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Sharon: Joe Blondeau from Lebret. Mr. Blondeau, do you remember your grandparents?

Joe: I remember them.

Sharon: Could you tell me something about them their names, what their background was.

Joe: Well my grandparents had brought me up, which his first name was Joe Blondeau. My grandmother was Ellen. And they were from Manitoba. I was pretty small when I was with them, I was with them since I was about six years old as far as I know. I was with them last week.

Sharon: What happened to your parents? Where were your parents?

Joe: Well, they were, I don't know at the time what happened, but I know that I wasn't staying with them. They never mentioned to me what happened.

Sharon: So the only parents you knew then were your grandparents?

Joe: Real like, well I knew my mother and dad because I took care of my mother till she died.

Sharon: And where were you living at this time when they were bringing you up?

Joe: We were living down Lebret just down the lake down in Coulee there. You asked where the folks were living most of the time. And my grandfather used to be a butcher at the Indian School, he butchered there for years and years till he couldn't do it anymore.

Sharon: How large was your family?

Joe: Our own?

Sharon: Yes your brothers, sisters.

Joe: Well five or something.

Sharon: Five. And you were all brought up by your grandparents?

Joe: No. Just me. The girls were brought up at home.

Sharon: Did your grandparents have their own house?

Joe: Yes they had their own house, their own place.

Sharon: And what was it made of?

Joe: Log house.

Sharon: Did they make it, or (inaudible)?

Joe: Yes. They built it themselves. It was just about two years ago that old house burnt down.

Sharon: Where was it?

Joe: Just about little better than half a mile from here.

Sharon: It was outside of town?

Joe: Yeah just outside of town.

Sharon: Whose land was it on?

Joe: Well to tell you the truth it was like it belonged to the priest Oblate Father.

Sharon: And did your grandfather work with him?

Joe: Yeah, he worked with him all the time.

Sharon: So he stayed on their land then?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Okay so there wasn't any like heat or running water or anything at that time?

Joe: Not that time.

Sharon: You had to haul wood, haul water?

Joe: Had to haul everything. There was no wells then and most of the time it was lots of water in the slough, we had to get water from the slough.

Sharon: How far did you have to go for water?

Joe: About two miles.

Sharon: What kind of furniture did they have?

Joe: It's all old fashioned furniture.

Sharon: And was it store bought or did they make it themselves?

Joe: Well, when they had it they must have bought it in (?) or something, you know, as far as I know. Lot of stuff was homemade those days. See their son, one of, they only had one son my grandfather, and he was a good carpenter. One of these that used to do all stone work, you know. He done a lot of work that stone work at the church. That church was built in 1925.

Sharon: And he helped to build it?

Joe: He helped to build it. My grandfather hauled lot of that stones that's there.

Sharon: So did he, did your grandfathere always work for the Father?

Joe: Always, always.

Sharon: And was this a permanent job?

Joe: Well, it seems that pretty well permanent in the summertime, you know.

Sharon: And what did he do to support the family in the winter time?

Joe: Well, in winter time that's when he's doing all the butchering at the school. He used to do a lot of butchering pretty well all winter, start early in the fall and pretty well to spring.

Sharon: And did he do any hunting or trapping?

Joe: Not too much.

Sharon: Did your grandmother have a garden?

Joe: Oh yes, yeah.

Sharon: Did he have any animals, like farm animals?

Joe: Oh he had a team of horses that's all he had.

Sharon: And how do they travel around?

Joe: Horses.

Sharon: Horses. The way you were living was that the way everyone else was living or were you poorer than anybody?

Joe: Well that's, that's, whatever little jobs you got ahold of around that's how they were doing their living till they got their old age pension, you know, old age pension wasn't too much at that time.

Sharon: Did you consider yourself poor compared to other people?

Joe: Well, to say the truth I don't think so.

Sharon: Everyone was pretty well lived the same way you were living?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Did you go to school?

Joe: I went to school yes down in Lebret.

Sharon: A town school or the...

Joe: Public School that time.

Sharon: Was there a conscientious of your Metis history in your family?

Joe: No.

Sharon: Did you hear any stories about the older days from your grandparents about how they lived back then?

Joe: Well, when recently not too long ago when my dad was living he used to talk about what the family (inaudible).

Sharon: Do you remember any of those stories that you could tell to us?

Joe: Well he used to tell me when they first moved down, when they first lived around here that they used to (inaudible). It's way up in the States there, North Dakota and that's where somewhere close to there he came from. North Dakota. St. Johns he always thought, he always named it that's way closer to the mountain, you know.

Sharon: And that's where they originally lived before they came here?

Joe: Yes. That's where he was born as far as I know when they first remembered quite a little bit, you know, he was talking about it.

Sharon: How were they living then? What did they...

Joe: Oh it was mostly trapping and hunting. They used to do quite a bit of trapping then. My old grandfather was a good buffalo hunter, you know.

Sharon: He did that before he moved here?

Joe: Oh when they moved to the west here. What my dad used to tell me anyway. When I knew my grandfather he was pretty well crippled up.

Sharon: Is that your mom's, or your dad's father?

Joe: My dad's dad.

Sharon: What kind of dances and social events did they have then?

Joe: Oh square dances, and play cards. Lot of big social events they used to have. Play horseshoes Sunday they'd gather up and play horseshoes and have a big meal. Great time.

Sharon: Were there weddings the same as like the white people around here?

Joe: Oh way different.

Sharon: Do you think you could describe anything about them?

Joe: Well, years ago when I remember there was no cars it was all horses and buggies all decorated, you know. And they gather up whoever got married place and they had a big meal there. Dances they dance all night. Whale of a time.

Sharon: How did the bride and bridegroom dress?

Joe: They dress real different now, they had long gowns and hat.

Sharon: And the men wear them too?

Joe: Well, yes, you know, old fashioned suits.

Sharon: All these social events were they, was there just Metis people at them or were they mixed?

Joe: Mostly the ones I seen that were pretty well mixed. (inaudible). They were pretty well invited pretty well anybody around that they know for the wedding.

Sharon: Did any of the Meits people that you know did they dress in a special way or a different way than the other people did? Or have you heard about any kind of a special Metis dress?

Joe: Oh mostly all the ones I've seen anyway they all, they all dressed pretty well old fashioned clothes you see know sometimes you see them, you know, they all dress like that.

Sharon: What about the women did they wear something, I don't think they wore pants back then did they?

Joe: (laughs)

Sharon: Well, did they wear long skirts, long dresses?

Joe: Long, long dresses yes. What you call those pants they wear right up to here, you know, their legs.

Sharon: Peddlepushers?

Joe: I don't know what they call them. Kelly, what do you call them long pants?

Kelly: Bloomers.

Joe: Bloomers. (laughs) And the shoes are not like they are, you know, they're all laced up to pretty near up to your ankles, you know, those long...

Sharon: Were some still wearing moccasins then too?

Joe: Oh there's still a lot. My grandmother used to wear moccasins all the time. So did my old grandfather he used to wear moccasins.

Sharon: What language did everyone speak?

Joe: Mostly all talk Cree and French.

Sharon: A mixture?

Joe: A mixture yeah. And lot of them I guess they knew lots of Indians, you know, they talk their Indian language too. I've heard my grandfather talk, he had a lot of friends Indian friends, you know.

Sharon: So there was a lot of mixing like with Metis, Indian?

Joe: Yeah. Lots of it, lots of that.

Sharon: And everyone was close with their relatives like the Metis kept close contact with their Indian relatives too?

Joe: Well as far as I know, yes.

Sharon: Like I know when we were living down the valley over here when there used to be something doing at school that's not now they haul them all in with their own cars or buses, you know. But when they used to come there their all wagons and tents, you know. All the valley down here where I used to live and that's (inaudible) pretty well every summer. There's always tents there and then most of the time my grandfather knew because he was working for the Indian School there. He used to come home (inaudible).

Sharon: That was the Indians that used to camp there?

Joe: Yes.

Sharon: What did they come for to hunt, or to pick berries?

Joe: Oh they were down to come and see their children or they used to come down and pick choke cherries, there would be a lot of choke cherries.

Sharon: And that would be when the children were out of school?

Joe: Well even though when they were in school.

Sharon: That was the boarding school you're talking about?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: When you went to school what language did you have to take at school?

Joe: English.

Sharon: Yeah, were you allowed to speak Cree or French?

Joe: Well if we had a chance we'd talk to one another.

Sharon: But like in the classroom you weren't allowed to?

Joe: No.

Sharon: Who taught you?

Joe: There was a nun, I forget her name.

Sharon: Was it the school, the school run by the church?

Joe: No, by the nuns, black nuns.

Sharon: Were they very strict?

Joe: Oh your not kidding. You don't cross with her you get a crack in the knuckles.

Sharon: With a strap, a ruler?

Joe: Oh they had a little strap there.

Sharon: Did you ever get the strap?

Joe: Oh couple of times, get into a fight. (laughs)

Sharon: What role did religion play in your life?

Joe: Catholic, Roman Catholic.

Sharon: Were you a strong Catholic?

Joe: I still am. So my old folks were.

Sharon: Did they attend the church regularly?

Joe: Yes.

Sharon: Did the priest or the father have a lot of influence in Lebret?

Joe: Well, they had lots of influence with me anyways, but I know them good, you know. They always had my grandparents and stuff.

Sharon: So they listened like if the father came and told them?

Joe: Oh sure they would yes.

Sharon: They listened to him. Do you think it's still, like the church do you still think it still plays a major role here in Lebret in the community?

Joe: Not now, oh heck the last twenty years has changed a lot the way that...

Sharon: Has church attendance gone done?

Joe: Yes. And I think even down in Lebret here there's only about five or six families that's about it.

Sharon: So that mean there's not that many people that even know the father very well.

Joe: No not now.

Sharon: How long ago did it change from (inaudible)?

Joe: About four, five years now. Oh it's a big difference



going to church now and they just say it English and I used to like listening to Latin, you know.

Sharon: Did you know any Metis people who felt it was necessary to hide that they were part Indian? Yeah well try to hide their background and wanted to be, tried to be white?

Joe: No.

Sharon: That was recently? That like no others in the earlier years like when you were younger? Did the Metis people keep to themselves or did they mix with the whites and the Indians?

Joe: All the ones I know around here that we got now they all mixed up.

Sharon: So they were all paid the same wages? If they got a job it didn't matter if you were Metis, or Indian or white?

Joe: Well, to tell you the truth I don't know what wages they were getting but I know very well they weren't getting very much.

Sharon: That was for everybody?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Wages were very low.

Joe: I know the time I was just working for, when I first started working I was only getting about \$1.50 a day that's all.

Sharon: What about the stores did they treat everybody the same?

Joe: The same as far as I know.

Sharon: Do you know were Metis people encouraged to marry other Metis people or they just do what they wanted to do?

Joe: They marry whoever they want to marry as far as I can see.

Sharon: Did you have friendly relationship with all your neighbors, like with the white farmers around?

Joe: Oh yes, I still have.

Sharon: And you were able to trade and, you know, exchange things with them?

Joe: Oh sure.

Sharon: What about the medical care around here was there a doctor always available?

Joe: Not around here, we always have to go to Balcarres. Years back we had to go to Fort.

Sharon: Is there a hospital around?

Joe: One in Balcarres and there's one in the Fort.

Sharon: Did you have to have money like right then in order to see a doctor or to go to the hospital?

Joe: Well, if you didn't have money you couldn't see a doctor.

Sharon: Was everyone treated the same?

Joe: As far as I know.

Sharon: You got the same treatment as other people?

Joe: Yes.

Sharon: How old were you when World War I started? That would 1914 to 1918.

Joe: I wasn't born.

Sharon: You weren't born. Okay, do you remember the great depression?

Joe: That last one I know quite a bit of it because I was right in it.

Sharon: How old were you at the time?

Joe: Eight years old.

Sharon: So you were at home living with your grandparents then?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Okay, how were they making their living at the time?

Joe: Oh anything they get ahold of.

Sharon: Did your family life change any by the depression, because of the depression?

Joe: Well seems to me even though the depression I think we were better off than we are now, you know, because you get fifty cents you can get fifty cents worth of stuff, now you can't even go down the store and buy a decent chocolate.

Sharon: So fifty cents back then went a long way?

Joe: Went a long ways sure. You had a dollar you could

buy pretty well all you want to eat for, you know, as long as it's not a big family.

Sharon: Did you have to work to help your family?

Joe: Sure.

Sharon: And what kind of work did you do?

Joe: Well in winter time we used to cut cord wood, you know, for the church and (inaudible) give you quarter beef or something, eggs something like that.

Sharon: It was a trade, they didn't give you cash?

Joe: No.

Sharon: So you stayed at home and you would go out and work, you just stayed at home you didn't have to move anywhere to go to work?

Joe: Well, when I started working I had to work, I had to walk up a good mile and a half every day even when I was going to school after school I had to go up and work, you know, to keep... My mother was sick all the time and I had to support her when my dad wasn't supporting her.

Sharon: So you were at that time you were living with your mother, you weren't living with your grandparents?

Joe: Well my mother was living with my grandparents, you see.

Sharon: How did they get, like say they needed groceries and from town from the store how did they get them? Did they buy them, trade for them?

Joe: They used to trade eggs and stuff like that.

Sharon: Right at the store?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: They had a garden did they?

Joe: Yes they had a garden.

Sharon: And your grandmother...

Joe: So that time the way the old folks used to save so much, you know, they'd never, they never waste nothing everything was special to them.

Sharon: So they had a big garden, what would they do with the extra stuff they had from the garden, did they can it or put it somewhere to keep it?

Joe: They had a cellar dug in the ground, you know, put their stuff in.

Sharon: Under the house?

Joe: Yeah under the house.

Sharon: They keep their vegetables in there?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: How did you, did your family receive relief during the depression?

Joe: Oh they got some, yes about eight dollars a month. But my dad had to work out on the road, you know, cutting brush on the road allowances.

Sharon: Oh how long did he have to work for these eight dollars?

Joe: Oh they worked quite a long time. They even have to work a month anyways.

Sharon: So you'd get that eight dollars every month for the whole year?

Joe: No, no. See that's, not the whole year just for the winter, you know.

Sharon: Oh in the summer time you wouldn't get you'd have to go and work?

Joe: You have to look for jobs, go down digging seneca roots for a living.

Sharon: So you'd dig up seneca roots and sell them?

Joe: Yes. They weren't getting very much then maybe about about twenty-five cents a pound. I remember when I used to go out with them and help them dig, everybody going out in July and join the, terrible hot.

Sharon: How many people were living at your grandfather's place at this time?

Joe: Well just me and my grandmother and grandfather, then mother had four girls.

Sharon: And so the eight dollars was for everybody, or did they...

Joe: No that had to do.

Sharon: For everyone? How did you get around?

Joe: Horses.

Sharon: And what did you do in your spare time?

Joe: Play. (laughs) Play cards.

Sharon: And what did the adults do in their spare time if they had any?

Joe: Oh they're always busy working around doing something outside, or looking after their garden in the summertime.

Sharon: Are there still dances and things like that going on?

Joe: Once in awhile there was. Not so much in the summer time dances, but in the winter time they had quite a few dances.

Sharon: Did you hear anything about Saskatchewan Metis Society?

Joe: Right now?

Sharon: No. Well it started in 1933, did you hear...

Joe: That's when that Amyotte was in charge wasn't it?

Sharon: I think it was later than that.

Joe: Well they started up quite awhile back and it seems to me that it kind of washed up and then it started all over again not too long ago, you know.

Sharon: Were you or any people in your family a member of the society?

Joe: No.

Sharon: Did it help you in any way?

Joe: Not that I know of.

Sharon: How old were you when World War II started?

Joe: I was twenty-two when I went into the army.

Sharon: So you joined the army?

Joe: Yes.

Sharon: And you went to fight?

Joe: No. I only went as far as Winnipeg. I was in the army for four and a half years then I got discharged. I was A1 when I went in.

Sharon: Were any other members of your family serving the army?

Joe: I had a lot of cousins.

Sharon: Who went to fight in the army?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: And where were you living at this time?

Joe: I was living down the valley here. I was still with my grandmother then.

Sharon: So they were making their living the same way they were before?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Were there a lot of jobs around here at that time?

Joe: Well when the war broke out there was a lot of jobs.

Sharon: What kind of jobs?

Joe: Oh working for farmers.

Sharon: What did people do during their free time?

Joe: Oh (inaudible) ball games and the Metis had their own ball team down here.

Sharon: Going back to your parents. Do you know if they had any education? Your father did he go to school?

Joe: He went to school a little bit, not much.

Sharon: Do you know up to what grade?

Joe: I think he went to grade four or five, I didn't hear him talk about it.

Sharon: Could he read and write?

Joe: Oh yeah. He could read pretty good.

Sharon: And your mother?

Joe: Mother the same.

Sharon: Could read and write?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: Did you hear any stories of past Metis hunts or other happenings that you could tell us about?

Joe: Not very much.

Sharon: Like say the buffalo hunts.

Joe: They used to go buffalo hunting.

Sharon: Around here? Here in the valley?

Joe: Yeah, just grandfather used to just up on top of the hill there by that bridge, you know, straight up on top the hill there. Dad tells me when he remembers there never used to be any trees around here, and I was talking to quite a few people around here and they've told me the same thing there never know there was any trees. All they had to make fire with is they went around and picking the (inaudible), you know, to make fire.

Sharon: So there was still a lot of buffalo around in those days?

Joe: It seems to me that's what my dad gathered up from his dad that there was a lot of buffalos around here.

Sharon: Did they go hunting by themselves or in a group?

Joe: Oh they used to go in groups.

Sharon: This was in the summertime or in the fall?

Joe: In the fall, in the spring, in the spring of the year he says. Sometimes they get caught in storm. All they had to do was cover up with a buffalo robe and wait till the storm was over.

Sharon: A rain storm, a snow storm, or...

Joe: A snow storm.

Sharon: What kind of weapons did they have?

Joe: He didn't tell me what kind of weapons they had.

Sharon: They were on foot, or on horses, or...

Joe: On horses.

Sharon: How many, do you know, like how much buffalo did they get?

Joe: He's never said to me how many they got. I don't know how many there were in a group. I'm pretty sure there must have been quite a few of them in a group.

Sharon: And if they did get any buffalo what did they do with all the meat?

Joe: Oh they split it up.

Sharon: Amongst all the hunters?

Joe: Yeah.

Sharon: I heard that there used to be a lot of buffalo bones scattered around here, do you know anything about that?

Joe: Yes. My grandfather used to pick them up and haul them to Regina trade them for a quarter beef.

(END OF SIDE A)

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