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VERNA RICHARDS

Verna Richards lived for many years in northern Saskatchewan where she ran the La Ronge Cafe in the fifties and early sixties. She knew many of the local Indian and Metis people including Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Life in La Ronge in the 1950s.
- Rape, illegitimacy and venereal disease.
- Impact of tourism.
- Relationships between Indians and non-Indians.
- Jim Brady: his lifestyle and personality.
- Problems of alcoholism in the community.
- Medical services for native people.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Verna Richards was a resident of La Ronge in the fifties and early sixties and ran a cafe in that town. She was friends with many of the native residents of La Ronge and became a good friend of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris during her time there. She talks here of the town of La Ronge, what it was like for native people, anecdotes about Jim Brady and Norris and stories about the native people.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm talking to Verna Richards of Prince Albert about her life in La Ronge. How long did you live in La Ronge, from what years?

Verna: 1953 to 1964.

Murray: You were just starting to tell me about a young Indian girl.

Verna: Yeah, Marjorie Izbister. She came to work for me and she was about sixteen. She was on morning shift, you know. Oh poor Marjorie would be so tired and I'd say, "Why?" you know. She'd say, "Well, they were up drinking all night." And you know, she never got any sleep, never had enough to eat, so most of the time Marjorie used to stay with me then, you know. And then we got some cabins behind the restaurant, which the girls stayed in. So that we gave them their room and board. And so Marjorie then moved into one of the cabins, shared with another girl. So she was always there, but oh, what a worker, and really a terrific girl but, you know, hardly any education. And then she got pregnant and she was going away to Saskatoon, I think, and was going to give the baby up for adoption. And her father came to me and he said, "You know, we have written to Marjorie. We've tried to get her to not give up the baby.

We'll look after it, but if you tell her she'll listen because she thinks of you as a sister and she listens to whatever you say." So I wrote to Marjorie and the next bus Marjorie was on it. So she kept the baby and when she was working, we'd have the baby in the basket in the back.

Murray: So she looked after it?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: Did she want to keep it?

Verna: Oh yes, but she thought that she couldn't, you know, wouldn't be able to, that she couldn't work and look after a baby.

Murray: It didn't bother her though that she wasn't married, that wasn't part of it?

Verna: Oh no, no, no, no.

Murray: That was pretty common, I suppose, anyway.

Verna: Oh, yeah. Most of the time it was rape cases that the girls got pregnant.

Murray: Right.

Verna: But not with Marjorie. In fact, one of the other girls that worked for me used to try and find out who Marjorie's baby's father was.

Murray: She wouldn't tell?

Verna: No, to this day she never told anyone. So finally Delphina said to her one day when they working in the kitchen and finally she, after bugging Marjorie for months, you know, finally Delphina said, "Do you know who the father is?" Marjorie said, "I guess so. I wasn't sleeping." (laughs) Things like that, you know. She was very proud of it.

Murray: You mentioned that a lot of the pregnancies were as a result of rape. Would that be white men?

Verna: American tourists, mostly.

Murray: Can you talk about that a bit? How often did that happen, and what would be the response of the police or the village, or the people in the town?

Verna: Well, they never reported it. I mean, the native people never reported, you know, these cases. Because the tourists would come and they'd have these big parties, lots of liquor, lots of food. And so a couple of the girls would go and then they'd get them to bring their friends. And, of course, the older women were right there if there was liquor. And so maybe one girl, the guy would get her in the bedroom or something, well - that was it. They never reported it. Well, it was just a drunken brawl, a drunken party. And the tourists would leave and the next thing you know a little blond-haired baby would arrive.

Murray: When did that start happening?

Verna: Oh, it was happening when I was there.

Murray: In '53 it was happening?

Verna: Oh, yeah. My aunt was there before I was there and she said it went on then, way back in the early years before the... Well, the road wasn't very good even when I first went up.

Murray: It would start more or less with the road coming in then I suppose?

Verna: Well, well, yeah. The more the tourists came.

Murray: Did it get worse in the fifties as you lived there, as more tourists came, or about the same?

Verna: No, no, because there were a few people in La Ronge, myself included, that threatened a lot of the tourists, that if any of our girls got pregnant in La Ronge, we'd know who to blame. Because we knew who was there and so on. And so I scared a lot of them, you know, that I had their addresses, where they were staying and so on. And then the girls used to tell me all the time who they were with.

Murray: So you'd be able to finger them.

Verna: Oh yeah, yeah. And I used to tell them that I'd write to their wives and tell them. Oh, they got scared.

Murray: So the situation did improve then, eh?

Verna: Oh yeah, and then, of course, the Bubble Gum Gang was organized.

Murray: What's the Bubble Gum Gang?

Verna: It was a group of girls who got together and you couldn't separate them. I mean, if one girl was invited to a party, the whole works went.

Murray: Or no one went.

Verna: Right. And they sort of protected themselves. You know, no one would tackle with the Bubble Gum Gang. They were very nice girls, you know. They used to come into the restaurant all the time and I, if we weren't busy, used to get them... you know, you press the button on the back of the juke box and you would get so many free songs. Because they didn't have much money except for bubble gum. That was the reason...

Murray: That's why they were called the Bubble Gum...?

Verna: Yeah, well, they named themselves that really. But it really was for protection because there was a lot of them being...

Murray: Pushed around.

Verna: Pushed around, and the tourists persuading them, and some of them weren't strong enough to say no, you know. They would go if there was lots of liquor and lots of fun.

Murray: Something to do.

Verna: Yeah. And so this way they kept out of trouble.

Murray: How old would these girls have been? What would they be?

Verna: Oh boy, they were ranging right from twelve, thirteen up to about sixteen.

Murray: How many would there be in the Bubble Gum Gang?

Verna: Oh, usually there was about... well, six used to come in quite regular, you know, the six girls.

Murray: Would that comprise most of the girls of that age in

the town, do you think, or were there lots of others?

Verna: Oh no, no, no. Yeah, there were others, but these were the ones that, you know, went out on parties and things like this. They used to help a lot of the other girls too, I think.

Murray: They'd look out for their...?

Verna: Oh, yeah, that's for sure.

Murray: And so they were fairly tough, I suppose, too, were they? How would they deal with a situation in which somebody was being pushed around.

Verna: Oh, they were kind of sneaky. One time they were telling me about going to this party. The tourists had

invited them. Well, first they walked around the cabin, they saw there was a back door and a front door. So they went in, and of course, all together, and maybe a couple of Americans there. And, you know, they were fairly well built and tough. They could throw them down if they had to. But anyway they thought, we'll fix them, because they insisted they wanted these girls for the night. So they said sure, we'll go.

Murray: The American tourists were insisting?

Verna: Yeah. "Oh come on, come on, we got lots of liquor, lots of food, you know, come." So the girls did. They went in and I think they had a beer. They said, they just had one beer and while a couple of the girls were talking to the tourists the other ones were loading up and they headed out the back door.

Murray: Took the haul of beer out?

Verna: All of the liquor and the food and away they went. And oh, they came to tell me, you know, what they done. I said, "Good."

Murray: Then the other two girls left after that?

Verna: Oh, they all went together. As soon as they realized that they were ready to go they just ran, the whole six of them, out the back door. But Linda Brown, who ran the Lindy's Cabins at that time, she fixed them one time. She was a motherly type, really used to look after the tourists like an old mother, you know. And she had a couple of tourists one time that wanted to party and they ordered food. Linda came

down and I had to go through the list of all the stuff I had to make for them, for this party they were giving. And they told Linda they wanted some women for the night. So Linda says, "Oh, you know, you shouldn't." "Oh come on, Linda," they say. Oh, they wanted some women for the night. You know, they bought all this liquor and all this food and they wanted to

party. So she said, "All right, you want women, you'll get women." She went up on the road and, of course, she was living close to the tourist camp. The tourist camp was close to the reserve, and as the women were coming by from twelve years old up to eighty, everyone went down. She said, "Come on," she says, "there's a party going here and there's lots of food, lots of drink. Come on down." And she said that she gathered up about fifty. And they wanted women. And here with all these kids in there, you know, just eating all the food and the old ladies, about eighty years old, they were drinking the wine. (laughs) And then, of course, when everything was gone, they all left. But the little cabin was just absolutely packed! So when Linda saw them the next morning she said, "Well, did you enjoy your party? Did you have enough women?"

Murray: What did they say?

Verna: "Damn you, Linda." You know, they knew. But they didn't say anything, you know, didn't complain.

Murray: How did the young girls feel when they - certainly in our terms they were raped - did they feel that they had been as well?

Verna: Oh yes, they did. Well sure, you know.

Murray: They were forced and held down?

Verna: Well, they usually they got them drunk first so they didn't remember.

Murray: Get them so drunk so they would be almost unconscious, I suppose.

Verna: Oh, yes. That's right. And a lot of them said they didn't know what happened.

Murray: But they end up pregnant nonetheless.

Verna: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Would there have been any prostitution in La Ronge as well?

Verna: Yeah, oh yeah, we had a couple of girls. What was their names now? I forget. Anyway, who bragged about how much she made. You know, and I'd say, "Really!" And she'd go, "Sure, that's what they want, they are going to pay for it." But boy, she really soaked the tourists, you know. (laughs) But that was just the two, I think, there's all I remember.

Murray: In those years, eh?

Verna: Yeah. That ever made them pay.

Murray: How did the white community feel about that? Was it

divided? Were there just a handful of people who were concerned and the rest didn't care or how did they approach that?

Verna: They didn't really think much about it. You see, the population wasn't very big in those years. I think there was eight hundred and something.

Murray: Would it be about half and half? Or it would be mostly Indians, I suppose, at that time? Mostly native people?

Verna: Oh, yeah. And you know, if you had any joint project or like at the school or buying things for the nursing stations - we didn't have a hospital then, just a nursing station - and everyone chip in together. I mean, the native people and the white people and, you know, everyone would work together. They weren't divided - the natives and the whites.

Murray: Did that division start happening at all while you were there?

Verna: No. I think it was pretty much like that when I left.

Murray: Most of the white people stayed in La Ronge. I mean, they weren't people who came in and left?

Verna: Oh, no these were...

Murray: Permanent residents?

Verna: Permanent residents and they weren't like they are today, just gone there. You go there now and you don't know anyone. A lot of the old-timers have left, though.

Murray: Yeah. What was the attitude of a lot of white people? I know that, for example, one of the things I hear quite often talking to white people, they refer to Indian and Metis as more or less childlike and various other kinds of things. How did the white people see the native people? Did they see them as being different from themselves?

Verna: No.

Murray: They didn't, eh?

Verna: Not in those days, no. I could tell by people coming into the restaurant. I very seldom ever went out because I was open seven days a week and I was there all the time. But you'd see them coming in, the whites, the natives and, you know, they were all friends and all got along. And, of course, at that time a lot of the natives were working because we had the fish plant going and all the fish plant workers boarded with me. And also the airways boys, they boarded there, some of the girls from the store. So they would all come in at once and

everybody sit down together - the fish plant workers and the pilots or whoever, the girls from the bank and so on. They all sat down together and they had their meals. No one sat separately. And they all joked. We used to play a certain game at coffee time - who was going to pay for the coffee - the numbers game or something. I forget now, but everyone took part in that, too.

And then Tony would start these stories, mystery stories, you know, and everyone had to take part in solving it. Like, for instance one was - okay, there's glass and water and a dead

body on the floor - you know, what happened? And you'd have to ask him questions. And that one I think went on for days. At every coffee time they'd come in and start asking questions again.

Murray: Until they finally figured it out.

Verna: Until finally someone said, "Was it a human body?" Well of course, no it wasn't. It was a fish. (laughs) But everyone at their coffee times would take part in this and, you know, it was really fun. No, I don't think you would see that now. I think everyone keeps to themselves. I think anyplace if it gets bigger is like that. In those days it was so, it was small.

Murray: It was a community.

Verna: You know and everyone cared about everyone else.

Murray: And everyone knew everyone else too, eh?

Verna: Oh yes, yeah.

Murray: There was nothing, no secrets in La Ronge in those days?

Verna: No, well there was nothing to hide really, and I don't now, everyone enjoyed each other's company.

Murray: What kind of public social activity would there be? I mean, there'd be lots of parties at peoples houses, but were there dances and those kinds of things, too?

Verna: Oh yeah, yeah they had dances.

Murray: Who would sponsor them and who would come to those?

Verna: Well, once the Legion got organized, they'd put on the odd one. Sometimes it would be, oh maybe some other, or just some people getting together.

Murray: Was there a town hall that the dance would be at?

Verna: Yeah. Well, the theatre.

Murray: The Aurora theatre.

Verna: Yeah, and Ivy and Walter used to just move the seats back and that was it.

Murray: How would the parents of these - I'm getting back to these young girls - how did they feel about them getting pregnant? Was that a pretty disturbing thing for the parents, or how did they deal with that? Was it just something they took it as it came, sort of?

Verna: No. No, they never seemed to complain. There was one, I think my first, no it would be my second evening in La Ronge. I was so mad, you know, and I was just ready to really raise Cain and my aunt stopped me. She said, "It's no use getting involved in that. That's their business." Well, there was this one guy who came in, a native fellow, and his daughter was with the group sitting over in a booth, you know, a bunch of kids.

Murray: Tourists, American tourists sitting there?

Verna: No. The girls were sitting by themselves. Oh, I think, this one girl that we're talking about would be about twelve at that time. And these tourists were sitting at the counter and this guy came in and he sat with them. And he said, "For a bottle of whiskey you can have my girl for the night." And she was only twelve. And he went over and she was crying, she didn't want to go, and he went over and he made her go with him. And I never forgave that guy to this very day. Every time I see him I could just about hit him, you know.

Murray: Twelve years old! So he got his bottle of whiskey.

Verna: Oh yeah, he got his bottle of whiskey. And his daughter turned out to be a real tramp. But he started her on the road.

Murray: Do you think that happened fairly often?

Verna: No. I don't think so. That was just a unique case and, oh, I never got over that.

Murray: That was just when you had just arrived?

Verna: My first experience in La Ronge and I thought, oh God, you know. But once you got to know the people you... Although he, the same guy, I got to know him and, you know, boy, the things I wouldn't do to him. Because I never forgave him. He used to go and get his groceries at the trading post, the co-op. It wasn't the co-op then it was the trading post. And then he used to bring them to me and wanted me to buy them from him, so he could get enough money for a bottle of booze.

Murray: Would he get those groceries on welfare, is that it?

Verna: Yeah. Or sometimes his cheque that came in, if he had any work guiding or anything, he'd have to cash his cheque there and he owed so much money. But his wife, you know, oh she was a lovely person, never drank. But he would go. So that is why, I guess, the guys at the trading post used to give him the groceries instead of the money.

Murray: Because they knew what he would do with the money?

Verna: Yeah. So that he used to come and start bringing out his groceries, you see. And I'd take it and say, "Oh gee," and put it under the counter, everything he was giving me. And then he'd say, "Well how much you going to give me?" And I'd say, "I'm not giving you anything. I'm going to give these to your wife when she comes tomorrow." And I wouldn't give them to him. I'd say, "Now you just hightail it out of here." And the next day his wife would come and she used to laugh, you know. And she'd say you could always count on me to have her groceries ready.

Murray: And he wouldn't learn, he would keep coming back with these, trying to sell you the groceries?

Verna: Oh yeah, yeah. And sometimes he would get someone else to come in, but I knew darn well it was him. So I'd do the same thing, put them under the counter.

Murray: That reminds me, it seems to me from some of my observations that it's quite often the women who look after the families and keep them together and keep the food in the kid's stomachs. Was that true?

Verna: Oh yes, very much so. And they'd get beaten up for doing it but they kept on.

Murray: For spending the money on food and clothes?

Verna: Oh yes and, boy, they'd be down scrubbing their clothes. Those kids that went to school, you know, they were maybe patched but boy, they were always clean.

Murray: Their hair was clean?

Verna: Yeah. Because I used to have one little guy. Oh, he started kindergarden and he didn't want to go to school. But I would always give him some fruit on his way, a little nickel package of Kleenex for him and fruit for his lunch. Little Johnny. And then he used to try and hide in the park on his way to school and I'd yell, "Johnny, you get to school." And in the wintertime you could see through the trees in the park and I'd watch, and everytime he'd stop I'd yell at him.

Murray: This is the campground?

Verna: Yeah. And so then the teacher would be at the other end and as soon as she could see him then she would yell, "Johnny!" And you know he was the smartest kid in the kindergarden, but I think he was just doing that to tease us, you know, just wanting attention. He was the same one that used to come in and sit up at the counter and order some ice cream or something. He didn't have any money. And then Berry took him home with him one day, across the road to the office. And oh, it was a miserable day, so he let little Johnny play with his colored crayons, pencil crayons and paper. So when it was getting, you know, close to supper time there, Berry said

to Johnny, "You have to go pretty soon." So he looked up, he sat there for about another five minutes, and he says to Berry, "Will you call me a taxi?" He was only about four at this time.

Murray: He had already learned about taxis, eh?

Verna: Oh, yeah. And Berry said, "No sir," he said. Finally he ended up driving him home, I think. But little Johnny, he was the cutest kid and right through school, like Julie still tells me, that he was such a bright kid. But there was a lot of them then. I mean, our kids went to school then. Most of their friends were the native kids.

Murray: Right.

Verna: They chummed around with some of the white kids too, but they were all friends, not just...

Murray: If you can, describe for me the sort of... I'm trying to get an impression of what the typical family was like in terms of their activity. If you could expand on that theme that it was the women who sort of kept the family together. Can you think of any incidents that would express that, or any particular families that would be a good example of that? I don't want the names but just some idea of how that would work.

Verna: Gee, I don't know.

Murray: Maybe there is no more detail. It's just the men would spend the money on booze and the women would try and prevent them. It was as simple as that.

Verna: Yes, yeah. And the women usually, well they had their own little outings. I mean, in the afternoons they had their poker games.

Murray: The women?

Verna: The native women.

Murray: Really?

Verna: Oh yeah, they used to have a ball. I'd ask them you know, did they lose much money? Oh no, they'd say, we just use

pennies. So it might be ten cents, you know, but it was just the fun of getting together for the native women. On the reserve.

Murray: What other kinds of activities might...?

Verna: There wasn't too much as far as activity, you know, because just the theatre, the show, and the dances, the odd dances. The white women started an organization, the ladies club. I went twice and that finished me.

Murray: Describe that for me.

Verna: Well, you sat around and you had tea and discussed how to raise money. I mean, the idea was good. Oh, I'm saying white women, there were native women in this group, too.

Murray: It was initiated by white women, though?

Verna: Yeah, and they had ideas. Well we did, we raised money. We put on a basket social one time to raise money to buy a piano for the school. We got a wheelchair. We put on something else - bazaar and bake sales, Christmas things, you know. And we raised enough money for a wheelchair for the nursing home, you know, things like that. The idea was good. But I went and it would just be held in different people's homes, you see.

Murray: White people's homes?

Verna: Yeah, well the native people, they couldn't have had it there too because everyone else would pile in and they would be drunk and they couldn't... although the native women used to come to the other meetings. Anyway, it dawned on me the second night, the second meeting I went to, that the person that wasn't there during coffee time, after all the business was over, that was the one that got talked about, gossiped about. And that used to really upset me.

Murray: So if you didn't go to any meeting you were bound to be talked about?

Verna: Yeah. So anyway I got up at the second meeting I went to and I told them that I was not coming any more so that they could give the other women a rest and they could talk about me. And I said, "Now, gee, I'll try and give you something to gossip about." And I walked out.

Murray: Never went back?

Verna: No, I never went back. Quite a few of them, the white upper class ladies, you know, that thought they were, they used to come to me and try and coax me to go back, and I

said, "No." I said, "Are they running out of people to gossip

about?"

Murray: What was their response to this?

Verna: "Oh, come on, Verna, you know we don't always do that." And I said, "Well that's what happened when I was there." So, you know, I wasn't interested in it. But I said, "If when you are putting on something," if they wanted my help as far as canvassing, as far as doing something, I would help, sure, but I wasn't going to go to their meetings. So they used to come and tell me, after, what they wanted me to do, or donate, or sell tickets...

Murray: So it was a pretty active group?

Verna: Yeah, but I don't think it lasted that long. It seemed to me it fell through after a few years. And then, for instance, for one year during the festivals they would run people for queen, which I didn't like. But anyway, you'd support them and you'd put on dances. Then my dad was great. He was good at organizing social evenings like dances, box socials, and then he would have the novelty dances and prizes. And also he'd call off at the square dances. Everyone liked the square dancing so he started the kids' square dance school, in one of the halls, Olsons Hall, up on the hill it used to be. And I went up there one day and you had a couple of native fellows playing the fiddle and guitar and I looked around and here were all these little kids, white and Indian together, you know, dancing. And Daddy kept getting after them to do this

right, but they just loved their square dancing. It was so cute to see them, you know. Some of them were really small. But it was all voluntary, whoever wanted, and it was free. But Daddy used to take time out once a week.

Murray: So these dances were once a week, eh?

Verna: Well his school, his square dance school for kids. It was just for kids. Because most of the older people knew how to square dance. And then they started this modern square dancing; it's not like the old-time dancing. Well, my parents joined that and they used to have their dances in our dining room at the back, and then I'd serve them lunch after. There was just three, four squares, so they'd hold it in the dining room. They used to have a ball.

Murray: (?) Indian people, did the Indian people square dance, too?

Verna: Not in that group because, boy, it cost a fortune. They had to have all the certain outfit, you know, the dresses. The women had to wear the dresses and the bloomers and the whole bit. I don't think the Indian women would be stupid enough to waste their money on that.

Murray: But at other dances they, did the native women

square dance?

Verna: Oh yeah, sure. The old-time square dancing, not this modern stuff. I could never understand it. You know, I used to watch them when they were dancing, I would have been lost a long time ago. Oh, they still have it here in town. They have these organizations all over now.

Murray: What can you remember about the Legion and what its contribution to the town was, and its activities?

Verna: Not very much, I don't think. They put on one social evening one time that I had to cater to. You know, I had to cook the meal. They wanted a midnight supper, so of course, I had to haul all the food over there hot and serve it. But that was about... I have never paid much attention to them. I was sort of put off with them after what they did to Jim Brady. I don't think they did that much. Some of the men complained because they weren't going to serve liquor and they said well, you know, the Legion wasn't there just for a bar. Like it is most places.

Murray: Right. Could you tell that story again, about Brady and the Legion? You mentioned it to me once.

Verna: Well all that happened, I think, was that when he went to renew his membership they refused it because they said he was a Communist. Because, you know, of his political views and so on. And that was it. But I think ever since, you know, from that on Jim just went...

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(SIDE B)

Verna: ...and you know, what's in the press you didn't know whether to believe it or not. And so Jim was always my source of information. We used to sit in the big booth and I'd ask him questions and he would bring me up to date in exactly how it started and why. And, of course, I'd mention this to someone else and they'd say, "Oh, you've just got the Communist side of it." And I'd say, "No, that's not true." Because then Jim would start bringing me, maybe the Guardian...

Murray: A whole variety of...

Verna: Yeah, of information to read. So that was why. He got me thinking...

Murray: Politically?

Verna: Politically, yeah. Because I used to sit and ask him questions.

Murray: He always kept up with what was happening internationally.

Verna: Oh yeah, oh that's for sure. He knew exactly what was going on and where.

Murray: Did he speak, even into the sixties - like in '64 when you left, up to that point - favorably of the Soviet Union when he talked about them? Do you think he was still supporting...? Many people in the Communist party left at various points because of things that were happening in the Soviet Union.

Verna: He never spoke very much of politics the last few years when I was there. He was drunk most of the time, and I couldn't talk to him like I used to.

Murray: It was really that bad then, eh?

Verna: Yeah. He didn't seem to care any more, you know, about things that were happening. I used to mention a few things to him, and he used to bring me the paper to read and

he'd say, "Well this is how it is. You just read it and decide for yourself."

Murray: He didn't want to talk about it particularly?

Verna: No.

Murray: Whereas before he would have sat down?

Verna: Oh, he'd explain everything to me in detail, you know, how things were.

Murray: Was he a bit of a recluse then, do you think? He just didn't want to see people, was that part of it or, what did you think at the time?

Verna: Well, he used to talk to people but not about politics so much, you know, maybe other things, less important.

Murray: Small talk?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: And that's something he didn't used to do. As I recall people saying he very seldom engaged in small talk?

Verna: Oh, no. When he opened his mouth he had something important to say and to contribute. But in the later years, well just before I left, you know, he wasn't that interested in discussing politics or...

Murray: Did he have much to do with other political people then, like Quandt?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: Still, into the later years, eh?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: So he wasn't sort of a hermit or anything, he just wasn't as interested in the later years?

Verna: Well maybe with me and being in the cafe, I mean if he wanted to talk to me, he had to come to the cafe.

Murray: Right.

Verna: And maybe he wasn't that interested in sitting. He used to sit with Quandt and Berry and Malcolm Norris and the rest of them, you know, I think, and discuss things. He'd answer me if I asked him a certain question about what happened here and there. You know, he used to tell me.

Murray: But not with the same enthusiasm, maybe, did he?

Verna: I think he was thinking, you know, God, things were getting worse or something.

Murray: Disillusioned. He was pretty unhappy, maybe, with the world situation or depressed about it.

Verna: That could be it. I don't know.

Murray: But he never revealed why he was feeling down?

Verna: He would never tell you any...

Murray: Personal detail.

Verna: The only thing he did tell me, the only time I ever saw Jim cry and get mad, and he was sitting in the restaurant with three other guys. There was four of them, two on each side of the booth, and this one guy was sitting next to the wall beside him. And they had been drinking. They came in to have supper, and there was quite a few people in the restaurant. And, of course, I never, you know... if they were sober enough okay, but if you were really drunk you just went out. I never even let them sit down. It didn't matter who it was, not just the native people.

Murray: Right.

Verna: Of course, the native people knew if they were drinking, they didn't come in. White people I had to kick out all the time. But anyway, they came in and you could tell that they maybe had one or two drinks. But the next thing I know Jim has - and he was quite powerful - Jim has this guy up against the wall and he was sitting there and practically knocked this guy's head through the wall. And I went over and I said, "Look, Jim, if you want to fight, you get outside. You're not fighting in here." "Okay," he says, "Okay, okay." So he grabs this guy and outside he goes. All he did was hit him, you know, and knocked him out. Jim used to walk by the

back door to go to his cabin behind the restaurant, and the path was right through there. Well, he went around and he went to the back door and he told one of the girls he wanted to see me. And I went out the back door and he was crying. And he

said, "Verna, I will never come in the cafe again." And I said, "Jim, don't feel bad," I said, "I'm not mad at you. I just said take him outside. He probably deserved it. I don't know what you were arguing about, but knowing you, he probably deserved it, but I just wanted you to do it outside." "Well, I won't come in again," and he was crying. And I said, "Oh Jim, come on. I'd miss you if you didn't." And he said, "You know why I did it?" And I said, "No, and you don't have to tell me if you don't want to." He was living with a woman, never married I guess, at Cumberland, and he was still sending her money, supporting her and the family. And I guess this guy was from Cumberland and he said some nasty things about this woman...

Murray: That she was sleeping around or something?

Verna: Oh, I don't know. Jim just said, "He said some very nasty things about her and no one's going to talk about her like that because she is not like that." And he said, "Anyone that says anything wrong about her, I'll break their neck." And that was why he hit... he was, you know, supporting this woman.

Murray: Was he fairly drunk or did you think he was...?

Verna: Oh, no.

Murray: No, he wasn't drunk at the time.

Verna: But he was so hurt, you know, that anyone would try to hurt him, you know, his feelings and that.

Murray: But very few people would. I mean, he was quite a popular person with other people.

Verna: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, but this, like I was saying, this guy was from Cumberland, he wasn't from La Ronge and I didn't know him.

Murray: So you didn't know who he was dealing with.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: You don't remember the guy's name?

Verna: No, I don't. He was a stranger and I never saw again, because he left town.

Murray: So Jim was...

Verna: He was very popular with the native, the local native people. In fact, that was their favorite hangout. In the wintertime it was cold, where did they go if they wanted to

have, you know, a bottle of wine? They'd go to Jim's. At that time he used to have that place spotless. Because he used to always come over and borrow the mop and pail - and my bread pans because he used to make beautiful bread and he always brought me a loaf of bread.

Murray: Really?

Verna: You know, when he brought the pans back, all cleaned.

Murray: Would he use a wood stove or...?

Verna: Yeah, just a wood stove, and oh, his bread was just delicious. And I used to tell him, "Jim, you don't have to wash

bread pans, you know. You leave them greasy." "Well," he said, "I never knew that." And I said, "No, you just leave them." But still the next time he'd come they'd be all washed and, "Oh, I forgot." So finally after that he'd just leave them - greasy. But he was so clean. And then he'd be over for the mop pail and everything; ask if he could borrow some Javex. And I'd say, "Jim, you just scrubbed your house yesterday." "Yeah but Angel(?) and Mary Ann were over last night and they got in a fight and they knocked all the stove pipes down. The house is covered with soot." And you know how that tracks into the floors and the walls. So Jim had to start cleaning again, but he never complained about them. They could still come back, they were welcome.

Murray: He never said a word about them drinking or anything?

Verna: No.

Murray: What about Malcolm? Malcolm, I don't know what he would say to you, but he used to be very critical of the native people when they drank.

Verna: Yeah, well I think that Malcolm always wanted the native people to act... He thought they were superior beings and he wanted them to act accordingly. And it used to get him mad when he'd see them drunk or sloppy or not behaving themselves.

Murray: In some undignified way?

Verna: Yeah. Because he figured that they should have the respect, you know, and he didn't want people to talk about them.

Murray: What was Jim's attitude? How would you describe his attitude towards it?

Verna: He just loved all people in those days. It didn't matter who they were, whites or Indians or who.

Murray: He was just interested in people?

Verna: Yeah. Very concerned about their well-being and I know that he used to go and help a lot of them; you know, haul wood, cut wood. He used to bake bread. I'm sure he never kept hardly any for himself. You know, he'd go and take it to people who needed it. He used to have kids come there, you know, for a place to play.

Murray: So the place was busy all the time?

Verna: Yeah, it was pretty well busy. When he wasn't there, his door was always open.

Murray: But nobody would ever take anything?

Verna: Oh, no. No, that's one thing, you know, you could always trust the native people. They're very honest. You know, all the years that I had native people working for me, helping me, never once would they ever short change. Quite often they were at the till. They would never take any money out of the till. I had one white girl I really had to keep an eye on. And the girls thought this was terrible because she was swiping some of the food one night. And a lot of these girls, you know...

Murray: We had a lot more than they did.

Verna: That's for sure, but they would never take it. And any dishes, for instance, they got a crack in, you couldn't use them, you see. So I had one old lady that used to come, and all the cracked dishes, I used to tell her, you know, "You can have them." She'd keep what she needed, but then she would give it to other native women, women that needed them more than she did.

Murray: So even up to '64 there was no problem with native people stealing at all, in your experience?

Verna: No. The fish plant workers, what they used to do, they used to board there like I was saying, and then they would bring their cheque to me. I'd cash their cheque at the end of the week, deduct their meals, and then they would say, "Okay, now you just give me \$2 and you put the rest in the till." Because this was Friday - they were going to the bar.

Murray: They didn't want to spend it all.

Verna: And they all had families and, you know, really nice guys and nice families. And so I would say, "Okay, but don't you come back after you have been drinking and want some more money because you're not going to get it." So they would say, "Okay, no."

Murray: But they would come back I suppose, some of them?

Verna: Once. One guy came to the back door and wanted some more money and I said, "No." He went away. The next day they

would come with their wives, get their money, and away they go and do their shopping.

Murray: So they knew if they took their money they'd spend it so they were...

Verna: Well, sure they did. Well, of course, not only that, but you get into the bar, I guess, this what they told me, all the friends come.

Murray: They wouldn't have money.

Verna: The ones that aren't working. And you see, they're so generous they wouldn't have the heart to say no. So they would just buy beer for their friends until their money was all gone. Because they always share, that was their...

Murray: Because those guys would do the same, I suppose, if they had a job, although, some of them I suppose didn't have jobs very often?

Verna: No, some of them drank quite a bit. But during the tourist season when a lot of them are guiding...

Murray: Most people worked?

Verna: Yeah, and most of them went and they spent it all in the bar. Because, like I was saying, they didn't just take so much with them and that was all. Because these guys knew, that had steady jobs, that... And they were trying to fix their homes, you know, they were buying furniture and things like that.

Murray: What percentage of the native men that you're talking about, at that time would be working sort of steadily? Would

it be just a small group or was it most of them, do you think? Were there jobs for most of them?

Verna: No, there wasn't. There wasn't enough work for them, so there wasn't that many working. You know, in the fish plant, I mean, it would only operate at certain times of the year, during the fishing seasons.

Murray: How many months of the year would that be usually?

Verna: Oh, a couple of months in the summer, couple in the wintertime, something like that.

Murray: So it wasn't very long?

Verna: No. And during the summer, the guides; but they had no work in the wintertime. Maybe some hunters would come and want guides in the fall. So there was really not much, I think, as far as employment for them.

Murray: Yeah. Did you think at the time that the people that were drinking the most, that it was a result of no work? Did you make that connection?

Verna: I think so, sure. Because I know even the girls that worked for me, before they were working, they used to be drinking all the time. Once they were working you very seldom even seen them go out drinking. And they'd even save their money. I'd come to town and they'd give me a list of things, sometimes I'd bring someone with me and they'd buy clothes and they'd save their money and get out their whole winter outfit. But before, any cent they did make, maybe babysitting or something, just went on liquor.

Murray: Did the Indian women quite often come to you if they had problems or they were beaten up by their husbands or that sort thing?

Verna: No, not all of them. But maybe about four that I...

Murray: That you were friends with?

Verna: Yeah, but they used to come and tell me. All the young girls used to tell me everything.

Murray: Who they were sleeping with and...

Verna: Oh, yeah. (laughs) I used to get after them and they'd giggle about it. And then the Bubble Gum Gang used to tell me all the things they used to do. And even the white kids at Halloween. Everyone used to wonder how come every place in La Ronge all soaped up, but never the La Ronge Cafe. And they thought I was behind this, you know, (laughs) and I'd say, "No."

Murray: Just because you were friends.

Verna: Yeah, and the kids used to come in and even the white kids would tell me what they did, and I'd say, "Oh, you little devils."

Murray: But they knew you didn't really disapprove?

Verna: No. Well sometimes these people deserved it because they wouldn't... Well some of them, for instance, the white people, they used to... Well one couple they used to, on Halloween night they'd turn their lights off and they'd sit in the dark just so they wouldn't have to give kids any candy. And they knew they were home.

Murray: Kids aren't so dumb.

Verna: No and, boy, their trailer would be just soaped and marked.

Murray: But, of course, they couldn't do anything about it because they weren't supposed to be home.

Verna: Yeah, that's right. And so, anyway, I told them one time. They were in they're crying about what happened the next day and I said, "Well, it serves you damn well right, you know. It doesn't cost that much for a little bit of candy. And trick or treat," I said. "Okay, you don't get the treat, you get the trick." (laughs) And I used to just laugh at them. But the kids, I used tell them at one time, I said, "You know what people were saying, that the reason La Ronge Cafe never got soaped up..." And they said, "You mean we should soap here just to make it look good?" (laughs) Well, of course, I knew who was doing all the tricks so if anything happened there, I knew who it was.

Murray: Right.

Verna: So they didn't dare.

Murray: Was there a problem with venereal disease along with the whole thing with rape and with girls getting pregnant? Was that a problem?

Verna: I never really knew if there was or not. You know, they'd keep that quiet. I knew of maybe a couple of them that used to have to go down to the nursing station to get their needles. But whether they were ashamed of that part or not, I don't know because then, no one ever said.

Murray: Wasn't something that you talked about?

Verna: No.

Murray: But that might have been just that they didn't want to, I suppose.

Verna: Could be.

Murray: Although they talked to you about most things, the young girls.

Verna: Yeah they did, but they never mentioned that. I used to talk to them about it, you know. I used tell them to be sure and go for their check-ups, you know. And I said, "It's nothing to be ashamed of, you know, it can happen to anyone. You don't even maybe have to be sleeping with someone to get it." You know, stories like this. But I used to tell them to go, because it's not a thing to be ashamed of any more. Because it could happen to anyone.

Murray: So they would go to the hospital.

Verna: Not very often, you couldn't get them to.

Murray: But you would try and get them to?

Verna: Oh yeah, I used to try and get them to go for their check-ups. But most of the cases... For instance, the doctor, the Indian health doctor that used to come up, he was such a racist pig, at that time. Well, the people called him the butcher, because he used to come up and pull teeth and that too, and he wouldn't even freeze your mouth - he'd just yank them out. There was one fellow that worked in the fish plant steady. He was quite, you know, sort of religious, and so he never drank. And he had cut himself with a knife at the fish plant when he was working and they flew him down to P.A. and he went to this doctor. And he sewed it up without freezing it and all the time he's getting after this guy. He says, "Yeah, you were probably out fighting and drunk. That's why you got cut." And he was very hurt when he came back that anyone would accuse him of being drunk and fighting because, you know, no way he would do that, because he was quite religious. And different things like this this doctor used to do. So they would have to be half dead before they would go the doctor, because this was the only doctor that they had to go to.

Murray: So they knew what kind of treatment they would get?

Verna: And they knew. The girls, I used to get after them about, you know, looking after their teeth. And they said no way. In fact one girl, she had a cavity, she used to put Ambroid in the cavity and it used to burn the root, rather than go to the doctor and have it pulled it. She used to have

toothache, and that is what she said she used to do. And I said, "My God, doesn't that hurt?" "Well, just for a minute," she said. "But," she said, "I'm not going to that butcher."

Murray: Can you remember any other stories about him?

Verna: Oh, just lately, I mean, after I moved to P.A. You see, the native people still thought, after this was disbanded, that they still had to go to this doctor. And they didn't, they could go to any doctor they wanted to.

Murray: With Medicare?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Yeah.

Verna: But still a lot of them used to come. And also he figured he could still get all the natives...

Murray: As patients?

Verna: As patients. And at one time he refused to go and see a baby that Berry had brought down from the north, until Berry threatened him. And then finally he went to see the baby. You know, things like that. And in fact some of the native people now had a note, Dr. Jurdus had given this native person a note when he went to the hospital, and that was thrown in the garbage and Green was called.

Murray: Really?

Verna: Well, even the hospital staff was still referring all natives to this one doctor.

Murray: So Jurdus would give them a note saying that this person is suppose to see me, and they would just throw it in the garbage?

Verna: Yeah, and then it would just go in the garbage and they'd call Green.

Murray: Did he treat white people that way, too?

Verna: No. Just native people. I guess he was just a racist.

Murray: There were obviously a number of political people in La Ronge such as Quandt and Berry and Jim and occasionally Malcolm, when he was there. What kind of political activity took place among that group of people? Was it mostly just discussions around the table?

Verna: I imagine so. I was never in any of their discussions.

Murray: But they'd sit in your restaurant sometimes, I suppose?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: Mostly at their homes?

Verna: Yeah, mostly at their homes. And they used to have discussions with other people too, you know. Like sometimes Berry had some guys working for him and they'd be in on some of the discussions. But I never got involved in any of their discussions.

Murray: Do you remember if Jim Brady had any girl friends in La Ronge at all, any women that he...?

Verna: No. Never, never, never went out with any women. He treated all women as sisters, if they were older, like mothers, you know.

Murray: That was pretty unusual for a Metis man.

Verna: Yeah. Well, I guess he was still being true to the woman in Cumberland, and why he never brought her over, I'll never know. I never asked him, but he still sent her money all the time.

Murray: Would it be, perhaps, he wanted his freedom as well?

Verna: Maybe, I don't know.

Murray: He would never talk about it anyway so you'd never know.

Verna: No. That was the only time I ever knew of her was when he was crying.

Murray: Obviously in the north, especially, the employment is really seasonal. Did Jim Brady have work most of the time or was he out of work a lot of the time as well, in those years you were in La Ronge?

Verna: Well, he used to get work with Berry. I don't know what else he was doing.

Murray: That was mostly summer work, prospecting.

Verna: No, in the winter, too.

Murray: Winter, too?

Verna: Yeah. But I don't know. He always seemed to have, not really jobs, but he always seemed to be busy. I know he came down to P.A. one time; he was translating some literature from French to English and it's disappeared, no one can find that. But he used to stay in town maybe five weeks at a time, and I'd ask him what he was doing.

Murray: In P.A.?

Verna: Yeah, and he'd be in the hotel and he was doing some writing and translating this book, but he never told me what it was either.

Murray: I wonder if it was Le Metis Canadien, a Metis history. I think that was what it was because there was a...

Verna: It could have been.

Murray: How long do you think he would have worked on that?

Verna: Oh, I just remember him coming down the one time when he stayed here. But he said he had been working on it before. Because he used to leave, you know, and I never knew where he went for maybe a few weeks at a time. So I guess maybe that's what he was doing.

Murray: You don't remember what year that would have been? That would have been later on in the '60s or in the '50s?

Verna: No, late '50s and on.

Murray: As well as translating, he'd be doing other kinds of writing too, do you think?

Verna: He seemed to be. He seemed to be always writing, because I'd ask, you know. He'd come over. "Oh," he says, "I just had to have a rest or a cup of coffee." And I'd say, "Why? What were you doing?" "Oh," he says, "I was writing." You know, he never told me what.

Murray: You mentioned that period after he got kicked out of the Legion that he was pretty, sort of lethargic and not very interested in things. Would he still be doing that kind of thing on his own, like writing and that sort of thing, do you think?

Verna: I don't know, but I don't think so.

Murray: He had lost interest in a lot of things then?

Verna: I think so. I mean, I can't say for sure, you know, because I don't know what he was doing when he was at home, but just the feeling I got that he was probably not that interested in it.

Murray: Right. Right.

Verna: Maybe that's why, you know, looking at his scrapbooks... There was a whole trunk full of clippings, and his scrapbooks were always neat and in order. And then all of a sudden there were none. His trunk was filled with clippings that should have been... and the scrapbooks were there, you know, the blanks. And why he never put these clippings into the scrapbooks...

Murray: How many years were missing? Do you remember that?

Verna: No I can't, because I never looked at the dates. But I know that there was an awful lot of clippings that...

Murray: That hadn't been put in.

Verna: That hadn't been. And I think there were three scrapbooks there, new ones.

Murray: So he had planned to do it, but just never got around to it?

Verna: Yeah, and just never bothered. And that wasn't like him, because when things happened, into the book they went, you know, as he would cut them out. And maybe make notes on his diary, you know, certain things that happened.

Murray: That period where he seemed to be depressed or whatever, was it a sort of an economic slump at the time as well? Would that have anything to do with it perhaps?

Verna: No, not any worse than any other time.

Murray: I know in the early '60s...

Verna: Berry used to give him work at this time, too, quite often, you know, to go out and do a job, line cutting or something.

Murray: So he never seemed to be without enough money to live on anyway?

Verna: No, he always seemed to have money.

Murray: Did he seem to have more money than you would expect him to have from his jobs?

Verna: No.

Murray: He didn't have a lot of money?

Verna: No, you know, he always treated himself to a meal now and then. And I'd see him going home with his groceries, and...

Murray: And a bottle or something as well.

Verna: Later, yeah, you'd always see him with a bottle. But in the early years, you know, very seldom.

Murray: What would he drink? Was it hard liquor he was drinking?

Verna: Gee, I don't know. I imagine so.

Murray: That's not important, I just wondered.

Verna: No, I don't know.

Murray: Because I know, from others that I've talked to, that he didn't drink much in his early days. He would drink but never get drunk, never lose control.

Verna: No. I never saw him drunk in the early years.

Murray: Did other people notice that about him? Was it something that friends of yours or friends of his might talk about?

Verna: No. I don't know whether they ever mentioned it. I think Berry and I used to discuss it, that he wasn't the same in the bush. He was never a bushman, but he was stumbling a lot, not as...

Murray: He wasn't as alert, maybe, as he had been.

Verna: That's right. Before, his notes were always perfect and he was so clean; and after, when he'd go out in the bush he was dirty and never washed.

Murray: So it was quite a dramatic change in his whole, just his personal sort of environment?

Verna: I think so. Yeah. I don't know what it was that really... whether it was just the Legion thing or if it was something else that was bothering him that made him change.

Murray: When he talked politically, I'm wondering whether he would talk about people and criticize them or whether he was careful. Was he fairly considerate of people?

Verna: With me, when I used to ask him, he used to start as if... Of course, I did know the difference between capitalism and socialism and communism and this sort of thing, but he'd have me like a student, and he would explain what capitalism, what socialism is, and what communism is. And explain the three areas and he'd say what, at that time, the crisis in Cuba was, that these people were socialists...

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VERNA RICHARDS

Verna Richards lived for many years in northern Saskatchewan where she ran the La Ronge Cafe in the fifties and early sixties. She knew many of the local people including Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Jim Brady: his life in La Ronge.
  - Role of the churches in the community.
  - Political parties in the north. Tactics employed by the Liberals during election campaigns.
  - Malcolm Norris in La Ronge. The prospectors' school, his teaching ability, his sense of humor.
  - Malcolm Norris after his stroke.
- Murray: You were talking a bit about him [Jim Brady] sort of lecturing you as a student.

Verna: Yeah, yeah. He explained the whole Cuban situation to me, you know. Not saying, "These people are wrong doing this and they're wrong for doing that." He would just explain it to me, you know. You'd come to your own conclusions, right.

Murray: So he was a good teacher in that sense?

Verna: Oh yeah, really explained things in detail for you.

Murray: Would he respond to anyone, do you think, who asked him about politics? Was this the kind of person he was?

Verna: Oh yeah, he would. And he loved kids. I'm talking about after 1964, after I left, we used to go back up north once in a while. And I remember one time Valerie was about two or three months old and Jim was at this camp, working for Berry. He came across with the canoe to pick us up, and of course, we just took Valerie in her little basket and shoved her in the canoe and away we went. We get to the other side and Jim pulls the canoe up, reaches in and takes Valerie, carries her up the bank and over to the cook shack. He had a tent set up for the cook, and there was a woman cook at that time. And he'd say, "I brought you a present." And here is little Valerie, she was so tiny. (laughs) But Jim used to sit and hold her and play with her. And that would be in '65.

Murray: Was he still, in '65, as you described him? Sort of less careful about his appearance and that sort of thing?

Verna: A bit. He was just starting then to be not quite as... But when he was out in the bush and away from drinking and that, he was almost his old self back again, you know. You could sit and talk to him.

Murray: He liked the bush, didn't he? He liked being in the wilderness.

Verna: I think so, I think that is why he had his little cabin set away back into the bush.

Murray: Even in La Ronge.

Verna: Yeah, away from everything.

Murray: Did he ever express that, that he liked being in the bush?

Verna: No, no he never. I think he just liked to be by himself and read, and write, and...

Murray: Did you ever hear any stories about him and his relationship with women other than that one time when you mentioned where he was crying and told you about his woman in Cumberland?

Verna: In Cumberland, yeah.

Murray: Did you ever hear any other stories from other people about Jim and other women?

Verna: No.

Murray: He wasn't the kind of person that people would gossip

about, I don't suppose, anyway.

Verna: Well usually, at that time, if they had anything to say about Jim it was always good, because he never gave them anything bad to talk about.

Murray: Right.

Verna: And he treated all women with respect. Didn't matter who they were, they were all treated the same.

Murray: Every time you saw him.

Verna: Oh, yeah. You know, he'd come in and if there were white women there, native women, they all got the same kind of hello. You know, a greeting from him. And everyone treated him the same, too. But like I was saying, he treated all women like sisters or mothers, with respect.

Murray: Never any indication that he was attracted sexually to any women in La Ronge as far as you could tell?

Verna: Oh goodness, no.

Murray: Not even a hint of it, eh?

Verna: No, no.

Murray: Very interesting.

Verna: Which seems kind of odd, you know, for a guy living alone. I used to think, gee, how come he doesn't have a girl friend or something like that.

Murray: No one would ever ask him, I don't suppose?

Verna: No, no, well it was his own business.

Murray: Right. People stayed away from butting into other people's business anyway, I suppose?

Verna: Yeah. People were very kind in La Ronge at that time, too. The whites and natives, they got along but they respected each other's privacy and you didn't, you know, get the...

Murray: Nosey people.

Verna: Right. Except the odd time with the ladies club I was talking about, but that was the only time.

Murray: And that was more gossip among whites, about whites, I suppose.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Was there much intermixing in terms of relationships between Indians and whites of the permanent community? Or did they pretty much stay to themselves in terms of...?

Verna: No, they were mixed. I mean in activities like in the school and church.

Murray: What about marriage and sexual relationships? Was there much mixing or was there sort of a taboo against that?

Verna: Oh no, no. Oh, the guys, the pilots, or the guys that worked at the airway, a lot of them had native girl friends. They mixed, you know, they...

Murray: So nobody treated anybody any different?

Verna: No.

Murray: Among the permanent people?

Verna: No, they didn't. And in the church they were all mixed, you know. They all worked together doing different projects, both the Catholic and Anglican church.

Murray: Was the town pretty much equally divided between the two churches?

Verna: It seemed to be, seemed to be.

Murray: Because the west side is pretty much Catholic and the east side of the province is Anglican. So maybe if La Ronge was sort of on the line.

Verna: A mixture. Yeah, because I know the Anglican church was always filled and the Catholic church was always filled.

Murray: Did you notice any competition between them or they were pretty much both established already?

Verna: Yeah. I used to get a kick out of it. There was Reverend Ivy, who was the Anglican minister, and Father Durand was the Catholic priest at that time. And I used to sit and talk with both of them when they'd come in. And they were really, both of them were really nice. And so I used to ask Reverend Ivy sometimes about, oh something that the Catholic church was putting on and he said, "Oh yeah, we must go to that and support it." Then the same thing with Father Durand. Father Durand was so quiet until we got him talking, got to know him, then he'd sit and talk by the hour. So one day I thought, boy, I'm going to get these two together. So one night I told them to come over, I wanted to talk to them.

Murray: Told each one separately.

Verna: Yeah, they came over. We sat in the big booth. And

do you know that those two men struck up such a friendship that just about every night they were in the big booth. I would have to kick them out when it came time to lock up, and lights out. And I would say, "Come on, you two, I want to close up." And one night we were doing the dishes and I said, "Okay if you two want to talk you can work while you talk." So each one of them, gave Father Durand a tea towel and Reverend Ivy a tea towel. So as they were talking, they were drying dishes, you know. (laughs) But they really got to be really great friends.

Murray: Did you ever notice anything about the church in terms of the role it might have played among native people? You hear lots of negative things about the church in La Ronge in terms of education and that sort of thing. Did you ever notice anything other than their religious activity?

Verna: Oh, they used to put on different things, you know, maybe teas, bazaars, bake sales.

Murray: Rummage sales?

Verna: Rummage sales. And if someone was burnt out, boy, both churches got together and did something for the family. It didn't matter if they were Catholic or Anglican or what they were.

Murray: So it was a real community sort of institution then, the church?

Verna: I think so, because I know when the Catholic church would put on something, Reverend Ivy would be right there and the same, you know, with the other. Well, usually when they put something on it was for a good cause, you know, to help people in the community or....

Murray: Yeah. It wasn't explicitly religious. It was just a community thing.

Verna: No. And then, of course, after Father Durand left we got Father Belanger. He was a little guy and he used to always ride a bicycle. And he was a plumber, an electrician, a carpenter - you name it, he could do it.

Murray: So he was fixing everything, too, I suppose?

Verna: Yeah, and everyone used to call on him, you know, get Father Belanger to do it. And Father would come. He put in all the waterworks in the cafe for me. It was his idea to put

a tap on the stove, I had this huge stove and I was always running over to the sink to get water. And he put a tap right at the side of the stove for me, so I had the water right there.

Murray: Saved you a few miles a day.

Verna: Yeah. And oh, he was always helping people, you know. They used to always call on him.

Murray: That reminds me of something that one of Brady's sisters said about him, that throughout his life, despite his political understanding of religion, he always maintained a relationship with the priests. Do you ever recall him talking to them or having any particular relationship with either of the ministers?

Verna: Oh well, of course Father Belanger used to talk to him. I used to see them sitting talking. But everyone, you know, used to like him. Then we had an Italian priest, Father...

Murray: Not Fiori?

Verna: No, I think it was - oh, I forget his name - anyway, he was there for about two weeks and they got rid of him. He was quite a socialist. (laughs)

Murray: Really?

Verna: And I don't know what happened. Because he used to come and he used to dry dishes for me just about every night and we'd talk. And that was a few times that Jim Brady used to come in the back door and we'd have some discussions. He was

going to teach me Italian cooking, and he loved to cook. And then he was starting to talk about, oh, things happening in Cuba and things like this, you know. After Jim explaining everything to me and talking about it, you know, we used to have some discussions, the three of us, while we were doing dishes and cleaning up. And the next thing I know, Father's gone. It was Father Durand that came back and I asked him what happened to him. He said, "Oh, they transferred him." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "He was getting too involved with the people or something," he said, "that was the excuse I heard."

Murray: So this fellow Durand wasn't impressed either with the reason?

Verna: No. No, he more or less said to me...

Murray: It was politics then?

Verna: Well, I think it was politics.

Murray: That's what you assumed from that.

Verna: That was the conclusion I came to.

Murray: Did Brady figure out pretty quickly that this new priest was a socialist? Did they have lots of talks?

Verna: Oh yeah, yeah. Well what happened was that Father was in and he just came in and made himself so at home. He used to eat there quite often so he'd grab a tea towel, if I was busy cleaning up in the back, he would grab a tea towel and start drying dishes and start talking about different things that was going on. And one night he said he was so disappointed that the people in La Ronge were not very political. He said, "They don't seem to understand. I talked with a few people and they don't seem to care what's going on in the world." And he was concerned, you know, about Cuba and different things and he said, "Try talking to them. They know nothing about it."

Murray: This surprised him?

Verna: And we were talking and Jim came in the back door. I had already locked the front door, you see, so Jim used to just walk in the back door. So then we got talking that night about Cuba and different things then, of course, that's how he and Father got to... because we'd been talking about it before Jim walked in.

Murray: So Jim picked up on it right away?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: So that must have been in the early... that would have been '63 or '64 or something like that, was it?

Verna: No that was in the '50s - '57 or '58.

Murray: Well, was it before the revolution?

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: Oh, I see. Before the government changed.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Oh, I see. Because that's when the revolution was in progress.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: They hadn't won yet.

Verna: No. Goodness no. Because I'd grab the paper every morning to see what was happening, if anything new happened. And then some of the stupid people in La Ronge, they'd be coming in to get the paper and saying, "Oh, I wonder what's going on. Maybe we'll be called to war yet." And I'd say, "Shit, who'd want you."

Murray: And most people in La Ronge, among the white people, were pretty reactionary I suppose?

Verna: I think so.

Murray: Business people, mostly.

Verna: Yeah, this type.

Murray: Was the CCF ever very active in La Ronge or was it ever able to get very many members?

Verna: I never knew.

Murray: Did Jim talk about it much?

Verna: No. Not that much.

Murray: Was it lack of interest on his part do you think or was it just something that didn't come up?

Verna: I don't know. Just that he never discussed it, you know, with me. I imagine they did in their group discussions, you know, with Allan and Berry and any of the other people in La Ronge.

Murray: Were they pretty active, that group, do you think? Was it a regular sort of thing that they got together or was it just whenever they happened to be together?

Verna: Well, it was whenever they got together, and then they would decide on writing certain material.

Murray: Position papers or something?

Verna: Yeah. On the north and doing different things, projects. But I don't know, people there, it seemed to me, you know, to be very funny. You'd see them one time if old Diefenbaker arrived, they were all Conservatives, eh. And then something else would happen, someone else would come up, they're all Liberals then. And then Allan Guy ran and all his friends then, even the left wing ones, were all Liberals and supporting Allan just because he was a 'home town boy' type of thing.

Murray: He had been a teacher there?

Verna: Yeah, he was principal of the school.

Murray: Do you remember that campaign with Allan Guy?

Verna: Oh, he was a pig. Do you know what he did? It was his campaign and the women told me, the native women, he used to go down and he'd buy cakes and cookies and all sorts of things and he'd arrange it with one of the women to have a meeting at her house. He would supply all the lunch for her, and her job was to get all the women there, on the reserve, to her house for tea and he would talk to them. And he went, the first time he did this, he said that if they voted for him he was going to furnish every house on the reserve with

chesterfield suites, bedroom suites, and chrome table and chairs. You know, they were all going to get furniture. So of course they all voted for him, right. They never got anything. So come around the next election he tried the same thing, you know. He picks the same woman to have the meeting at her house and he said he would supply everything. And she said, "I'll do it," she said, "when we get our furniture," and walked away. So he wasn't able to pull the wool over their eyes again.

Murray: But did he win again though?

Verna: Oh yeah, sure.

Murray: What were some other of their tricks?

Verna: Well, he threatened some of them. Of course, the outfitters would say to the guides, you know, "If you don't vote a certain way, you haven't got a job here." And I mean they didn't know that it's a secret ballot. You could say you're voting one way and vote another. But the native people, you see, were sort of scared by it.

Murray: Right. They thought maybe people would be able to look at their ballots and see how they voted.

Verna: Yeah, yeah, that's right. And they would lose their job. And their guiding job was the only job they had during the summer. And if they didn't vote the right way... And then, of course, he bought liquor. You'd see them hauling them in there, you know, half drunk.

Murray: Into the polling station.

Verna: Yeah, and it was sickening to watch.

Murray: The Liberals would actually bring them up in car loads.

Verna: Oh, yeah.

Murray: To the polls, eh?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: And then drive them back again?

Verna: Yeah, and then you never saw them again. He didn't care what happened to them after he got their vote. You know it was surprising that... Well, he knew the line propaganda wasn't going to work any more.

Murray: But the booze would work?

Verna: But the booze worked and the threats. Then they started the big threat campaign, that you'd be without work.

Murray: Did they threaten other things too, like welfare and that sort things?

Verna: Oh, yeah. I imagine they would stoop to anything. Because they knew that they couldn't lie to them and promise them things like they did.

Murray: So if the promise didn't work, threat was the next thing to use.

Verna: The threats. And I used to tell some of the people, the native women that used to come in, I'd say, "They can't, they can't take your rights away." And they used to say, well for instance, if you voted for the NDP, that they would come and burn down your church, they would take your children away...

Murray: The NDP would?

Verna: Oh, yeah. And a lot of these old people were very religious, you know, and they were scared. But this was a campaign that Allan Guy used, that if you voted NDP, you were voting for the Communists and they would burn the churches. And if you had a cross in your house, you know, any religious signs, they would burn your house down.

Murray: This is the story they would come back to you with?

Verna: Oh, yeah. And I think the worst place was up at Fond du Lac. Mary MacDonald went up campaigning for the NDP and she went around after Guy had been there. And that's where she comes from and it was her people, and they practically ran her out of town.

Murray: Right.

Verna: And this was the propaganda.

Murray: And she couldn't convince them?

Verna: No. See, they were very religious and in no way were they going to lose their churches and their kids and their homes. But they believed, and yet Mary tried to explain to them that these were lies.

Murray: Right, but they weren't taking any chances.

Verna: No, they weren't going to take a chance.

Murray: They didn't like the CCF that much that they were going to take a chance that their church might be burnt.

Verna: Right, right. And Mary tried to explain to them maybe some of the benefits they might get, you know.

Murray: They knew promises weren't kept, but they knew that

threats might be.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Is Mary MacDonald still around?

Verna: Yeah, I guess she's still in La Ronge.

Murray: Is she a native woman?

Verna: Yeah. She came from Fond du Lac.

Murray: Did she work for the CCF on the various elections, or the NDP?

Verna: Yeah. NDP.

Murray: This would have been 1960 or '64, I suppose? 1960 was when Guy first beat Allan, I guess.

Verna: Yeah, and then it was after that, you know, and she even worked - well, I guess she's worked for the NDP up till not very long ago. Because I remember she was crying one night. We had a meeting at Lindgrens and we happened to be at the lake so we went in. And here all the NDPers were there at this meeting, and Mary was the one who did all the shit work, and she wasn't invited.

Murray: Really?

Verna: She came into the kitchen that night, she was drunk, and did she raise shit. She called them all "F" this and that, and she had Allan Quandt crying, at the end, you know. She just went after them. She said, "Sure, I'm good enough to do

all your running around for you and campaigning all over the north, but I'm not good enough to come to your meeting."

Murray: So Quandt felt badly about that?

Verna: Well, of course, she made everyone feel like asses.

Murray: Which they were.

Verna: Well, which they were. But Allan, you see, hadn't set up the meeting. I don't know really who did. But he was hurt, you know, that this was overlooked, inviting Mary who lived right next door. Anyway she told them, you know, that she was good, because Mary didn't beat around the bush.

Murray: How many people would have been at that meeting?

Verna: Oh boy, maybe ten.

Murray: That's probably the whole CCF contingent for La Ronge, eh?

Verna: Pretty close, yeah.

Murray: Would it be Lindgrens and Quandt and maybe Dalby?

Verna: Yeah and then...

Murray: Brady?

Verna: No.

Murray: Brady wouldn't be there, eh?

Verna: Oh, what's his name?

Murray: Tony Wood?

Verna: No. The guy that had the electrical shop or something, the Ukrainian man.

Murray: Oh, Rahorchuck.

Verna: Yeah, he and his wife, his wife was quite active. I forget who else was there. Anyway that was...

Murray: Was it just an oversight do you think?

Verna: I think so, yes. I'm sure that no one, because everyone liked Mary, you know. I don't think they would deliberately not invite her, but they just never thought.

Murray: But it's typical that they forgot the Indian and not any of the whites?

Verna: That's right. And also it's typical of any political party that you always forget...

Murray: The women, the shit workers.

Verna: The women and the one who does all the work. You know, the rest can sit around and theorize but you get doing the legwork and the talking.

Murray: So chauvinism was a definite feature of the politics in La Ronge in those days, I would expect. Even among the left wing as well as the right wing?

Verna: Of course, this happened in the later years.

Murray: Right.

Verna: After I left La Ronge, when we went back.

Murray: Oh, I see, this would have been '67 or...?

Verna: Maybe, yeah. Around there.

Murray: When did those tactics of the Liberals start to get really bad? Was that with the arrival of Allan Guy?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Before that it wasn't...?

Verna: Well, before that I never noticed, you know, I never paid much attention to this.

Murray: So it might have happened but it wasn't as obvious then?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: And the first time would have been 1960? Was that when Allan Guy first ran against...?

Verna: I can't remember now if he ran before that or not.

Murray: But it was at least as early as that?

Verna: Yeah. And I don't know, I think it was the line, the propaganda that he was giving to the native people on the reserve, that he was going to furnish all their homes, that really struck me, you know, to sort of keep an eye on him after that.

Murray: Right. And before that you might not have had any reason to pay any attention to him.

Verna: Right. But when anyone would say such a thing and you know it's a lie.

Murray: Right, it's so obvious.

Verna: Yeah. And it was after that when Tony was running. When was that?

Murray: Oh, I think it was either before or after Allan.

Verna: Because Jean Cuthand and us went up to La Ronge to help in the campaigning and that was when Jean Cuthand went to the reserve. This was the second meeting, you know. She said, "If he comes around again promising things, you know, just let him buy all the drinks, let him buy the goodies and everything else and never mind. You can go and put your "x" in the other place because he doesn't know. Eat his food, drink his liquor, you know, but don't vote for him."

Murray: Do you think she influenced them?

Verna: Oh yeah, because they knew Jean because she had

been...

Murray: In the hospital.

Verna: At the nursing station there and delivered most of their babies.

Murray: She was pretty popular then?

Verna: Oh, yeah. She was a darn good nurse. She was going day and night, if anyone needed her. I think they took advantage of her because she was so good, you know. If anyone was the least bit sick or not feeling well, "Call Jean."

Murray: She was probably the only one in the nursing station that paid much attention to the native people for one thing.

Verna: No, the other girls in the nursing station were good, too.

Murray: It was just the doctor that was the...?

Verna: Well, there was different doctors. The first one wasn't so hot, and then we had a good doctor after that. But most of the girls that worked in the hospital were really good. But anyway, most of the women knew Jean and she'd go out campaigning.

Murray: This was in the late '60s. This was after, you were not living in La Ronge.

Verna: No, I wasn't living in La Ronge then, but it seemed to me it wasn't long after.

Murray: Well, it could have been. There was an election in '67, provincial election in 1967.

Verna: It could have been '67.

Murray: It might have been a federal election, I suppose. No, it would have to be.

Verna: No, it would have to be. I think that was the time Tony was running, it seems to me.

Murray: Yeah. I think maybe he did run in the mid-sixties there.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: I've asked you about as much as I can think of about Jim Brady, unless you can recall any other stories about him that come to mind that would tell me something about him.

Verna: I can't think of anything offhand.

Murray: Right, well it might come to you. And I want to get

your impressions of Malcolm Norris as well, what kind of person he was.

Verna: Oh, he was a terrific guy. Very funny, called everyone a paleface, all the white people.

Murray: Even his friends, he would always refer...

Verna: Oh, yeah. Oh, he used to be such a tease though. During the prospectors' school, you know, I used to feed all the... and they used to have a ticket. They'd come in and I'd punch their ticket, you know, for their meals. And his son, young Malcolm, was going to this school, but he wasn't eating there. So one day Malcolm comes in and he wants to know if young Malcolm can use his ticket. And I said, "No." And he'd get into an argument about who could eat there and who couldn't and then he'd get after me. "Oh, you damn paleface, you."

And then he used to tease me if I had a low neck blouse or something on. I had this cross on a chain and Malcolm used to always have the habit of looking over the counter and trying to peek down. And then he got after me one day and he said, "Oh, why in the hell do you wear that cross? Just when I get a dirty thought in my mind and I want to peek," he says, "this cross hits me and I lose interest." (laughs)

Murray: His religion comes back does it? That was the reason?

Verna: Oh, he was such a tease though. But boy, could he talk. I guess he was really a good lecturer at the prospectors' school, because everyone like him and he used to hold their attention. Because a lot of them used to come in for lunch, maybe in the evening and boy, you'd hear them talk about Malcolm. "Doesn't he explain things good," they used to say.

Murray: Because he was popular, too?

Verna: Yes. The prospectors' school, going to that, God. I think I only remember a couple of native people taking it, and the rest were all whites from the south who had no idea of ever going into the bush. But it was something to do, I guess, and to make, you know...

Murray: You had a native prospectors' school too, later on.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: Maybe they were separate, I'm not sure.

Verna: I don't know. But at that time there was very few. But the native guys that did take it, you know, really made use of it; the rest didn't. I mean it was young guys from the south. I guess they wanted something to do in the summer, and

they went to the prospecting school.

Murray: You mentioned that Jim always treated women either as sisters or mothers, depending on how old they were.

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: How did Malcolm treat women?

Verna: Gee, I don't know.

Murray: Was he a flirt?

Verna: He used to pretend he was. You know, he used to always make eyes at you or look you up and down. But I think it was just the devilment in him.

Murray: He was just teasing?

Verna: Yeah. Oh, he was a tease. But he was very serious at times, too.

Murray: Was he the same as Jim, in that if you expressed an interest in some political issue that he would talk about it?

Verna: Oh yeah, sure. Although Malcolm and I never did talk that much, except after he had his stroke, and then they lived in town. He used to come over and he was crying, and I'd get after him and tell him he didn't have to cry. There was nothing wrong with his big mouth. He could still talk, he could still write, he could still phone people. Just because he couldn't run around after the girls, you know. And you'd get him smiling then.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Verna: ...all I can remember on that.

Murray: Who used to take him to the meetings? Would Russell take him?

Verna: Most of the time, Russell.

Murray: He was sort of his other arm.

Verna: Yeah, I think so.

Murray: Did he try and encourage Russell to get involved in Indian politics or Metis politics?

Verna: I don't think so.

Murray: Not that you were aware of?

Verna: No, I don't know. I imagine all the kids were influenced by him. I mean he always had pet names for all of them.

Murray: Did Malcolm have a house that he stayed at in La Ronge when he was up there? A cabin at all?

Verna: Yeah, he had a cabin, I think. I was never even near it, because I never went any place. But I knew that he had a cabin.

Murray: But he would only stay there... He was in La Ronge quite a bit of the summer each year?

Verna: Yeah.

Murray: That's where he had the school, eh?

Verna: Yeah, the prospectors' school would be held in the spring, and he seemed to be around quite a bit of the time.

Murray: Did he and Brady spend a lot of time together when Malcolm was in La Ronge?

Verna: I would see them the odd time sitting together, but I don't know.

Murray: In the restaurant?

Verna: Yes. The only time I would see them was when they were in the restaurant. But I imagine they would.

Murray: Right.

Verna: Because they had so much in common.

Murray: Right. Well I think Jim worked with Malcolm on occasion, too.

Verna: Yeah, well it goes back, I guess, their friendship, to the beginning of the Metis Society.

Murray: Yeah.

Verna: So they'd have a lot of things to discuss.

(END OF SIDE B)

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