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SASKATCHEWAN  
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SASKATCHEWAN  
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INTERPRETER:  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discusses his negative attitude toward the RCMP.  
SASKATCHEWAN ARCHIVES WRITTEN DOCUMENT

Born Lac La Biche, Alberta, 1934. Raised by Indian people west of Calgary. Did construction work. When 14 years old, moved to Edson, Alberta, worked in bush camps. His father was three-quarters Sioux (from U.S.). His father and mother broke up when he was little.

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Carol: Then these weren't your own parents then that raised you?

Bill: No.

Carol: Do you know anything about either your own parents or your foster parents?

Bill: My foster parents were full-blooded Indians. My own parents -- my dad was a Sioux, about a three-quarter part Sioux from the United States. His father had come from the United States before the turn of the century; he run away from the army down there. That's about all I know about the old man. And my dad, I don't know where he is now. He's wandering around Canada somewhere, but we never had much to do with him. My mother and father broke up when I was little.

Carol: How did it happen that you got sent to this place near Calgary?

Bill: Well, (inaudible) was through relationships and (inaudible) decided to Sioux...

Carol: Oh, it wasn't through any government agency or something; it was just done through your family?

Bill: (Inaudible) Sort of left behind, or there was a deal made. I don't know exactly what it was; I never really looked into it.

Carol: And then afterwards, in Edson, where did you go from there?

Bill: I worked with camps pretty well up in the Rocky Mountains. And up until 1958 I was working in Banff, for the government in Banff. And from there I went to Dawson Creek and I worked in the bush. I was a part-time laborer working around that area, back and forth to Prince George. Mostly bush work, slashing, maintenance work along highways. I did some trapping during that time on and off, not many constructive ways. Did a lot of hunting for old people that wanted hunting done. And I never settled down really until about 1959 and '60 when I settled in western Alberta. And I became a coal miner for three years, and worked in the bush, and...

Carol: Was that at Canmore?

Bill: Canmore.

Carol: Is that in the prairie or...?

Bill: No, it's south of Banff about sixteen miles. And from there I went to B.C., to Vancouver, and I worked for the long-shore docks. And boats, towboats, on the coastal vessels as a seaman. Other part-time work -- I've never really done any full-time work up until about 1969 when I was in Saskatchewan. I've been in Saskatchewan before. I was married in Saskatchewan. I met my wife in Saskatchewan; she's from Saskatoon.

Carol: So when did you get married?

Bill: It was in 1959 in Dawson Creek.

Carol: Okay, I'll ask you now if you've had any bad experiences with R.C.M.P.?

Bill: Oh, it was the R.C.M.P. that got me started in the Indian organization, Metis organization in Saskatchewan. I was in the organization prior to that but they were small groups and things like this -- we were involved with the Red Power Group, the West Coast, in the struggle for Port Lawton(?) and the Sechelt peninsula. And we come back to Saskatchewan. One of my wife's uncles was beaten up pretty badly on the street by the Mounties, at which time my brother-in-law and I wrote to the Attorney General, who was then Heald, and he opened an investigation on it. And naturally Mounties investigated Mounties, and the staff sergeant investigating their lower echelons. And we took it to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and also, at that time, David Ahenakew had just been elected and there wasn't too much done from that end, probably because of their early stages of organization. And we went to the Metis Society and talked to Jim Sinclair and he found out that we were non-status, and he invited us to join the society, which we did. And from then on we've been working for the Metis organization off and on for the last four years. But the Mounties -- since working for the organizations, we've found out more and more that they are very biased and they are racist

to quite an extent in some of their dealings with the native people of Canada, or Saskatchewan for that matter. But there has been various cover-ups done.

Carol: Can you give me some examples of that?

Bill: Well, my uncle, he got beat up, or my wife's uncle. He had a very bad cut in his face and bad bruises on his ribs, and he was beaten up right in the middle of the street. It was investigated. We took it to court, and the judge and the Mounties laughed at it more or less. And from then on he was never brought out into the open. There's other cases, like where there has been killings on the reserve, or in the community, and they've been sort of investigated in a preliminary manner and then they've been sort of pushed to the side and filed away in Ottawa. There's only one or two that ever really came into the courts and became known. A lot of the time the people are frightened to witness against the Mounties. A lot of times they're spoken to before the court case is presented and, you know, told something will happen if you speak out against us. But I think this sort of trend is changing now, because there is more and more cases coming into the open and people starting to speak up.

Carol: Is that different from the way they treat the white people do you think?

Bill: Oh yeah. All you have to do is spend about a weekend in Carlyle. You'll see the paddywagon literally backed up to the door of the bar and a couple of police cruisers sitting at

the other doors. And anybody who staggers a little bit, or who's under the weather, or even some cases people walk out cold sober and they've been thrown in the paddywagon and taken

into jail overnight. Whereas I've seen white people, you know, sort of groping along the wall of the outside of the hotel, or drunk and they wet themselves -- they haven't been picked up. They've been sort of laughed at as being 'a hell of a good Joe', you know. He's the town eccentric sort of thing, you know. He's a white drunk, he's different from an Indian drunk.

Carol: Yeah, especially if he's got any money.

Bill: Yeah. You get this old farmer, he gets drunk once a week, you know, he's sort of, you know, they don't bother with him -- he's a good old guy, you know. There's a special tank in Carlyle for Indians and it's packed on the weekend, or on a payday especially, or welfare days. They just literally throw in anybody who's only half-drunk.

Carol: Where's Carlyle?

Bill: Southeast Saskatchewan down by, right down by the Manitoba border almost.

Carol: What about the school, do you remember? Well I guess it would have been on the reserve, eh; so they wouldn't have been with other kids.

Bill: Well, it was partly there, and I went to a Catholic school in Calgary, which is no longer there. The name of it, I think, was something to do with St. James. I'm not too sure of the name of it now. And what I remember of it was the nuns and the priests. Some of them were very, very good people. The majority of them were there to teach "savages" civilization. And I know I talked about it and there was a lot of conflict in there between my brothers and myself, and one or two other kids

who were from the Blackfoot reserves, who refused to stop speaking their languages, or refused to... rules and regulations that were strictly for silly little things, you know, like whistling or singing in the hallway, or something like this.

Carol: In other words you weren't supposed to have a good time.

Bill: Yeah, it was like a prison, you know. It was dusty halls. We always smelt funny, you know. It just wasn't the thing we were taught. We were taught catechism a lot, and a lot of stuff that was of no value to anybody. You know, they talk about Indian mysticism but this was real mysticism in itself. You know, superstition if you want to call it. And this is what turned me off completely on religion, pretty well of any type. The mystic side of life, I don't believe in it. I don't believe in it. I'm not discrediting people who have great skills. Some of the people believe strongly yet they are very

people-orientated.

Carol: Not too many of them.

Bill: No, there's not very many. There's medicine men around who have certain religious beliefs, which I won't go against. They've also got very great skills in healing with environmental medicine. I very strongly believe in a lot of this, and I think it should be documented. But as for spiritual beliefs in this, I don't have the time to worry about it. There are other more important things to be done on this earth than worrying about whether there is a Great Spirit, or a God, or anything like that.

Carol: Were there white kids in this class in your school, or was it just Indian and natives?

Bill: No. The section we were at was all native children and Metis and different tribal people. There was Blackfeet, a lot of Blackfeet. There was Peigan; there was Sarcees, and Crees...

Carol: You mean there were white kids in the school but...

Bill: Well, there was white kids came into the school, I believe, but into another section. There was some classes where there was some white kids in -- they were mostly from very poor families, Catholic families. We didn't have much to do with them. There was conflict in there, and the conflict was kept alive...

Carol: How was that?

Bill: Well, they would use one against the other as examples. You know, sort of, "Bill, you're not behaving properly. Take a lesson from little Johnny over here. You know how he behaves -- this is how you're supposed to be." You know, just sort of pitting the white against the Indian.

Carol: You mean little Johnny was white?

Bill: Little Johnny would be a white kid, yeah, and they'd sort of pit one against the other, you know. Sort of use him as example, you know, that this is the way you're supposed to live in the civilized world, you know. And civilization is merely a word. It's an economic word; it's got nothing to do with anything else -- as far as I'm concerned.

Carol: I don't know if I'm supposed to ask you about some of this stuff. You know, this healing and medicine and stuff, but I'm quite interested in that so... Because I think probably a lot of it is true; like a lot of the doctors now don't really know anything.

Bill: No, doctors don't...

Carol: And none of it's perfect. I mean the medicine men obviously can't do anything either, but like they... Anyway, can you tell me something about some things they use?

Bill: Well, some things they use for healing purposes -- parts of birch trees that can be used for healing burns, or very serious rashes. There's a lot of environmental medicine, I call it. It's to do with herbs and things like this that are used in a proper way. There's also a psychological effect -- if you believe strongly enough in something it's like faith healing. And in the white world where there's a mixture of herbalism and psychology, I guess you call it, and it does work. I've seen it work. And a medicine man is a very, very knowing person. A good one, he knows, he understands the person he's dealing with probably because he lived close to them all his life. The strong feeling of religion has got a lot to do with it.

Carol: Are there still a lot of them around?

Bill: Oh yeah, there's a lot of them around. There's a lot of fakes. There's a lot of so-called medicine men around who go around professing the art and talking on radio shows and this, to my way of thinking, would not be a medicine man. But there's also a lot of people who nobody knows about who are usually within a community, or a group.

Carol: Is there usually one in every community?

Bill: There could be one or two. They don't usually come in the open. They usually won't have anything to do with white people -- they deal only with Indians, or native people for that matter, or anybody who is connected in a specific way like mostly their relations.

Carol: Do the medicine men have more respect or power in the community?

Bill: I don't think they have more power or respect. It depends on what they are. If they're one of the kind that they're looking for power, then they are going to have power. And some of the ones I know, they're just like ordinary people, you know. They have a skill like, you know, a doctor, or a lawyer. They fit right into the community. They don't have any particular power; they don't really want any.

Carol: Do people look up to them more than to others, you know?

Bill: Yeah, they look up to them according to their ability. Like some people would look up to a king trapper, or a good trapper, or a good bushman, good hunter.

Carol: It's no different than that then? He doesn't have more respect?

Bill: No, he wouldn't have any more respect, or power. The power is distributed throughout the community. This is something that's different from the society at large. You know, there is people who, through their abilities, gain a

certain amount of prestige in the community, but an ordinary person can tell them off, or, you know, because they've done something wrong. Because they've got that prestige doesn't mean they can walk over everybody like they do in the city here. If a person is a millionaire he can easily stomp all over people, you know, small people in the city. But in the native community we don't have that.

Carol: Getting back to this school that you went to in Calgary -- you said they didn't let you talk your language?

Bill: Well, I don't know if it was a rule by the church itself. A lot of the times the reason they didn't want us to talk was because they probably thought we were talking about them.

Carol: Which you probably were.

Bill: We were most of the time, you know, calling them down. Or they believed too that if you didn't have a perfect command of English or something like this, you know, you wouldn't be able to get along in the society that they were sort of dreaming up for us. There's a lot of little factors go into the language. I think very strongly that the basis of private is in a person's language, no matter what nationality the person is. If he's a Ukrainian, if he can talk it, if he can speak his language. If he cannot speak his language, then he's only got a Ukrainian name. I think language is an extremely important part of education. In many classes in communication among people if you can communicate better in your own language there's some value. There's a lot of values in Indian life that's different from white life, and it can only be explained in the Indian language. You can't explain it that well -- it doesn't sound right if it's in a foreign language.

Carol: Right. Like what example can you give me?

Bill: Oh, I can't just click any right offhand. English always seems to be a sort of a scientific language -- cut and dried: a tree is a tree is a tree. But in the Indian language, a tree takes on a different context altogether. It's not just a beech tree; it's not just a poplar tree; it's got a descriptive phrase to go with it. It could be anything from a stinking tree to the perfumed tree, its feet smell good or...

Carol: Oh, there's a different word for each...

Bill: There's a different word for each one, yeah. The tree is the same name that fits the descriptive phrase that goes with the tree. And a river is not just a river; like the Saskatchewan river is Fast Flowing Water, which is the original

name of the Saskatchewan River; and the Churchill River is the Rough River. Classified as Indian language it would still be a river.

Carol: And there's a different word?

Bill: But there's a different word to describe them, yeah. There is words to describe the headwaters of a river. It's not just a headwater. It's different words, you see, descriptive phrases depending on the environment. There's descriptive phrases for deer and moose, you know; different animals they have descriptive names because they're not just cut and dried.

Carol: Yeah, I see. After that Catholic school, did you go to high school after that or anything?

Bill: No, I just went to, I almost got grade eight, and I'm more or less self-educated myself. I did a lot reading when I was in jail a few times; I'd do a lot of reading in there. And I studied by myself in my own way. There was also some people helping when I went to Vancouver. I met some people over there who got me involved in sort of various groups like the Friendship Centre and things like this. They sort of recommended reading to me, what I should read. And the stuff they gave me was, you know, made me want to read more. And from then on I sort of just kept studying on my own until last year I went to University. And the first year I passed the adult entrance exam, which was quite a deal because I've only got grade seven and I passed into University. But the University -- I didn't find too much information in the first year anyway. It was very heavily biased towards one way of thinking, very heavily religious-orientated (especially the University of Saskatoon). They seem to be hung-up more on arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas than they do on material arguments. This isn't philosophy.

Carol: Depends who you take it from.

Bill: Yeah, right. I did happen to hit on some pretty good profs, and the political science that I took was heavily biased in favor of American or Canadian content, in that order. British Law came second.

Carol: Whereabouts, social welfare, can you...?

Bill: Welfare? Well as far as I'm concerned, it's mass bribery. It's a payoff to keep people quiet, so that they won't fight back through the system that's oppressing them.

There's sort of an attitude in Canada, or Saskatchewan for that matter, that Indians aren't much use for anything, except for (?) bush, or for working in the rivers, and trapping, fishing, guiding, maintenance sort of jobs. There's the odd one who breaks out and becomes a steel worker, or becomes involved in the unions, things like this, in a more progressive way. The majority of people are sort of kept on the reserve. They're given no extraordinary capital in order to start an economic base or system, and it's easier for the country -- it's more



expensive for the country, but it's easier for the political line of things -- and to pay them off in welfare cheques, by welfare cheques. And this not only goes for Indians, this goes for poor whites too within the unemployment situation. It will defeat its own purpose sooner or later. The cost is enormous. If they were to take twenty years of welfare, which is given out right across Canada, and put this into cooperative, or collective industry, or industrial development, or agricultural development, their returns would be twice as much as is now being paid out in welfare.

Carol: Are Metis people treated worse by the social welfare?

Bill: Yeah they, well, yeah they are. Because for instance, treaty Indians. People who have signed treaties get their welfare more or less from Indian Affairs; it's guaranteed, and so on and so forth. The Metis people are Indians in every sense of the word and yet they have signed no treaty; they come under the laws and regulations of Canada. And if you have biased welfare workers, or people who just believe that all Metis and, or all Indians, are drunken sort of lazy bum attitude, you wind up with a situation where the Metis are discriminated against by the welfare office.

They're investigated more; their welfare cheques are cut down because the man probably can't find a job, because he's Indian, or he looks more Indian than the other person. There has been cases in welfare -- I don't know if they're still doing it, they used to do it, I know this, I worked for welfare -- where they write on the top of your paper -- Indian -- on the top of your report. And this classifies you, and you're put into a special file; this is opposed to Indian Affairs files. So the Metis people are treated by society at large the same as any other Indian, but they do not have the protection of the Indian Affairs, welfare services, or all their educational services, or anything like this. It's only the last two or three years that there has been any programs come into effect, which are almost meaningless because there's so little capital available for it, or of the attitude from the bureaucrat force, non-status people who they feel should all fit into society and shut up -- and keep your place sort of thing.

Carol: What do you think about the question of integration?

Bill: That depends on an awful lot of factors.

Carol: How important is it in the total picture?

Bill: At the moment I don't believe integration will work, or assimilation that they like to call it. In some cases it is two different sort of categories, to my way of thinking. If we're given the chance, or we take the opportunity to create an economic base, and we can come up with and form our own society, I think then sooner or later the two societies, the society at large has got to come through down in their way of thinking as well -- both ways this works -- not just one. Then maybe in years to come there will be a sort of an integration.

But not in the sense of banishing Indian development into the multi-cultural mosaic that Canada's trying to (?) to put on right now. Right now, I think, you're finding the more they try to assimilate and integrate people, the more the reaction is from the native people against this sort of thing, the more cultural racist they become, because of the racist society. Indians aren't racist, they're only counter-racist; because of the... And that doesn't mean the reverse; that means counter to racism.

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