him when I was sixteen and I

stayed here for a while in the Cache. With my aunt and uncle, the Gauthier's. Albert Gauthier. Stayed there and then I left there and went back to Faust and then I went to Ladysmith. And then I moved to Edmonton. I stayed with the grandparents again, the Cunningham's. They were living in Kamloops and then they moved to Edmonton. Then I went home to see my mom, for about a month. Faust had just changed. It was so dead. So I left and I came to Prince George and I've lived here ever since.

Tell me about the Cache.

Okay. We had a lot of fun in the Cache. Because I was a young girl you know, there were parties, there was parties galore, every weekend. That's actually where I met my girlfriend Ronnie. Her husband was with the Company of Young Canadians. I think it was shortly after I moved to the Cache I met her. I was living at the Cache, either at my mom's place or my Aunt Rose's. I would go to parties and so on. There was parties all over the place. I used to party with the Garneau's, Alice Garneau was my best friend. We used to run across the tracks from the Cache going to downtown. We never worried either about walking the streets by ourselves or going across the tracks in the middle of the night. It just, it was safe. Or we felt safe. Or we were stupid, either one. [laugh] I'm not sure. [laugh]

Who was living in the Cache?

The Garneau's, the Carifelle's, the Cunningham's, the Ouelette's, the McGillvray's. The Mossman's, but they weren't Métis. Some of the Potskin's lived there too. Carpenter's, there was a lot of people down there I just can't remember them all.

What was going on down there? I mean like your mom being involved with the NDP?

She was involved the NDP in Alberta. In Faust. When she moved to BC she was active in BCANSI, which is the BC Association of Non-Status Indians. She helped found it along with Fred and Anne House. She was one of the founders. And she was always involved with Métis politics. I remember going once with her to Victoria to go to a meeting. I don't remember what the meeting was about, but they paid our way, and I was just a tag along. But she always was involved in Métis politics. I didn't exactly know what it was she was doing. I know she always wanted to help. And then she was involved with the Cache. They were having problems with the Cache from City Hall. That's when they had the floods in '72. She was one of the ones who could go to City Hall with all the rest of the people in the Cache. She wrote poetry in Prince George here.

Did she do beadwork or leatherwork?

No. She just sang and played the guitar. She played cards, she loved to play cards. And play bingo, I love to play bingo too. But she just loved to play bingo, but in Faust, we liked visiting. She used to always have people over. I guess when she was younger, her mom and dad used to take her to dances. Dances back then were like block socials and the whole family was able to go. She used to just loved to dance back then. She used to really have a good time. They never drank or anything like that. They would dance, the girls would dance together. And as she was growing up she said the guys from Faust would come to her parents house and sing, (to the tune of Buffalo Girls) "Gauthier girls are you coming out tonight." [laugh] She used to always tell us that. We always had company. Mom always had this hangover soup she used to make every Sunday. And I don't know if she had a hangover every Sunday but she'd always make it. It consisted of hamburger, potatoes. This was when we were getting older, when she was living with Richard. She'd always have this soup. As I grew up, Shawn said "we used to have this hamburger soup every Friday." I never realized how much I was making it. And I make it at the restaurant here too. Except I call it hamburger and potato soup. But she loved her children and she really loved life.

What about her BCANSI involvement?

She would go meetings with them. I believe she was instrumental to them getting houses. I'm not sure what year it was, but there must have been about eight or nine houses. We had a house on Regent Crescent. Gertie Regan still lives there. That was bought through BCANSI, or something... I'm sure it was BCANSI.

Whatever became of BCANSI?

I think it folded here. But it's still going strong in other places. I don't what happened here. It wasn't something that I was interested in, except for going to meetings in Victoria or maybe, I was quite young. She always like to belong to the Métis or half-breed I guess; the non-Status at that time. It was good for her. And she helped in Faust too, I guess.

When did you marry Angelo?

We got married in 1975. And we lived in South Fort George. We bought a house. Actually it's funny, it had one bedroom, living room and a small little kitchen. He paid \$5,000 dollars for it and it had an outside bathroom. And this is in 1970. Something similar to what I grew up in. So he and I and Shawn lived in it for a couple of years. And then we had a house

built in Pineview. We've been living there since 1972.

How many children do you have?

In total we have four girls.

When did you start catering?

Actually, I stayed home with the girls and volunteered with Brownies and Blockparents and then I decided, after my youngest one was in grade eight, to go back to school. To get my GED, so I did that. I got my grade 12. But before that, when Angelo and I were first living together I went back and got my grade nine and ten through the College of New Caledonia. And I got my basic book keeping course, I did my husband's books forever. I'm still doing it. And then had my children and got them safely through school, they're still working at it. And then I went to the Friendship Center, they have this program, Project Refocus. So I got my grade 12, or GED through that program. And then Shawn and I, she was at loose ends so we decided to take this Native Entrepreneurship Training together. And that was in 1991, so we did that, and we started catering together. That was the first business that we opened. So I've been catering since 1991, 1992. Shawn and I were partners for a few years. She decided that it wasn't steady enough and she needed a full time job, so she went to work at the Friendship Center. She just loves it there.

Before you started catering, you cooked?

I cooked just for family and we had barbecues and stuff like that. But also too, when we were living in South Fort George in our first house, I was doing this survey through the Unemployment Office, I don't remember the name, but it was surveying groups like active support against poverty and the crisis Center. That was years ago. But I was always trying to be involved with something. I was also involved with Harold Morin, in, it was a Métis Friendship House. I think it was on Fourth Avenue. Years ago. I was actually hired as a counsellor. Don't ask me what we were doing. It was just like a drop in Center. It was kind of neat. There was Betty Janiquis, Harold Morin, myself and Fern Lanagan. Those are the four names I remember very well. We got donations of clothing and household goods. Which we distributed to people who needed them. And it was a good place for half breeds to drop-in for coffee or discuss your problems.

What year was this?

I don't remember. I was living in South Fort George.

And you moved out of the Cache in 1970? (Yes) And by 1973, the Cache was gone?

Yes, because they had the flood in 1972. In fact my mom wrote a poem about it, the flood of 1972. Oh, it was June the tenth of 1973. That's kind of neat.

What do think is the most important thing your mother taught you?

Determination. Not to give up. To respect your elders. One thing she taught me was to earn respect. I respected my mother even though she had a lot of trials and she had a lot of problems growing up. She had a lot of misfortunes but she struggled through. I respected her not because of the things, like having a child out of wedlock. That's nothing. It was the things in her heart, the things in her mind. The respect that she gave people, the love, her generosity. Her beliefs. She never really talked about anybody. She found good in everybody. Sometimes I find it hard to do that. But she liked people and she accepted you for who you are and not your past. You don't find too many people like that. She was just a beautiful person. Not her looks, but her inner self. She had strength, her common-law husband shot her arm off, she loved him and she forgave him. She went back to him and she died in his house, with him being there. She loved him so much that she didn't care what any one else said about her. She was talked about a lot, she didn't give a damn. She just, this is how she felt and this is her life, to hell with everyone else! I think that's why I am the way I am now. And she believed in God. No qualms about it. I think it was her strength that helped me all these years. And I always wish I could have told her how I felt.

You never had that opportunity?

I told her that I loved her, but not what she brought and gave to me. Because I always, I grew up with her until I ran away from home at thirteen. I would come back periodically and then there was always things going on in her life and in my life that we never, ever had a good time to talk. Or found the time to sit and talk. And when she died, of course you feel guilty because, you know. So I talk to her now and I know she hears me. But she gave me a lot of stuff. I don't think we ever think about the things our parents have given us, it's not just the material things and so on. But it's the inner strength and all the other things that they give us. We never realize until we are older and they're gone.

There's something about that word "maturity," you do grow into these things.

Yeah. And after the fact it's kind of late. So hope that your children will know your

strengths and weaknesses and where they came from.

Did she get to know your kids?

She knew Shawn well. She got to know Angela a bit. I was pregnant with Gina when she died. But I did tell her that I was going to have another child.

What do you think she would want to pass on to her grandchildren?

She passed on her poems to them. She would just love them all and hug them. I don't think she was that emotional, or at least maybe I am conservative and she wasn't. But I think she would tell them through her writings. Because she did that quite well. I know she would tell them not to give up and pray to God.

Is there any other topic that you would like to talk about or add?

Hmm. I don't know. I know she didn't have much education, maybe grade three, she was a good cook. She was funny, she used to tell funny jokes. This is one of her poems.

*My father was French
My mother was Cree
They made a half-breed out of me.*

*I can bake bread, I can fry fish
I can make a casserole in any old dish.
My hair is black, my eyes are green
My skin is dark but my head is clean.*

*I have four sisters and brothers three,
And they are all half-breeds, just like me.*

Yeah. Her poems are very simple, but they were her. We grew up very poor in material things, but very rich in love from my mother and my Aunt Rose. She was always a generous person too, my Aunt Rose. I think probably the way I feel is because my grandmother Clara Laderoute, was also a very loving and generous person. So to me, I believe she passed this down to her daughter who then passed it down to us. And I think this is the Métis way.

Because of Alice

*Cocooned in warmth, nestled in her perfect body,
The cry as I entered - the world, the cold awoke me.
Then soothed by the crooning of her beautiful voice,
Singing softly, a sweet lullaby that only I could hear.*

*Mother's milk, the vest of life - to nourish, to nurture
all that is hers, to give me a start, and help me along.
This great, vast highway of life.*

*I grew to be a thinker, a listener, a speaker, needing a quest
for knowledge that only someone, as giving and understanding as
she could be - by leading me, then prodding me, to do the best,
that only she knew, that each step I ventured upon,
was due to the love and nurturing she gave to me.*

*This special lady, who became my friend, who listened when I was
frustrated, who screamed at me when I got lazy - with life.
This special person who was there, when I needed someone,
when I felt that life was cruel, she gave me the encouragement
to see life in a different light, this special lady, the backbone
of who I am, of who I will become, of whom I give thanks,
by honouring her, not just today, but saying a prayer for -
this special lady - my mom.*

- Rose C. Bortolon

In talking about this my mother was really proud, she felt really proud that she was able to do this and that she was taught how to get fish and how to fix fish. Here she was seven years old and she was doing this with her grandmother, she was always a fish woman. She said that my dad didn't know how to get in the fish, but "I was always a fish woman."

Sophia Suvee

(as told by Ruth Suvee)

Interviewed by Andrew Embree in Prince George BC, on Sept 26, 1997¹³.

Ruth: My mother was born at White Fish Lake, which is called Good Fish Lake Reserve and that's in northern Alberta, April 2, 1927. She was removed away from her family in 1939 to go to residential school, and she attended residential school in St. Albert Elementary School, just outside of Edmonton. It was about 120 miles from her home. In 1943 she was taken out of residential school, and she went to work in Edmonton from 1943 to 44. She went back to her reservation in 1944 and then she married my father in 1945 and moved to the Kikino Métis Settlement.

So at Good fish Lake what was home? What did it look like?

It was a log house. It was it wasn't very big. It had an upstairs, there was a kitchen and a big large living area in the downstairs part and then there was an upstairs and it was all open. Everybody shared the big room on the upper level. There were no partitions, it was all open. It was her grandfather's house. It was an old, old, house. It would have been my mother's grandmother and grandfather's (father's parents) that lived there. There was a lake down the hill from the house and my mother's grandmother lived very close to their house. You could see my mother's grandmother's house before the lake.

There was a road. It wasn't a main road, it was like more a path or a wagon trail. I asked my mother about this house. I remember how this place looked and she was totally

¹³Mrs. Sophia Suvee was not comfortable being interviewed, so her daughter Ruth asked her the interview questions, and recorded notes of her responses. Ruth was then interviewed about what her mother had said. The following is from the second interview.

amazed that I remembered how it looked and where my great-grandma's house was and the trails... it was kind of over a hill... I couldn't tell you how far the main road was. There was always a garden, they grew potatoes and root vegetables, carrots, onions, it also had rhubarb. There was muskeg there too, and there were a lot of trees. Every morning from the age of seven my mother would go with her grandmother and pull in the fish and then they would fix the fish. This is what they did first thing in the morning, she would go to the lake with her grandmother on a boat and they'd pull in the net and then they would dry the white fish.

In talking about this my mother was really proud, she felt really proud that she was able to do this and that she was taught how to get fish and how to fix fish. Here she was seven years old and she was doing this with her grandmother, she was always a fish woman. She said that my dad didn't know how to get in the fish, but "I was always a fish woman." She was taught how... from the time she was seven.

The grandparents lived just over the hill you said? (Just down the hill). And their names?

I don't know, her grandma's name was Mariah Gladue. Her married name was Gladue and her maiden name was Reid. Her grandfather, her first biological grandfather's name was Abraham Cardinal, and her step grandfather's name was St. Pierre Gladue. Her natural grandfather died when she was really young.

All of her grandma's children were from her first marriage: her oldest uncle was Alex Cardinal, and then her uncle Elmer Cardinal, and then came her mother Eliza and then her younger Aunt Eleanor, and there was an Aunt Sophie and Jean, they're all Cardinals. There were six children from her grandma's first marriage with Abraham.

They were fishing people. Fishing women. [laugh] And Farmers, they had cattle and they gardened. Her grandmother was born in Lac la Biche, Alberta and her grandfather, she doesn't know where he was born. She said that they were poor but they always had meat to eat. Her maternal grandparents, her grand-grandparents were English Métis. (*So she has some Métis...*) Then I guess my great-grandmother married an Indian man.

Were your grandparents religious?

She said that there was a lot of stuff that was hidden, so she wasn't really sure. She just knew that there was a lot of shame around talking about religion, didn't ever talk about it. And with her experience, they took them away to the residential school and they wouldn't

talk about those things. So it was something that they didn't talk about to the children in the school. Her maternal grandmother was Catholic. That's as far back as she can remember, but the other things or the other part of it was not talked about, but she knew there was something that they talked about.

I wonder, the accomplishments they had, which ones are they most proud of?

Being good farmers and good providers for their families. Her maternal grandparents were good hard workers. But her paternal grandparents, her grandmother had died when she was an infant and she never really got to know her and her grandfather, her paternal grandfather, favoured her and spent a lot of time with her. I think he needed her, "his favourite grandchild." [laugh]

Ok, we'll move a generation down, and talk about your mother's parents. What was your mother's first memory of her mother?

That she was strict, and that she made her work hard. And that when she was small she had to do a lot of work.

Father?

That he drank. She didn't really like her father. She told me that she remembers her father trading a cow, the last cow to always bring in moonshine. He would trade fish for moonshine. She was telling me that the women where the ones who went and got the fish and then he traded the fish for moonshine. Her dad died when she was seventeen years old and she's not sure how he died but people would say that it was bad medicine. It was never discussed.

What were her mother's goals in life?

To feed her family. Her parents always talked in privacy so she never really knew. The children were never included in any of the discussions, and my mother didn't ask a lot of questions.

What are some of the things that her parents taught your mother?

Fishing, gardening, domestic chores, trapping, netting. Most of the things she said she learned from her grandmother. She was closer to her grandmother than she was to her parents. Her grandma just lived down the hill and she was kind with her.

My mother was kept home from school. The rest of her siblings were taken off to residential school when they were six and they didn't know that my mother... they told the Indian agent that my mother was blind, and she faked blindness and was able to avoid going to residential school until she was twelve. So she was kept at home so she could help her mother, so she could work and help her mother with the younger children. She was kind of chosen. She said there is always one that is kept back to do the work and to teach them things.

Was that a sort of a prestigious... ?

I don't think she saw it that way, but I think it was. You know she doesn't say this, this is what I know about her life now. They would keep one at home so they would maintain some of their traditions and could teach them to others. She did spend a lot of time with her grandma. She doesn't talk a whole lot about some of the teachings cause, I believe, there's a lot of shame about that with my mother. I don't know if she was talking about residential school, it was bad medicine, so she wouldn't talk about it.

When your mother was a child what kind of things did she like to do?

She said she was never a child. She did like spending time with her grandmother, but most of the time, she said she just worked. As far back as she can remember, all she can think about is work. My mother has worked hard all her life, all her life right from being a child, and even after her family grew up, we grew up, she always feels that work is important, and really that's all she needed to do. When we'd go on vacation she really doesn't enjoy that because she wants to come home and do her canning.

What about her sisters and brothers?

Her oldest brother is George and was born in 1921. And then she had a sister Charlotte, born in 1923. Ida, was born in 1925. Katie in 1929, and my mother was born in 1927. And then Dora in 1930, and Alan in 1932, Wilfrid in 1940, James in 1944. And there was sister Sylvia in there, she was born in 1942

Were there any times were she got to go to any special places?

Church every Sunday. And they visited with the Jacksons, this would be her cousins. She talked a little bit about how that was the day that they didn't have to work.

How about the bad times, like the winters and droughts?

She said it was really cold. There wasn't very much snow. And they never had decent clothes, they didn't have enough clothing to keep them warm. Her mother was too proud to receive clothes from the church so she said that they were always trying to mend their clothes and never really had enough. Because they lived by the lake it was especially cold in the winter, the wind would blow off the lake. And she again talked about hard work, and how that was always there.

What kind of child was your mother?

She said that people liked her. She was very well disciplined, and she was always shy. She played with her cousins. That's all that she knew, the cousins and her siblings, but her sisters and brothers weren't there most of the time. They were at residential schools. She said she was friendly with her cousins, but that's the only people that she was able to see.

How about the illnesses, were there any of those in her life?

She was healthy but she got really quite sick when she was sixteen. Her hands and legs were swollen and she couldn't move. At the school they thought she might have had rheumatic fever, but there was no doctors so she never really knew. She was treated by Indian medicine, by plants bleached with turpentine. The medicine man used different things, herbs. She said she never really knew what happened, but she said that she believed that she would have died if the medicine man hadn't treated her. She got better after he treated her. But this might be one reason my mother has severe arthritis now. But she was very strong and she could do anything with very little effort. That debilitated her only for that time that she was sick, she "worked just like a man."

What did the teenage years bring her?

She said she was crazy. She liked to be crazy. She remembered babysitting a lot, taking care of other kids. She loved to dance and she learned how to do the jig. My mother was a really good jigger. She taught us how to jig. She was a really good dancer.

When she was younger, what did she want to be when she grew up?

She thought that she would always be at home working. That's all she knew. So she didn't know anything else.

What were the most important things that happened before she was twenty-one?

Having two children. She had two children by the time she was twenty-one. They had children two years apart. She was twenty-three when I was born.

How was residential school?

She said she enjoyed it. I was really quite surprised. She was quite disappointed when she had to quit because of the war. She prided herself at being smart because she didn't start residential school until she was twelve but she learned very quickly. And, I guess she got a lot of hassling, but she said that she would look at her brother's and sister's books when they came home from residential school. Her siblings taught her something so they were quite impressed by her in residential school because it was her first time learning how to read and write. She learned very quickly. "I didn't have to work this hard" she said. She still had to work hard but not as hard as she had to at home.

At school did she have any kind of favourite teacher?

No. She remembers being strapped on the wrist from giving answers to friends. So she was punished for telling other students answers. And she remembered one teacher, a man teacher, and she said that he was good to her, but she couldn't remember his name.

Did she get in trouble in school?

For talking Cree. I gather they were punished. The other thing that she said... when she got in trouble at school they'd make her stand in the corner with books on her head as well. And she'd get in trouble for beating up the boys. The boys were bullies. There was this one particular boy that was a bully and she wouldn't let him beat them up, she got in trouble for that. And the new kids were always too little, terrible when they first came in, and she couldn't get to stick with her friends. There was a lot of violence, the older and bigger kids picking on the littler kids. She was picked up by her ears and beaten.

What about the work, what kind of work was given?

You worked hard. You did baking and learned how to cook. So the girls had to learn all the domestic things like cooking and cleaning and the boys did the outside work in the garden. So they had to cook the food. She'd still have to work, but she didn't have to work all day, that was the difference. Because they were in class for part of the day and they work for part of the day. When she was at home she worked right through... got up early in the morning and worked all day long.

She doesn't remember playing very much. I remember her saying one time that they used to separate the boys and the girls outside for playtime and sometimes that was the only time that she might see her brother. They used to have to peek through a hole in the fence and talk to each other. Because when they were inside the school they were either working or...

Did she marry after residential school?

She actually left home when she returned from residential school, when she was sixteen, when the war started. And then she went to Edmonton to work, she was a waitress and dishwasher. She was only there for a year, then she married my dad. They married when she was eighteen. She used to get a dollar an hour, and she paid seven dollars a week for rent. She worked at an army base restaurant. When she was making eight dollars a day that she would send that money to buy clothes for her family. She only kept enough to pay her rent and clothes, and she was eating at the restaurant. She said she would buy herself one piece of clothing each pay, and she'd send the rest of the money back home, or she'd buy clothing to send back to her family.

She waitressed then was a dishwasher. She said she chose to be a dishwasher because she didn't really like being around people, she was a bit shy. She said she enjoyed working. And then after she went back to the reserve, after the war was over, she went and worked with her uncle George. She worked fifteen hours a day on his farm.

The depression, how old was she then?

She was about three years old, she said in those days we didn't have any welfare. And she remembers sitting and waiting for rations. They used to get tea, sugar, porridge, flour, baking powder and they would get lard, salt pork, elk and moose. They would distribute the game that someone got.

When your mother was little, did she want to get married?

She never wanted to get married. She thought that whoever she married would be as lazy as her dad, but that wasn't the case, my dad is not lazy.

When did she meet your dad?

When she was seven. She said my dad was a real show-off, she said to me, "he couldn't help it."

Do you know when she got married?

In 1945 in St. Paul, Alberta. My parents lived together before they got married because my grandfather... everytime they made enough money to have the wedding, they say my grandfather would go to buy the wedding dress and the stuff for the wedding. They had made enough money and saved enough money for them to do that and everytime my grandfather went away to do that he would end up spending the money gambling and eventually coming back with nothing. They just spontaneously decided to do it and that's how it turned out that they married in the way they married. That's why they got married at a celebration. There was already a dance there so they took advantage of the situation, and ended up going to the dance.

From your mother's perspective, what was it like raising you kids back then?

She said, that we were good kids, and that we worked hard and she just said that we were all good kids.

What were her dreams for you?

To be smart and well educated. To see her kids grow up healthy.

So what other jobs did your mother do?

Basically that was it, and raising a family. She never worked outside the home. I mean she couldn't, not when you have ten children. She doesn't feel they were hard times because, well, she said we always had food and my Dad always worked. She didn't see it as hard work 'cause she worked harder when she was a child than when she was an adult.

Who was the most influential person in your Mother's life?

Her mother, my grandma. She said she was her best friend. There was a lot of sadness when she was talking about that because it was really hard for my mother to be away from my grandma when we moved to BC. And she always talked about her mom and she really missed her mom. When my grandma died she was totally, totally, devastated. When we would go visit my grandma in the summer you could just see how happy she was to be with her mom. They talked Cree and she was just totally happy. My grandma was her best friend.

What advice did she want to pass on to her grandchildren?

To be proud of who you are, and to do your best.

Well there was always about 17, 18 people sitting around that table eh... and only one cook. I can always remember that, even when I was just a little kid, I remember it eh... and everybody seemed to have a big house like that... you know uh, my Uncle Sam, he lived until he was a hundred and four, one of my uncles, my godfather. He had a big house too. We had a wedding reception at his house and there was two bands. When they had a wedding in them days, you went for three days and three nights... they'd just kill a whole cow or a pig and then there was just changing cooks, and changing bands, but I danced for three days and three nights...

Eva Stafford

Interviewed by Craig Campbell and Heidi Standeven in Prince George, on May 15, 1997.

I was born in Lovett, Alberta, a coal mining town, in 1918. I don't know if that's on the map or not because that mine has been closed for years. That's where I was born.

I was two years old I guess when we moved out of there, it was my brother that looked after me, because that was the year that that awful flu killed so many people. He was the one that looked after me because my mom was down and dead. He gave me my bottle I guess and kept me swinging on that. I can't remember the years that we lived there eh.

I think that I was about two years old when we moved back into Lake St. Anne. I never went on the trap line but I did go on the fishing trips with my dad. Out there in the cold, ice fishing... stay out there for a whole week [laugh], living in a tent. We never undressed when we went to bed at night, we just left all our clothes on, toques and everything.

Then we moved to Blue Ridge. That's around White Court, out of Edmonton about a hundred miles. I was just young, must have been about eight I guess, when we moved from Lake St Anne into Blue Ridge. That is where we stayed until the time I went away and got married. Then we moved back to the coal branch, we went to coal valley then. That's after I was married but we never went any place until I went and we got married there. We had the three boys when we moved to Coal Valley. Gordon worked at the mines there.

So you were twenty when you were married right?

Yeah, Gordon was 21. He was 21 April the 24, and July 23, I was 20.

How old were you when the depression started?

I was a young girl at home yet. We were living in Blue Ridge, because when that started, Dad couldn't work any more because he had this arthritis so badly, his fingers were all crippled, he couldn't hardly walk. His toes were all in like that eh. Oh he was a mess when he passed away. He couldn't lift up a cup with his... like you know you do. He had to use two hands 'cause they were all doubled up so bad he couldn't... the only thing he could move good was his thumbs.

Were you still in Blue Ridge when the war started?

The second war? Oh no, I was married then and we were living in Wildwood because the second one started in 1939 and Reggie was a baby then, he was born in June when the war broke out.

We got married in Evansburg. Yeah, I was there. I left from there. We were in, I was in Whitecourt, I was still single, I was 18. I worked in the hotel and in my sister's café there. And then I decided to take off to Wildwood and that's... I went there and I was there about eight months, six months before Gordon came back from Winnipeg, He was in Winnipeg working for his uncle Jack eh. He had a drive-in in Winnipeg and he was working for him. But I came to Wildwood about eight month before Gordon got back. And everybody used to kid me about him, you know everybody used to say: you wait until the other Stafford comes back. You'll get hooked. Because I was more or less chumming around with the other two boys. One is married to my niece the other one passed away with a heart attack too.

That was about normal back then? I guess people are getting married a bit older these days eh?

Yeah, they are not like now you know they get married and they don't stay married. Stick with it, fight I guess. We've been married 59 years. Our oldest boy, he will be 59 next month. The other one will be 58. They were both born June the 17th. They're living here. They're both in the lumber business, have been since they were teenagers.

We lived in coal valley uh six months and then we moved to Merco. Our daughter was born in Merco, and she is 54 now. So we moved to Coal Valley back to Blue Ridge and that's were we spent our time until we come up here. Did my brother Ed (Letendre) say anything about the... when we were in Lovett during that flu time?

Yeah, he talked about how your dad used to go around making fires for everybody and how he never got sick.

I don't know where any of my grandparents or my mom or dad were born. He's got that all down I suppose.

I remember my grandparents but I don't remember where they came from or anything like that eh, I remember, I remember being with them but I don't remember where they came from or where they were born or anything, I never did know that eh.

Well it will be nice 'cause you and Ed can kind of supplement each other's story, what you don't remember he can remember, what he doesn't remember you can remember.

Yeah that's right, well that's what I say, he can remember more, he's got... more, if I had a memory like him I don't know... He does, for being 95, he's got an amazing memory.

Well I know when we were just kids at home he used to read those cowboy books. He would read one a day and then he would come down that night and tell us everything that happened in that book you know, just like a show. His, like if you were sitting in the theatre, uh you know, everything, word by word he would, he remembered everything. That's why I say he's, if he can remember that then he remember it like that, well he can remember lot of things. So that would be, you know, well that, this book it's gonna be just one book eh. Just certain people have just so much part in it, is that it. I think most of them are from Manitoba or Saskatchewan some place, anyway, like you know, like us, we came from Alberta. We moved here in 1949. We came by train, we landed at Giscome first on the 24th of April, right on Gordon's birthday, our youngest one was only 6 weeks old when we got here and we stayed in Giscome just one year because we had three boys going into high school and we couldn't afford the dorm that they used to have here, so got a job in Prince George here and we moved into Prince George from Giscome.

So you were in Merco quite a long time then?

Yeah we were there nine months after Viola was born, I had to get out because the climate was to high I was getting to many nose bleeds eh. That's in the mountains... Cadaman, I think that's still, that must be, on the map. Sterco, there was uh, that's where our daughter was born in Sterco and then we moved into Merco. See you have to go up on the train and take another route to go into Merco, you kind of more or less back track. We walked that, I forget how many mile that is from there into Merco, from the uh railroad into Merco. We

went to a dance, there was about twenty of us walked up the track.

When you first were moving like from Lac St Anne to Blue Ridge, how were you getting between those places?

We went by horses, like you know riding and go cross country. It was no highways in them days.

Why did you move to Prince George then?

Because Gordon had a job up here and when we were in Blue Ridge there wasn't, there was just a village more or less, there was no work there eh. How he got up there was through uh, he's a drummer eh, and he answered an ad, they were looking for a drummer in uh Coal Valley and that would be uh, Sterco, Coal Valley is about a mile apart eh. So that's how we got up here. They were all the coal mine up there. Yeah, Cadaman is right inside of the mountains and wind, oh golly. I remember when we used to go down there on the weekends for the boys, that was during the war eh and you had to have coupons for liquor and of course. Gordon didn't drink, I didn't drink so our coupons went to the other boys that were drinking and they would pick us up in a car and you'd go to Cadaman; 'cause that was the only place with a liquor store and from there and well Edison would be the next thing. I got out of the car and the wind was blowing, I had to grab the car door, it just lift me right off my feet.

Was you husband playing drums then too?

They had a band there and he played the drums and he worked in the coal mines. Every Saturday, sometimes Friday and he was working Coal Mines at the same time eh so...

What did you do when you first arrived in Prince George?

Gordon was working at the Northern planer mills and I was busy looking after six kids.

Did you have any family when you came here to Prince George?

Well I just had, all we had was just our kids, we moved up here to get away from the family, an the first thing they moved and a whole bunch moved in. Lived with us and oh...

Eva Stafford

So you came here cold, you didn't know anyone?

No, there was only one person that we knew even, he was a time keeper there in Blue Ridge, that's the fellow that sent the telegram to Gordon to come into BC.

So what do you think is the best thing about Prince George?

Well I can't put my finger on it but Prince George, I wouldn't move anyplace else. We did a lot of moving, we were in Hazelton, we were in Smithers, we were in Telkwa, but I always moved back here and the last time I made a move I said to Gordon, "that's it", I said the only move I'll be making is from here to the grave yard. Be about 20 years since we moved back to Prince George.

So when you first came here what was the worst thing about Prince George?

Oh my God, there was no sidewalks, all boardwalks... I... Gordon's sister and their oldest boy is the same age as Raymond, she's got some pictures, she took some pictures of the boys on Third Avenue. What... I'm telling you when you look at those pictures you just think oh my God what a difference, you know... It's going so much and all the buildings look so nice now, the others they're all run down looking. It was 49 when we got to Giscome, and we moved in to Prince George 1950. We've been here since then. Well, outside of going to Hazelton in 59. I liked Hazelton but there's nothing there either, you know, it's building up a bit.

Was there much of a Métis community here when you came?

There wasn't anything. It's just the last few years here that I got into this eh. I went through the Friendship Center first... I'm a member of the UNN [United Native Nations] too. And that's a lifetime membership.

What is the UNN?

Well they're not Métis, they're the different types of Indians. That was the first one that I joined. We were having bingos there, I was working at the bingos. That's how I got started with Micky or Margaret. She was the one that got me started on that and then uh we had our membership, we had our pictures taken.

In the other places you lived, you were never in any other Métis organizations?

No this is the first place that I knew that there was any such thing as separating them like that.

Do you remember at all what that first home looked like?

Vaguely, you know when you're two years old you don't really... so I was two when we left but we did live in a big house, I know that... 'course at the coal branch they all had big houses. They were all made for families and there was a couple of my uncles, they stayed with us when we lived there. I can remember that because... I guess I was a mischiefy little devil when I was small. I was into everything.

It was two story, the bedrooms were up stairs and the living quarters, like I mean your kitchen and everything... mostly your kitchen and dining room is all in one great big room. Gotta be as big as this whole house. You know, the one room and..great big table... I'll never forget this table though. Well there was always about 17, 18 people sitting around that table eh... an only 1 cook. I can always remember that, even when I was just a little kid, I remember it eh... and everybody seemed to have a big house like that... you know uh, my Uncle Sam, he lived until he was a hundred and four, one of my uncles, my godfather. He had a big house too. We had a wedding reception at his house and there was two bands. When they had a wedding in them days, you went for three days and three nights... you know, they'd just kill a whole cow or a pig and then there was just changing cooks, you know changing bands but I danced for three days and three nights, I'm telling you when I was finished, I was 18 years old. It was one of my cousins, I was the bridesmaid.

That was a party, but you know, when you had a party in our days there wasn't any drinking, never a drop of booze because nobody had any money, there was no liquor stores around, no pubs or bars so I mean there wasn't any drinking. What they got like when my dad signed himself up because he was a drinker, I don't know where he ever got it, I think that mostly home brew eh, moonshine, yep. And when he got himself out of the band [took scrip?] now I don't know nothing about that... Did my brother say anything about it?

No.

He didn't say how he got himself out of the band? I think he bought himself out... or they bought him out or something. I remember uh my brother saying that all he got out of it was an old trunk.

So he bought out of the band, or they bought him out...

Yep, that's how come we lost track of the band that you know... Lake St Anne had it in their

church... but when their church burnt down, all that stuff burnt down... but I can remember the name of the place where we used to go when I was just a little one... and that was called the narrows. That was out of Lake St Anne, I know we used to... but it seemed like it was only me that they took when they went down there. We'd stay a couple days, you know, tanning hides and drying meat and stuff like that fish and everything.

There was never any cabins in that reserve, there was only tents and tepees. The pointed things and then uh the regular tents... I know we stayed in a couple of them because my mother and dad went and they always took me with them so they could keep an eye on me I guess. I enjoyed all the trips that I went with them there eh... I remember eating this soup out of uh birch bark you know they made their own bowls... I remember that and it was the dry meat and the dry saskatoons. They just boiled it together, and made soup out of it. I remember that, I'll never forget that and I know I ate out of that birch bark too.

Did you ever learn how to work with the birch bark and stuff?

Oh I was just, I was too small to really get into anything like that eh. 'Cause I couldn't have been any more than three or four years old. We went quite often, and everytime anybody got a moose or something we went down to help get the meat all cured you know like the smoked meat... at that time because there was no fridges, in fact I didn't know what a fridge was like until we moved into Prince George. Never had a fridge. We always had a spring where we lived... and uh. my dad put this great big wooden barrel in you know and the fresh water was going in it covered it up where the flies wouldn't get it and the salt..and that's how we kept our meat in the summer.

The meat would be white on the outside but when you'd cut it, it was ready, it wasn't spoiled eh... it was just the salt that discoloured it. But it was always fresh meat, it was never... it wasn't spoiled. and then when we did a lot of canning in ah the winter... like you know, wild meat... we'd eat wild chickens and moose and deer and we did a lot of canning because in the summer time that's what we used for our meat.

Did you ever do any hunting?

Yeah... somebody's got a picture of my brother and me, the one that passed away, we went out hunting and he had a .22 and he got a deer, we got it on a post here and uh we're holding this post, pole like you know where the deer was... we tied the legs on this pole so we were holding it up and somebody took a picture of us... we brought it home. I went fishing. I did fishing with my dad, ice fishing, Waltman Lake that's on Edmonton line there.

We used a net, we put the nets in... like you know put holes in the ice and put the net in in the evening and in the morning pull it out and your fish is all in the nets. I think they were getting about 25 cents a pound I think it was at that time... white fish you know. Have you ever seen white fish? Well I got one in the deep freeze here I'm gonna make. Get my brother down, he just loves white fish. I'm gonna make it one of those days and get him out of there...have him down for dinner. He's lookin' forward to it but I'm just waiting like until my son goes out to Burns Lake again then I can cook it because he doesn't like fish. Gordon isn't fussy for fish so I want to cook it when Keith isn't here then he doesn't have to eat the fish. So I said I'd wait until he goes out of town and then I'll get him out.

How do you cook it up?

Well, my mom used to, you can fry it or you can bake it or you can also cut it up... just better remember this... you cut it up in pieces like you're gonna fry it and then you put it in the pan and she'd cut up onions and sprinkle flour over top and some water and stick it in the oven... that way the fish wasn't so dry.

Did you ever smoke it?

Oh yeah, that's what we used to do when we went to the narrows, like we did, fish and we did wild meat eh, dried meat. Just on the open, big fire and there's a kind of a pole, a thin one where you hang the meat like you know, you hang the meat down and the smoke gets at it eh.

So it's got to be real thin?

Oh yeah, they know how to cut it, some of them do it around Tache, there's a few that do it. Every once in a while I get a little bit from a friend here, she's a native woman eh. I've often gotten some from her and I gave some to my brother. I pounded it like you know pounded until it was all like a powder and you spread that on a piece of bread with butter. Fish is good too. But I like the dry meat better.

What's that called, pemmican?

That's what I'm talking about... but my mother used to just use a couple rocks eh, and put a tea towel on it and cover it up and she'd use the rock to pound, my dad helped her too. When we were kids at home we used to fight over it but we liked to have bacon, you know when you fry bacon... pour that over top or butter, it's good with butter. Keith just loves it with butter... every time I get any he always says "Why don't you get me some?" Keith and Ken are the two that really went into it eh... right into that dry meat... With my mother there

so much in Blue Ridge. Kids were just young then.

In Lake St Anne, we had a big house and my Grampa Lee and my Grandma Lee lived with us and we had a bunch of horses and pigs and cows and chickens. We had our own because I remember when they butchered.. When Mom and Dad did their butchering then my uncle, a couple people would come over and help. They made a bunch of that blood sausage and they made their own head cheese, and cured the meat. There was there was a lot of work in living there I can remember, because I had all those horses to look after. Well there was no cars so you had to have horses to get around... anywhere eh. It took us, from Blue Ridge to Lake St. Anne, to go to on the Pilgrimage with the team it took us two days. Even going across country, you couldn't make it in one day. Dad put a cover over the wagon and that's how we'd go because we'd have to stay someplace along the road over night.

The first time I was just a little wee thing. I went every year until just after I got married. I never went anymore because Gordon wasn't a Catholic and... course we never had money and we couldn't go anywhere... until I got with the Métis here. And that's when I started going back.

We always had our own garden. We never had, the only thing that I can remember that my mother ever had to buy was flour and sugar and salt... the rest was all made just from the, you know, your land... more or less. Your vegetables, and all your meat and stuff all came from there... It was a lot of work. I used to get into the barnyard and try and ride the calves. I did, this one time I got knocked out and they couldn't find me... like the calf bucked me into the ditch. I laid there, I guess, for quite a while. After that they never let me out of the fence, they'd tie a rope around my waist and tie me to the fence and I could only get so far from the house.

I never went to school until I was 16 years old. Because all the places that we lived in them days didn't build a school unless there was 35 or 40 children. Well there was never that many around where we ever lived eh. So there was a lot of us kids never had any schooling. I had grade one and that's it. That's, you know what I've learnt is the years that's gone by and then I've learnt for myself.

Were your grandparents living with you then?

Yeah, the one of them, my dad's side had their own place and their house was a great big house but then they had a big family too... like us, there was a big family of us too there was about 12 kids in our family. Now there is only four left, two boys and my sister in

Alberta.

Do you remember your grandparents' names?

The only one I can remember is my grandpa John. He was from the States, Montana. He was a tall man... he was a fisherman. He had a fish house right by his place and he did all his fishing and people used to come out and buy this whitefish off him, he had a, what they call an ice house. At that time it's sawdust... and that's how he kept his fish fresh, in that ice house and he had a, well he used to call it a gasoline boat, but I don't know what you call it now. Everything is so different now. But he had a boat of his own and he used to take us across the lake to Alberta beach, there was no road at that time, there is a road through Alberta beach now, that's the one you take to go into Lake St. Anne.

He used to take us three kids across. Myself and my brother Paul and my sister Margaret. He used to take us across to Alberta beach and I always remember this big bear standing there with this bottle of coke, you know. Bear standing way up here and, standing there with his coke, drinking. And that's that's many years ago, I'm telling you. Because I was only a little girl. Margaret would be about eight I guess, and I'd be about six. And I'll always remember that. I know when my grandpa would take us out there after he would make his big sale, he would take us across and he would do his shopping and he would take us kids for a treat eh. And all the other kids would have ice cream and candy. Not me. I always had to have my pear. I always ate pears. I always loved pears when I was just a kid. I'd never eat a candy. I never, I don't think I had half a dozen candy bars in all my days. I never. It was always fruit. I went into fruit a lot.

Was that the same lake that you were ice fishing on?

No, we were on Walden lake, that's up the line like. We used to have to go with horses... but we had a sleigh, it was in the winter time we were doing the ice fishing. Like I say, I never got into a car until after I was married and Gordon's dad owned an old pick up, eh. And that's what we went in when we got married in at Evansburg.

So how many children did your grandparents have, then?

On my dad's side there must have been about twelve or fifteen. It was a big family there and they were all mostly men. I think my dad only had four sisters. That I can remember of anyway. The rest is boys and they were all big men, they were all over six foot... both my grandpas were very very tall. My Grandpa Lee was slim and my other grandpa, my dad's dad, well he was blind ever since I could remember and that was about forty years. He just

went blind I guess. You know don't bother going to the doctor because there was no doctors or... off Edmonton was the closest doctor.

What is your first memory of your mother or father?

I really can't put my finger on anything. They had a lot of company and Mom did a lot of work for other people you know... she was a seamstress and she did a lot of sewing making moccasins and that and doing beadwork. I can do that too. I've done that, well, I've helped my mother. We used to sit up until about four o'clock in the morning to fill up orders... at that time you only getting fifty cents for a pair of moccasins.

What was your dad doing for a living?

Trapping. He was a guide, he used to take people out hunting. Like in the fall. People from the States would come up Dad would take em out hunting for moose and whatever they could get and they did a little bit of trapping, like for beaver and muskrat and things like that.

There was a Hudson's Bay but I don't where it was, but for most of his trading... they'd come to the house. Yeah, that's how he used to do his trading. He never had to go to the Hudson's Bay or any place. There was always a salesman. At that time salesmen, my God, they'd try to cheat you as much you can. But a lot of times Dad didn't give in. You know, he knew he could get more... sell it someplace else. There was a lot of guys who would come and try.

Did they trade or did they give you cash for it?

Just cash. And like I say we had a lot of wild meat and the only thing Mom ever bought was salt and sugar and..well, coffee and tea. But I mean, for baking, she had her own flour and did all her own baking.

So were they doing what they wanted to do or did they ever have any special dreams?

No, just ordinary living. Not thinking about going here or going there. The people that lived in Lake St. Anne there, they were all more or less relations eh. So we did a lot of visiting from house to house, you know. As far as I'm concerned, I'd sooner go back and live that way now. You know. It's too fast living now. Too fast for me.

What are some of the things that your parents taught you?

Work. Well we never had nothing else to do but work and sleep and eat. No shows to go

to, no nothing like that eh. I think our first dance... oh we used to have like, Mom and Dad would make a little box socials for us kids eh. And we would have well the neighbours and they'd have kids like our age.

Did you ever go out to the cabin while your dad was out trapping?

No. no. There was just so many of us that could go eh. You couldn't take the whole family. The oldest of them would be at home looking after the rest that was left... Like you know, there was... unless I was, maybe I was one of them. I don't remember. Because I know they took me a lot all over because I was always the one that was causing so much trouble for everybody. Chasing after me so... I could've been one of them and my sister Margaret too. She was just two years older than I am.

What did you like to play when you were a kid?

Skipping and hopscotch. We played a lot of hopscotch too. I can remember the most was that I was in with the animals as much as I could, when I was turned loose of the rope. I loved playing in the barn yard with cows and... chasing chickens and pigs.

Did you have any sheep at all or goats?

No just cows and chickens and pigs and horses. We had lot of horses. That was a lot of work looking after a place, you know, a farm. Now they got all that machinery but everything we had. Cut the hay with this thing you sweep, yeah, yeah, you bet there was a lot of work. And then we never had basements, decent basements, it was always just a hole dug in the ground eh. Cripes go down there. But we always had a lot of canned fruit. It was all wild fruit. And we had at least 500 quarts of fruit put away every fall. Did all the berry picking. Us kids would walk for miles to go berry picking. Some places we would have to stay over night because we were picking all day. Well even Gordon did. After we were married we went up, like where we used to get our blueberries, we used to have to go up on a speeder and a flat car. You know. We'd take wash tubs, to put our blueberries in. You couldn't carry it then, that many pails, when we went out, went out for the whole day, like went out early in the morning about 8 o'clock, picked all day and came home with the speeder, it wasn't bad, and then the flat car. We would put our tub of blueberries on this flat car and there was six people could get onto the speeder eh. And then a lot of them sat in this flat car with the berries.

This speeder is just the thing that goes along the train tracks.

Yeah, they have them and then have the one with the motor in... yeah, that's a handcar.

Speeder is the one with the motor and the flat car is just the, a flat thing about so big. Oh I don't know about four feet wide and four feet long eh. They were made for the tracks, they use them to haul equipment to the place where they are fixing the tracks.

So if a train was coming you had to jump off and pull the thing off ?

Well we never, where we lived the train only came once a day. It was in the evening and then they go back the next morning. Like back to Edmonton, but that's how we used to travel to Edmonton when we did eh. That's after we moved to Blue Ridge, we didn't know what a train was until we moved to Blue Ridge. You know that's where the train went through to Whitecourt and that, made returns at Whitecourt and go back to Edmonton the next morning.

So it was Lake St. Anne that you lived in longest? What was the town like? Or was it a town?

No, no Just little farms, you know. Poor peoples farms, not those rich guys with all the machinery and that. Everything that they did that I can remember, they had to use their hands and horses. There wasn't that much money floating around in them days. The women worked hard, I know that. They all worked to help their husbands, that's what. So when we were out... like where we lived, we lived about this in the corner from my uncle, my oldest Uncle. He, I think he lived not too far from us. Well we're just neighbours, like you know... But they didn't have as much cattle and stuff as we had... My dad had a bunch of horses and then we had those chickens and cows and pigs and that eh. We had all that. We had a big field for hay itself eh. They never had to buy any hay. I know that because everybody had a little bit of land where they'd just take the hay off of that and trade for something you know. They never had to buy any hay.

Did you sell some hay then?

No no. Like if I had a bunch of something, we share with the other... you know? I still do that. The old man gets after me but I think if anybody needs help... If I got it, they'll get some of it too, you know. That's the way I was raised you shared everything you know. The only thing you didn't share was bed, only with your sister.

There was a lot of happy times because the people when they got together, they weren't drunk, they weren't doped. They were just old fashioned and enjoyed their life. And that's the way. I wish I could be like that yet. I still like it better than I do now. I don't have to be afraid that somebody's gonna come in and rob me or anything. That was the part that I

really... that stuck to me is the people were so friendly, they never fought with each other eh. What one had, the other one shared. We were like that we didn't say well you can't have mine because you haven't got it you can't have mine... it was always shared. Anything we had was always shared. Even when we were kids growing up, when my dad was working in the camp, on his payday, I think that was once a month, he'd buy 25 cents of the mixed candy. They looked like Christmas candy now. He'd buy 25 cents worth of candy for us kids and just give us so many a day eh. And that was it. And if friends came over, well... they'd get the same as we did. We always shared with whoever was there. And I think that's what made it so hard when we moved to Blue Ridge. There was some white people eh, and I guess they, well they didn't do that at first. Some of them were friends of ours. But we always did. Mom and Dad used to have little parties for us, you know, young kids... Mom played the mouth organ and we'd dance in our kitchen. You know everybody would see the way we were brought up so they started changing more like being friendly. I guess that's what, maybe they just didn't know how to take... the Indians eh. Maybe they were scared they'd get scalped or something. But finally when we got to know everybody around there in Blue Ridge there, there was different nationalities there too eh. But we finally got friends with them.

The store keeper, Mrs. Obey, she was a nurse. And her husband had a truck. One of those cattle trucks you know, you use to haul cattle in to Edmonton or something. On Saturday, we would have a meeting at the store and everybody would chip in two bits and she'd make the lemonade and ham and potato salad and on Sunday we'd go out to somebody's field and we would have a picnic out there or a dance out in the field... boy we had square dances out in the field and yeah, we had an old couple that owned a piano. She played the piano and her husband played the violin... they'd load that piano on the wagon and take it out somebody's field, that's how, like when I was sixteen and seventeen and I was growing up that was our enjoyment, was having our picnics every Sunday after church. Where we lived there was no church at that time... so we'd had it in some home, like somebody's house. I know we had to have church in our house more than one Sunday morning and then after that'd be all over then we'd all load up in this old thing or walk.

When you were a teenager then, there was probably even more work I guess?

There was a lot of work because we used to the house cleaning, then we'd sit and help Mom with her sewing like you know. She was making moccasins with vests or jackets or whatever and gauntlet gloves we used to call them. Mom didn't tan the hide, she just got it all white eh. And she made a jacket, a full jacket with the frills at the back and the front here and beaded... and the cuffs were beaded and across the back. And she made those white gauntlet gloves to match it... And this guy from England got it. And you know... at

that time when she was selling all those things, I think she got about three dollars for the gloves and the jacket I think was only about five, ten dollars... There was a lot of work gone into it because, I mean, when we were doing the beadwork, we had to put a white cloth in our laps so we wouldn't get that part, the pieces we were doing, you know, the beads. But I was the only one that did that. My other sister she couldn't be bothered. She was the same when it came down to eating wild meat, my dad used to call her stuck up because she wouldn't... she never ate wild meat... and she was the one that started getting sick so often... And my dad used to say, I remember my dad saying. 'Well you gotta eat meat.' You gotta eat moose meat or rabbit or whatever we had eh. But uh, no, she wouldn't touch any of it.

Do you remember what you wanted to do when you were a kid, when you grew up?

I wanted to be a cook. Yeah, right from the start, I wanted to go in cooking. And yet I can sit down and make anything too, you know. Seen it as far as seamstress is concerned. You can't have a Mother a seamstress and not know nothing... you know. But Margaret never paid no attention to any of that. But I did, I was always interested in what the old people are doing eh. But she wasn't. She couldn't care less what they were doing but I got into everything that had to be done and how to do it eh.

Makes you wonder where that little white jacket is now...

Oh it's in England. Maybe they got a family and passed it on to their kids... and it couldn't be washed eh. You only could clean hide at that time when we were making moccasins, Mom always got dry bread and we scraped. Put it on the moccasins and then take a brush and brush it off and then all the dirt came off. That's how we did after we did all the beadwork like and putting the stuff together... like the slippers or whatever we were making. Then we'd take this rye bread and rub it on eh. You rubbed like if you were cleaning something with a cloth. That's how we did it. And then take the brush, and brush the crumbs off.

I ran away from the school and went into cooking. Well the teacher, there is the one I couldn't get along with her because she was always picking on my nephew eh. And I just couldn't sit there and watch her cutting his wrists and the other guy that's causing all this rumpus is sitting behind him not getting nothing but he was a white boy... So I mean, when I see that happening, well I just said I had to get out. But first I had to tell the teacher what I thought of her... and her white kids, they weren't any good. This is how I said it: Your white kids aren't any better than us Indians, I said, and neither are you... Like I say now, all my learnings about what to do and what not to do and what's right and what isn't is what I

just learnt just by, you know being on my own...

Somebody said that they're gonna start up a sawmill and they need a cook... There's a time to take off. On my own eh. And that's what I did. Yeah, I was sixteen years old and I decided I was too old to go to school so I went out to a camp and I cooked for twenty men. It was just a small camp eh. Twenty people about then you know, wasn't very much. I cooked just ordinary meals, Like your roast beefs and your roasts and pork chops and steaks and your potatoes and vegetables and your bread. I made my own bread. I learned to make that at home. When I was pretty young. I did my own baking. My brother came with me because he didn't want to stick around either at school because he..he was only fourteen. So he came flunking for me. That's ah, you know, helping in the kitchen. We were there a whole year. Until the camp closed down and then from there I moved into Whitecourt and my oldest sister had a café there and I worked in the café... I uh, when she wasn't around, I did the cooking and waited on tables at the same time. And after that, when she closed the café down, I went into the town and I was a chambermaid at the hotel... Chambermaid and waiting on tables with a friend of mine.

Was your first language English or did you speak Cree or something?

Everybody talked Cree at home eh. Around, all the relations, they were all you know, they all talked Cree so that's what I learnt...

We did laundry for the camps too, we had about thirty men that brought their laundry to our place and that time we were just using the scrub board. No washing machine, no dryer, no nothing like that... We used to bring those long underwear, you know, combination underwear, bring 'em in the house when they're frozen stand em in the corner and they just stand there until they got soft... No, I did everything the hard way. I learnt the hard way.

So when you went to that camp, was that the first time you left home?

Yeah, it was the first time and I kept going after that. They tried to get me home but I just told the police, I've been on my own, I said been working on my own I says and giving money to my parents. But it was my mother. I mean, she only had me to do the work, she didn't have Margaret. So anyway, I said, no I'm not going home . I'm gonna stay and I'm gonna work out... I was only about 13 years old when I started working in the store there. There was no school and I start working in the store eh, twenty-five cents a day. At that time the most you could make a month at that time was 15 dollars a month. That was work. We worked for what we got.

Appendix One: Description of Research and Methodology

The project from which this volume was produced was initiated by the Prince George Métis Elders Society in the fall of 1996. In late 1996 Marcelle Gareau and Mike Evans (at that time both faculty in the Anthropology Program at UNBC) began working with Leona Neilson and the Elder's Board of Directors to put together a participatory research project designed to produce the oral history(s) presented here¹⁴. In order to understand the shape of this final volume, it is necessary to recount some of the methodological, intellectual, and political considerations that have affected the project. The project was a community based, and Elder directed one, but it was also conducted with the assistance of faculty and staff from UNBC, and the resulting work is published by an academic press. In other words there were several parties engaged in the project, each with their own, albeit complimentary goals.

Collectively and individually, the Elders wanted something that they could give to their community, and something that would represent them to the wider society as well. The university participants wanted to produce for the Elders a book that would meet the Elders' goals, and at the same time provide a rigorous training opportunity for students. More specifically the project was to be one in which the community shaped both the research process, and the research results in the sorts of ways suggested by participatory methodologies (see for instance Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991, Finn 1994, Frideres 1992, Maguire 1987, Reason 1994, Warry 1990). The issue of community control is one felt keenly by Aboriginal communities, and it was our intention to both respond to the need for explicit community control of the research process, and to demonstrate to students how such a goal might be achieved. In accord with the policies of the UNBC, and our overall concern for ethical and respectful research, we developed and discussed the following document with the Elders Society in January of 1997:

Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Prince George Métis Elders' History Project: Métis Elders Society of Prince George and Métis Elders' Oral History Project Research Team (Faculty Supervisors: Marcelle Gareau and Mike Evans)

This document is designed to deal with several ethical issues arising from the Métis

¹⁴Others were involved, and they are recognised in the Acknowledgement section.

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

Elders Oral History Project. Offered below are a number of guidelines for the conduct of researchers and the disposition of research materials and results. These guidelines were discussed with the Board of Directors of the Prince George Métis Elders Society on January 14, 1997. Following the discussion, facilitated by a version of the guidelines translated into everyday English, the Board unanimously approved the guidelines.

Guidelines in the following areas have been agreed on:

1) Guidelines governing the construction of research instruments and of research design generally.

- all research tools (interview schedules and protocols) will, wherever possible, be developed in consultation with the Métis Elders Society. All research tools will be presented to the Board of the Society for approval before implementation.
- an outline of all research initiatives into archival, census, or other documentary materials will be presented to and cleared by the Board of the Prince George Métis Elders Society or their representative before implementation.

2) Guidelines governing the conduct of researchers.

- faculty supervisors will provide all student researchers with a set of guidelines governing their conduct in the project.
- all researchers must complete a workshop (with Ruth Suvee) on appropriate behaviour around Métis Elders.
- all researchers will maintain the confidentiality of interview materials except in so far as individual Elders agree to release the material for use by the project (see guideline numbers three and four).

3) Guidelines for insuring that the Project has each Elders' informed consent at each step of the project.

- Elders who wish to participate in the research project will be determined by the Métis Elders Society. Initial contact with all Elders will be made by the society.
- an introductory letter explaining the project, with copies of the consent forms and interview questions will be sent to all Elders identified by the Métis Elders Society. Included in this letter will be a clear description of the Elder's rights in the interview process.
- at the first meeting of the Elder and her/his interviewers, the interviewers will explain the interview process and invite questions from the Elder. The Elder will be informed verbally of their rights within the interview process (ie the right to speak, and the right to refuse any question, the right to have present anyone they wish during the interview, and a person to contact and inform if any difficulties arise during the interview). After this discussion the Elder will be invited to sign the form consenting to the interview (should she/he refuse, the interview

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

will stop). If consent is given, the interview will proceed.

-at the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer will ask again for the Elder's consent to transcribe and edit the results of the interview. Verbal approval will be deemed sufficient for this purpose.

-once transcriptions and editing are completed, the results will be returned to the Elder for correction or revision. Once the Elder has indicated that the transcripts and edited version of the transcripts are acceptable, the interviewer(s) will seek permission to use this material in an edited volume of oral histories.

-at this time several options will be outlined to the Elder:

- a) The interview tape and transcriptions can be returned to the Elder with no further work or use of the interview materials.
 - b) The Elder may grant permission to use the interview for the project, but ask that the materials be returned to them, and not be stored by the project.
 - c) The Elder may grant permission to the project to use and store the material, but restrict who may subsequently access or use this material.
 - d) The Elder may grant permission to use and store the material without any restriction beyond that decided by the Métis Elders Society.
- A post-interview informed consent form (containing a clear discussion of their options) will be presented and verbally explained to the Elder for them to sign (or not).

4) Guidelines governing the archiving of research materials.

- full copies of all tapes, transcripts, and publications resulting from this project will be supplied to:

- a) All participating Elders - that is all Elders will receive one copy of the tape and transcripts of their interview, and a copy of the final publications arising from the overall project
 - b) The Métis Elders Society will (assuming that the individual Elders have not asked that their interview materials be restricted in some way) receive copies of all tapes, transcripts, and publications arising from the project
 - c) We have suggested that an additional archive be created at the UNBC Library. If this is agreeable to the Métis Elders Society, we will work out an access policy and protocol.
- * In discussions with Joanne Matthews (Special Collections Librarian), we have determined that the Library is willing to store in their special collections area the material collected by this project. Ms. Matthews has also indicated that the Elders society may place any restrictions that they desire on access to this material. Thus in consultation with the Board of the Society, the research team will develop an access policy and protocol for the research material.
- d) The Supervising Faculty (unless requested otherwise by either individual Elders or the Elders Society) will keep a copy of all tapes, transcripts, and publications arising from the project.

5) Guidelines governing the return of research materials to individual Elders.

-all participating Elders will receive one copy of the tape and transcripts of their interview, and a copy of all publications arising from the overall project.

6) Guidelines governing the production of a volume of the community's histories and the subsequent control of that volume.

-copyright of the final edited volume arising from the project will be transferred to the Prince George Métis Elders Society. However, any portions of the volume of an analytical nature produced by students or faculty working on the project may be reproduced or used by the individual(s) involved for scholarly publications, providing that guideline "8" is followed.

7) Guidelines governing the production, dissemination, and control of other community focussed material coming from the project.

- the Prince George Métis Elders Society will define their role in any subsequent use of the material collected in the final volume for all subsequent community focussed work. The participation of the current UNBC research participants, and their roles, will be defined by the Elders Society.

8) Guidelines governing the production, dissemination, and control of scholarly use of material coming out of the project.

- the members of the research team from UNBC will have the right to use material produced by the project for future scholarly work providing that copies of this work is provided to the Board of the Métis Elders Society for comment and/or correction. In the case of verbal presentations (ie Conference Papers) copies will be supplied as soon as possible. In the case of published material the Elders society will have six months to comment prior to publication.

**Confidentiality*

- one of the most important elements of the project is the recognition that Elders own their knowledge, and have given their approval to use this knowledge. Thus rather than confidentiality, the guidelines are constructed to ensure that Elders can control the flow and use of their knowledge (up to and including their withdrawal from participation).

- in addition, no researcher shall breach confidentiality except as directed by individual Elders for the benefit of the project, and in project directed activities.

Our methodology was participatory; as our main method we interviewed Elders on an individual basis. Before these interviews occurred, each Elder was sent the following letter (dated Feb 10, 1997)¹⁵:

Tansi,

In the Fall of 1996, we, Mike Evans and Marcelle Gareau, were asked by Leona Neilson and Board members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society if we could write down the history of the Métis Elders who live in Prince George and the surrounding area. We felt that with the help of some students at the university, we could do this project by the Spring of 1997.

We would like to invite you to help us with this project by telling us your history so that we can write it down and put it into a book for the community. If you decide to join some students will come to interview you. They will bring with them some questions to ask you. Copies of the questions are enclosed, so that you and your family can look at them before the students come. You **don't** need to fill these out - this copy is just for you to look at before the students come.

You don't have to answer all these questions, only the ones you want. If you decide you would like to be interviewed, but don't want to talk about something, just tell the students "I don't want to talk about that." If the student doesn't want to listen or if they are disrespectful in any way, please call either Leona at 562-2771, Mike at 960-5643 or Marcelle at 960-6618. We'll be glad to know about this because then we can explain to the student how to do research better. They are working on this project to learn how to do a good job. If you want to have a family member or a friend with you, while the students interview you, you can. Please do what makes you feel comfortable.

The interviews will be taped and then transcribed by the students. Once the interviews are put down on paper, the student will show you and read to you what they have written. If you like what is there, that's great. If you don't like it or want some part of it changed, just tell the student and they will change it. This is something you want to feel good about, and your family, friends and the Métis community will be reading what you had to say. Changing things is very easy on the computer, so don't worry about the work.

We have enclosed the consent forms, so you can look them over. If you decide to help, you can sign them when the students come.

If you have any questions please telephone us at: Leona 562-2771, Mike at 960-5643 or Marcelle at 960-6618.

¹⁵Note: materials sent to Elders were in a large font to make things easier to read.

Meegweetch, Mike and Marcelle

The students who will be coming to talk to you if you decide that you want to, are

Included with this letter were the consent form, and a copy of the interview schedule¹⁶, and a form indicating consent to be interviewed. Following a series of training workshops, the students were then matched with interested Elders, and sent out with the interview schedule.

Consent and Ethics Form
Métis Elders' Project

Tansi,

In the Fall of 1996, we, Mike Evans and Marcelle Gareau, were asked by Leona Neilson and Board members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society if we could write down the history of the Métis Elders who live in Prince George and the surrounding area. We felt that with the help of some students at the university, we could do this project by the Spring of 1997.

Mike and I would like to thank you for volunteering to be part of this project. As a volunteer we want you to know that if there are questions you don't want to answer, you don't have to. If you don't want to talk about something, just say "I don't want to talk about that." to the person asking the questions. If the person doesn't want to listen or if they are disrespectful in any way, please call either Leona at..., Mike at..., or Marcelle at.... We'll be glad to know about this because then we can explain to the student how to do research better. They are working on this

¹⁶This schedule was suggested by Leona Neilson, and then modified somewhat by consensus. There are two versions, one with instructions to the students, and one without. The Elders received a version without the specific student directed instructions.

project to learn how to do a good job.

The interviews will be taped and then transcribed by the students. Once the interviews are put down on paper, the student will show you and read to you what they have written. If you like what is there, that's great. If you don't like it or want some part of it changed, just tell the student and they will change it. This is something you want to feel good about, and your family, friends and the Métis community will be reading what you had to say. Changing things is very easy on the computer, so don't worry about the work.

If you want to talk about your history and the history of the Métis people and you want to have this written up as part of a book that will be read by many people, please sign your name at the bottom of this page. If you don't want to, that's ok too.

Meegweetch, Mike and Marcelle

Name _____ Signature _____
Date _____

Interview Schedule

MÉTIS ELDERS' ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The following schedule is in three parts. The order of the parts is not accidental, and the sequence of the schedule should be followed. Parts One and Two should be done at one sitting. Part Three can be delayed and done at a separate sitting. If either the interviewers, or more importantly the Elder being interviewed, is getting tired, it may well be best to return to administer Part Three.

Part One involves the use of a map of Western Canada. Elders will be asked to tell the interviewer where they were born and all the places that they have lived, including the dates they lived in various places. These will be marked and recorded on the map.

Part Two asks a series of questions about the life of the Elder. This section will probably take the greatest amount of time. Many of the questions are quite open-ended (this means that the Elder may give an extensive answer to the question).

The questions that will be asked in Part Three are in fact based on the answers that were received in Parts One and Two. The basic idea behind Part Three is to illicit information about each of the places that the Elder has lived, and why they moved to and from there. Part One asked when and where the Elder has lived. Many of the answers in Part Two bear directly on the additional information we wish to get in Part Three. The task of the interviewers then, is to ask the appropriate questions during Part Three to get the information required without irritating the Elder by asking repeat questions. This will become clearer as you scan the schedule itself.

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

In addition to this instrument some form of genealogy will also be taken. The method of administering this genealogy is yet to be decided, but in fact many Elders already have written genealogies, and the Elders Society has already begun to ask others. Many of the questions in Part Two of the schedule deal with genealogical matters. In the event that this information has already been collected, the repetition of questions will be used to double check accuracy and completeness.

Part One: Movement of Elders During their Lives (to be done with the aid of a map of Western Canada).

Where were you born? _____ (identify on map).

What date? _____

When and where did you move from here?

When? _____ (record dates on map as well)

Where? _____

From there when and where did you go?

When? _____ (record dates on map as well)

Where? _____

From there when and where did you go?

When? _____ (record dates on map as well)

Where? _____

From there when and where did you go?

When? _____ (record dates on map as well)

Where? _____

From there when and where did you go?

When? _____ (record dates on map as well)

Where? _____

Continue this line of questioning as long as is necessary to arrive in Prince George. At the end of this process there should be a series of places identified on the map with the corresponding dates that the Elder lived in these places. Note that the Elder may talk about seasonal movements as well - this information must be recorded as well.

Once the discussion has progressed to Prince George ask the following series of questions.

How did you get to Prince George? (Train? Horse? Car?)

Why did you move Prince George?

What was happening in Prince George when you came here?

Did you come with anyone else when you moved Prince George?

Did you have any family or friends in Prince George before you came?

What did you do when you first arrived Prince George?

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

What do you think is the best thing about Prince George?

What do you think is the worst thing about Prince George?

How is it to be Métis here?

How is it in Prince George as a Métis person compared to other places that you have lived?

Part Two: Life History

Introduce this section by telling the Elder that you would like to ask now about when they were young, starting at the very beginning.

Were you born at home?

What did your home look like?

What size? How many rooms?

Where did you sleep?

What was it made of? Who made it?

How was it heated?

What was it like outside of your house?

Was there a garden?

Was there a river?

What is your first memory from childhood?

Did your grandparents live with you?

What were their names?

When were they married?

How many children did they have?

What work did your grandparents do?

Where were they born?

*If a genealogy has not already been done, record this information on a genealogical chart immediately... do not wait for the transcription. If a chart has been done, double check. Ask whatever questions you need to determine the proper placement of these people on the Elder's chart (eg. Is this person your Father's Father or your Mother's Father), and get as much detail as you can for the genealogy chart. **If** this process begins to disrupt the flow of the interview, then stop. You can return to the chart at another time.

What was it like for them when they were growing up?

Were your grandparents religious? Superstitious?

What skills did they have?

What accomplishments were they proud of?

What were some of their disappointments?

Is there anything else you would like to say about your grandparents before we talk about your parents?

Where were your parents born?

What is your first memory of your mother/father?

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

What other early memories of your parents do you have?

How did your parents meet?

What did your parents do for a living?

What were their goals in life? Their dreams?

Were they strict with you?

What are some of the things that they taught you?

Did you have work to do around the house?

What did you like to do as a child?

Did you have any sisters and brothers?

Do you have their dates of birth?

Did you have cousins living with you?

*If a genealogy has not already been done record this information on a genealogical chart immediately... do not wait for the transcription. If a chart has been done double check. Ask whatever questions you need to determine the proper placement of these people on the Elder's chart (eg. Is this person your Father's Father or your Mother's Father). If this process begins to disrupt the flow of the interview, then stop. You can return to the chart at another time.

What was the town/village/city that you lived in like?

Did you have any special places that you went to?

(If the Elder lived in more than one place you can repeat these two questions for each place - but ask the questions as a pair). Again, if this process begins to disrupt the flow of the interview (as it may well if the Elder lived in a number of different places) stop. Part Three deals with these sorts of questions.

Were there bad winters, droughts, etc.. when you were growing up?

What kind of child were you; popular, loner?

Did you have any serious illness?

What were your teenage years like?

What did you think you would do when you grew up?

What was the most important things that happened to you before you were 21?

What did you do that you were most proud of before 21?

What was your greatest disappointment?

Did you go to school?

Did you enjoy it?

Did you have a favourite teacher?

Did you get into trouble in school?

What was school like back then, compared to now?

Were there rules?

How much work did the teachers give you?

Did you play at school?

Did you get any awards?

When did you leave home?
What was the first job that you ever had?
How did you get it?
How old were you?
How much were you paid?
What were your responsibilities?
What were your hours?
Did you enjoy it?

How old were you when the Depression began?
Where were you living?
What did you do during the war time? (WWI, WWII, Korea)

When you were little did you want to get married?
When did you meet your spouse?
When did you get married?
Where did you get married?
What is your best memory of your wedding day?
How many children did you have?
When were they born?
How did you decide on their names?

*If a genealogy has not already been done record this information on a genealogical chart immediately... do not wait for the transcription. If a chart has been done double check. Ask whatever questions you need to determine the proper placement of these people on the Elder's chart (eg. Is this person your Father's Father or your Mother's Father). If this process begins to disrupt the flow of the interview, stop. You can return to the chart at another time.

What was it like raising children back then?
What were your dreams for your children?
What are your best family memories?
What other jobs did you do?
Were times hard then?
When were you happiest?
What person most influenced your life?
What advice would you give to your grandchildren?

Part Three: Questions about the places that the Elder lived.

For each place that the Elder has lived (except Prince George) ask:

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

How did you get there? (Train? Horse? Car?)

Why did you move there?

What was happening in _____ when you went there?

Did you go with anyone else when you moved there?

Did you have any family or friends there before you went?

What did you do when you first arrived there?

What were other Métis people in the community doing? Ask about both Women and Men.

Was this a Métis community? Or were there other people living there too?

How were the relations between the communities?

What do you think was the best thing about _____?

What do you think was the worst thing about _____?

How was it to be Métis there?... Compared to other places that you have lived?

*** Depending on the answers to the questions given in Part Two some of these questions may be repetitious. If this is annoying the Elder - stop. Ask only the questions necessary so that you have the required information for each place.

Most of the interviews that were done were taped, but a few were not. It was up to each individual Elder as to whether or not taping occurred. If no tape was made, then the students wrote up what the Elders had told them, consulted with the Elder to ensure what was written was acceptable and correct, and then submitted the result. In cases where there were tapes, the students (who always worked in pairs) transcribed the tapes. Once the transcriptions were complete, the students returned to the Elders, and confirmed that the information was correct. If the Elder wished any part of the transcript changed, this was done. After these steps had been completed, the Elder was asked to complete the following permission form.

**CONSENT AND ETHICS FORM
MÉTIS ELDERS' PROJECT**

Tansi,

We are now near the end of the Oral History Project and we would like to thank-you for volunteering to be part of this project. We believe that the information you have provided us with will be of great use to both your family and the community. What we intend to do with the written interview is to put it with all the other Elder's interviews and to make a book out of it. You, will receive a copy of this book, the interview and the tape. The original copies of the interviews and the tapes will be put into two places, the Métis Elders' office and the University of Northern British Columbia's archives. This way there will always be a copy of the information available for the community. If you agree to this, we need to have you sign your name at the bottom of this page. If you don't want to have your life history published or don't want to have the tapes of your life history placed in the Métis office or university archives, please

Description of Research and Methodology - Mike Evans

don't sign. Do what makes you feel comfortable and don't worry about the students, they won't fail if you don't want your history put into the book. Meegweetch, Mike and Marcelle

1. I agree to have my oral history printed and placed in a book.

Yes _____ No _____

2. I agree to have the original copies and tapes of my interview stored in the Métis Elders' office.

Yes _____ No _____

3. I agree to have the original copies and tapes of my interview stored in the University of Northern British Columbia's library.

Yes _____ No _____

Name

Signature

Date

This phase of the project was largely complete by April of 1997. Throughout the summer of 1997 Heidi Standeven, Leona Neilson and Mike Evans worked to make sure that all the interested Elders had been interviewed, and all permission forms completed. A few more interviews were conducted as well. At this time Mike Evans began to edit the transcripts into more story-like form. Throughout this summer, and then on into the summer of 1998, Heidi, Mike, and Leona Neilson continued to work on the project as required. In the summer of 1998, Lisa Krebs joined the team, and worked closely with the Elders on the final details. At this time the photos that appear in this volume were also collected. Work on editing transcripts continued, and in a couple of instances Elders were re-interviewed. Once the editing of each transcript was completed, the result was returned to the Elder for final approval. Several Elders made small corrections and additions to their stories. One Elder, unsatisfied with the edited version of his interview, re-wrote his story himself. Another Elder wrote up a chapter to be included along side an edited transcript. Finally all the Elders' stories were collected into this final volume. At the direction of the Elders Society, we have also included a very brief description of the Society and its activities, and a copy of the Métis Nation Anthem. A brief bibliography of materials on the Métis Nation and people has been provided for anyone wishing to read further (see Appendix Two).

Some extended comment about the editing process is in order. First of all, several Elders asked that some parts of their transcripts be removed; this was done to their specifications, and the original tape was also modified as required¹⁷. One Elder decided that she no longer

¹⁷Where an Elder requested portions of their interview be deleted, this was done. An archive of the project materials including unedited tapes and transcripts (except as directed otherwise by an Elder) has been set up at UNBC. Persons wishing to access the archive, may do so only with the written permission of the Prince George Métis

wished to participate, and her materials were returned to her. All of the transcripts were edited by Mike Evans. This editorial process involved moving material around within the transcript in order to enhance continuity and flow. In many cases this also involved the removal of the interviewer's questions and interjections; this was done wherever it was possible to do so without changing the meaning of the Elder's words. The process of transforming an interview into a written document is a complex one, which must balance the need to maintain the integrity of the interview itself, and the need to present interview materials in ways that are not insulting and/or demeaning. The speech acts that occur in conversation use conventions very different than those that characterize the written word. Editing was done in such a way as to maintain the voice of the Elder, while at the same time forming a readable story.

We have purposefully avoided interpretations and analysis of the stories included, but rather have left the Elders' stories to speak for themselves. The only editorial license that was taken can be seen in the short passages of the Elder's talk that precede each chapter. Using the interview schedule had some unavoidable problems; not surprisingly different Elders responded in different ways. Some Elders simply used the questions to tell very detailed stories which were basically under their own control. Others allowed their recollections to emerge through the course of the questions in manner more or less determined by the schedule. Still others, for whatever reasons, did not find either the questions or the interview situation conducive to talking, and so did not¹⁸. In all cases we have simply tried to present what the Elder said in a respectful way¹⁹. The reasons for this are several, but the fundamental methodological point is that sometimes the best way to ensure that Aboriginal community members are represented fairly is for researchers to stay silent, and let people speak for themselves. Euro-Canadian scholars have had a great

Elders Society.

¹⁸Indeed one Elder, on reading the questions found them "foolish", and declined to be interviewed at all.

¹⁹This sort of approach is well represented by others (see for instance Cruikshank 1990).

deal to say about Métis history and culture, so we thought that we would let Métis themselves have a turn (see also Shore and Barkwell 1997). This is not to suggest that the scholarship of anthropologists and historians is somehow bad, but simply that there needs to be a place in Métis Studies for Métis voices as well.

We have tried to be respectful of all those who contributed to the project and its success. Each chapter is an Elder's story, and we have used the Elder's name to title the chapter for this reason. There is no particular order to the chapters, because any ordering would necessarily impose a structure on the volume which is not inherent in the stories; each chapter is a history valuable in its own right. The students involved did not, and do not, have authorship of these histories; to claim such would be to take from the Elders in ways that are unconscionable. At the same time however, the students put a great deal of their own energy and enthusiasm into the project. Because of the key role the students played in helping the Elders tell their stories, and putting the stories in a form that could be used in this book, each is recognized as working "with" the Elders they helped. Finally a word on the editorship of the volume is in order. On the cover it reads "Edited, Organized, and Compiled by Mike Evans, Marcelle Gareau, Lisa Krebs, Leona Neilson, and Heidi Standeven". This phrasing is not accidental, but rather recognizes the people who worked the longest and hardest on this volume. The reason the cover does not claim a series of joint editors is because the vast majority of editing and editorial decision making was done by Evans, and to attribute the responsibility to the others in both inaccurate and inappropriate. But given the nature of this project, it would also be inappropriate to simply assume that the editorship of the volume was key, and the work of the others to be work of a lesser type, not worthy of recognition except in the acknowledgment section. Marcelle Gareau's contribution in the organization of the project set the tone for all that followed; in addition to co-directing the first phase of the project, she communicated to all of us, the necessity to be both respectful and careful in our work. In addition to her intellectual contributions, Leona Neilson worked to direct the students, organized the Elders, and made sure that the relationships between a complex array of participants worked, so the project could work. Lisa Krebs and Heidi Standeven both worked extensively with Leona and the Elders and contributed hundreds of hours of time and effort to bringing the text together. Through the collective efforts of Evans, Gareau, Krebs, Neilson, and Standeven this final text has come together, and this needs recognition too. Though the phrase "Edited, Organized, and Compiled" is not conventional, it is accurate.

Throughout our collaboration we have tried to balance the goals and priorities of all the cooperating parties. All of the activity described above has been intended to maximize the Elders' control of the research process and to research materials, and produce a volume and research collection that will be of value to the community in the years to come. Since

the research began, the relationship between the Prince George Elders Society and UNBC has grown in some very interesting and fruitful directions (see Evans, Nyce, and McDonald 1998). We worked together successfully on the production of four university level Métis Studies courses culminating in a Métis Studies Certificate Program at UNBC, and at the present time are organizing a second oral history initiative. Our continuing relationship, and the productivity of our collaboration, speaks well of the potential of the approach taken to benefit us all. What started as a community based applied anthropology project, has become a community based, university level, Métis Studies initiative of considerable depth. This has been possible because the Elders have been willing and able to play a large role in the process. The community empowerment called for by proponents of participatory action research is not only possible, it is indeed powerful.

Mike Evans, University of Alberta, May 1999

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Photographs



Florence Aubichon and Family - 1986



Florence Aubichon - 1933



Henry and Maria McDermott - Parents of Anna Bellrose



Anna (age 14), Betty, and Lillian
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Anna Bellrose - 1994



Alice Cunningham - Mother of
Rose Bortolon - in 1943



Rose Ouelette and Rose Bortolon in 1943 at Faust



Rose Oulette - Aunt of Rose Bortolon - wheeling
around children at Faust in 1958



Frances and John Cunningham at an Elder's Social



Georgina Collins and Bill Regan at an Elder's Social - 1997



Lawrence Gervais (age 3) and Family -1940



Lawrence Gervais (far left) and Classmates



Flora and Lawrence Gervais - 1995



Benny Paul, Flora and Family



Mary Gervais and Family on her 75th Birthday -
August 30, 1998



Mary Gervais -75th Birthday, August 30,
1998



Mr. and Mrs. Gervais and Family - 50th Wedding
Anniversary, 1989



Five Generations of Ghostkeepers - 1985



Mary Ghostkeeper - 1992



Leo Goulet's Grandparents - date unknown



Leo Goulet (center row far left) and Classmates



Leo Goulet - 1945



Roseanne (Gray) Goulet and Family



Lena Loveng and her husband Joe Aubichon - 1965



Ed Letendre - 1997



Marie Adele Paquette



Leonard Paquette - 1998



The Paquette Family - 1955



Gertie Ragan and her Granddaughter Danielle
- 1995



Ragan Family Christmas Dinner - 1997



Eva Stafford at a Metis Elders Social - 1997



Residents of Young's Point - circa 1930



Sisters Rachel, Margaret (Jaffray) and Florence - circa 1930s



Sisters Helena, Florence, Rachel, Margaret (Jaffray), and Antonia (Brommeland) - 1945



Sophie and William Laboucan - Parents of Marie Jobin



Marie Jobin - 1998



Jerline Doucette - 1999