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INTERVIEWER: BRENDA ARNAULT
INTERPRETER:
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General discussion of their lives

Brenda: April 11, 1984, I'm doing an interview with Maxime Gervais. Can you tell me how... what we were talking from, you went from grade one to, you had to go to school and you had to do grade one to grade four twice, you said. You went from grade one to grade four at St. Louis?

Maxime: No, first at St. Laurent, started at St. Laurent. I left St. Laurent at 12 years old -- I was in grade four -- and I went to St. Louis. I started at St. Louis at grade one again.

Brenda: To grade four?

Maxime: Grade four.

Brenda: Did you finish all... How long did it take you to finish your grade four when you went to St. Louis?

Maxime: Well, four years.

Brenda: It took you four years?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: So you were out of school when you were 16 years old with a grade four then, eh?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: You went to work after that, where did you go to?

Maxime: I went to work in Domremy.

Brenda: Domremy?

Maxime: Domremy, yeah, for a cousin of mine.

Brenda: What kind of work did you do?

Maxime: Farm work.

Brenda: Long hours?

Maxime: Long enough.

Brenda: How was the pay?

Maxime: Oh, \$40 a month.

Brenda: Was that a good money then?

Maxime: Well, that was the best money for around here, or around there.

Brenda: That's the most money I've heard yet that anybody made.

Maxime: Well, that was before the '30s, eh.

Brenda: No, before the '30s.

Maxime: Well, that was before the '30s. After the '30s you couldn't get no job around here.

Brenda: Is that during the '30s and '40s?

Maxime: Between there, yeah.

Brenda: That was because of the depression?

Maxime: No, no crops. Nothing, eh. No, I quit. (inaudible) went away.

Brenda: Did you do any other kind of work?

Maxime: Pardon?

Brenda: Did you do any other kind of work?

Maxime: No, mostly farming. Once in a while you work in the bush. When I was young all my work was done on the farm, farm work from farmer to farmer.

Brenda: You worked in the bush too, you said?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: Cutting cord wood?

Maxime: Cord wood, I cut lots of cord wood. (laughs)

Brenda: That was in the...

Wife: How many years did you do that one job or the other there?

Maxime: I don't remember the years.

Wife: Some do, they do remember that year and that year and that year. No, not me. I remember things but not to tell the year it was that that happened.

Brenda: When you were growing up your parents, your mom and dad, did you do things together? Like go berry picking or...

Maxime: No.

Brenda: How about school, what was it like for you in school?

Maxime: It was okay.

Brenda: Was there ever any predjudism [sic] or discrimination

shown to you?

Maxime: No.

Brenda: You went to school where there were all Metis children mostly?

Maxime: All kinds. In St. Louis there were French people.

Brenda: When you were working was there any discrimination shown to you?

Maxime: No. Because I work pretty near all the places where I knew the people. I was okay.

Brenda: Okay, going back to school, let's go back to the school. What kind of teachers did you have? Were the teachers good to you?

Maxime: Oh yeah.

Brenda: How about Miss Dorval, was she...

Maxime: There were nuns that were there, eh, in St. Louis.

Wife: Miss Dorval, she was good.

Brenda: What did she teach you? Did she teach French, was she an English teacher?

Maxime: No, she was French.

Brenda: She was a French teacher. Did she know the English language?

Maxime: Oh yeah.

Brenda: I'd like to know... maybe you could tell more about Miss Dorval and what it was like going to school. She was your teacher for how many years, six years, four years?

Maxime: Oh, more than that. I don't know. She was there when I started, you know, she was gone when I left. Because I went to Dr... teacher LeClair, too. And Mrs. Caron, yeah, for a while.

Wife: You had four teachers then when you went to school in St. Laurent, four different teachers?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: How was the school, was it a one-room classroom?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: How many students?

Maxime: There wasn't very many, because the ones who had four miles distance, they didn't go to school as soon as the winter started. And the others, well, they didn't go to school for four months, three months, four months.

Wife: The school closed around Christmas and it started only in March after that.

Brenda: So you had school...

Wife: It was two months, exactly two months...

Maxime: You had about four months holidays in a year.

Wife: Well, they didn't have summer holidays at that time. Only winter holidays.

Maxime: Well, we had about four months anyway, holidays.

Wife: No, two months. It closed at around Christmas there and it started in March -- that's two months.

Brenda: And then you had to...

Maxime: Well, January, February, that's two months right there.

Wife: Yeah, well that's it, it started in March.

Brenda: And then you had to go to school all summer?

Maxime: Yeah. That's what she says. I don't know if I went to school all summer.

Wife: I know. I don't know how it was in St. Louis, but it was that in...
Wife: I know. I don't know how it was in St. Louis, but it was that in...

Maxime: Well in St. Louis it was all right. There was only two weeks holidays in Christmas and New Year's.

Wife: And that was it?

Maxime: That was it. School, school, and school.

Wife: Oh yeah, school was closer, the kids were closer to school. And you had only two weeks holidays?

Maxime: Yeah, two weeks in the summer and two weeks in the winter.

Wife: Oh well, that was different. But in St. Laurent you had to go through all summer. Only in the winter -- January

and February -- the school was closed.

Brenda: The coldest months there was no school?

Wife: Yeah. Well the kids were all far from school, you see, and they had to walk all the time.

Brenda: Were you comfortable at school? What did you enjoy about school?

Maxime: Playing outside. (laughs)

Wife: He didn't care if he learned something or not. (laughs)

Brenda: It seems... Did your parents encourage you to do well in school?

Wife: They weren't around. (laughs)

Brenda: The school you went to had one room, classroom. How did they heat it, with wood?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: Politics, were you ever interested in Metis politics? How about the church, did the church ever come around to come and visit your family, to influence you on which way to vote?

Maxime: No.

Brenda: Were you ever involved with the local, were you ever a member of the Metis local?

Maxime: Didn't have time, travelled too much. (laughs)

Maxime: Didn't have time, travelled too much. (laughs)

Brenda: Where did you travel to? You travelled all over, you said, and you worked...

Maxime: Work, working here and there.

Brenda: What places...

Maxime: I worked in Churchill for eleven falls.

Wife: Churchill, Manitoba.

Brenda: Oh, way over there. What years were you up there?

Maxime: I don't know, in '61 I quit, '50 to '61.

Brenda: So you were up there for eleven years?

Maxime: Eleven falls. Eleven falls. Yeah, three months.

Brenda: What kind of work was that?

Maxime: Loading grain. Shipping grain and...

Wife: You ever heard about Churchill at all?

Brenda: Yeah. Yeah they have a big port up there.

Maxime: Yeah, yeah, that's where I worked. I worked in Saint Front for two years.

Brenda: Where's that?

Maxime: East, by Manitoba, close to the lines of Manitoba.

Brenda: What's the name of the town?

Maxime: Saint Front. Never heard of the place? It's pretty hard, it's not even on the map.

Wife: Fourteen miles from Naicam, I think.

Maxime: Fourteen miles the other side of Naicam. Fourteen miles from...

Wife: South of Naicam.

Maxime: East.

Wife: Is it east? I thought it was south.

Maxime: After that, well, I worked there two years and I came back home to St. Laurent. And I got married in them two years there. In '39 I got married and I stayed in the same place there for one year. I came back and I got another job in Quill Lake.

Brenda: That's...

Maxime: South of the place I was working there.

Brenda: Then you got married a second time. What year was that, what year did you get married in?

Maxime: 1957.

Wife: '58.

Maxime: '58 I mean. '57 I lost my first wife and '58 I got married again. Since then, well, I stayed around home here.

Brenda: You've been around Duck Lake area then?

Maxime: Well I had a little farm here by the river there. Raised a few cattle, farmed a little.

Brenda: You had your own land?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: How much land did you have?

Maxime: Two hundred and seventeen acres.

Brenda: And did you buy your own land, you bought it?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: Was it under the Homestead Act or...

Maxime: No.

Brenda: And did you sell your land?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: You weren't pressured or you didn't lose it to taxes, or anything like that?

Maxime: No. I didn't sell it I gave it away.

Wife: He gave it away for the price he got for it.

Maxime: I just sold it for the price of the building I had on it, not even that.

Brenda: Who did you sell it to, the town or to...?

Maxime: A guy that, a guy from Saskatoon has got it now.

Brenda: Did you get a good price for it?

Maxime: I told you I gave it away for nothing. I sold it for \$3,000. After I sold it, they were offering me \$7,000. That's in '72 -- I could get about \$20,000 now.

Brenda: Two hundred and seventeen acres you sold for \$7,000?

Maxime: Three thousand.

Brenda: Three thousand dollars.

Maxime: And I had a barn 24 X 32, house 24 X 24.

Brenda: And then you had cattle there, and...

Maxime: I had cattle, I sold my calves. We moved in the Home here, first year. We were the first one to go in that Home there.

Wife: Pioneer Home. You know that?

Maxime: Yeah, we were the first ones that took this suite in

here.

Brenda: How long did you and your wife live there?

Maxime: In there?

Wife: We were six years there. We got there in '72 and we moved out in '78.

Maxime: Stayed in P.A. for two years. (laughs)

Brenda: Boy, you move around a lot. And you've been here ever since?

Maxime: Been here for three years this spring again.

Brenda: So you were never really involved with Metis politics?

Maxime: No, nothing like that. They knew I didn't have time, I was moving around. (laughs)

Brenda: How about community life, did you go to dances and socials?

Maxime: Who, me?

Brenda: Yeah.

Maxime: Not too much. Not too much. I didn't have time. When you were hired you got to stay where you're working -- not dancing. It's not like today, it's not today, you know.

Brenda: I was thinking about the life, the social life the Metis people had in the community.

Wife: Oh yeah, I suppose, But that's before our time just about. Me anyways. Well, they had some, but the old people before me, some they had social evenings, and singing, and dancing. But not much when I was young.

Maxime: Oh yeah, the old folks remember when they were young there they had fun. Gee whiskers, now there's no fun in dances.

Brenda: Why was that? What's the difference?

Maxime: They don't dance today.

Brenda: Oh yeah, what...

Wife: Just jiving and... rock and roll, that's it.

Maxime: Make noises, twisting around, and the feet stays in the same place. At that time they were dancing they were not just moving the...

Wife: Well, that was the home parties at that time, but now you...

Maxime: More fun than any other you got today.

Brenda: Did your family ever... do you know any Metis songs? Were there Metis songs?

Maxime: No, I never was a singer.

Brenda: How did the old people, your parents and that, do you remember them to use Indian medicine for curing, you know? Do you know if your ancestors or parents or grandparents, if they used to use Indian medicine for curing illnesses? What did they use when they were sick? Did they go to the doctor when they were sick, or were...?

Maxime: If they had the money they go, yeah. The doctors were scarce then.

Brenda: But when they were sick how would they get themselves well? Stay at home and...?

Maxime: People didn't get sick in them years. If they get sick they'll die. (laughs) They were healthier than us.

Brenda: The foods were a lot healthier then?

Maxime: Well sure, now these days we are poisoned before we come to life. Smoking, as they say, now smoking and everything like that, alcohol and everything, and all that stuff they put in the grain and garden, spraying and everything. Oh, there's lots of old people that died because I suppose they didn't have any money to go to the doctors. They're too far, you see...

Wife: Nobody knew what kind of sickness they had.

Maxime: ...what kind of sickness they had and this and that. Tuberculosis, that was the worst in them times.

Brenda: T.B.?

Maxime: T.B., yeah.

Brenda: There was no cure for that, eh?

Wife: Not at that time, no.

Brenda: What did they do with the people when they got sick with T.B.? Did they, were they taken away?

Wife: They send them to sanitoriums after that.

Maxime: That's not very long ago though. Fort Qu'Appelle,

that's the closest place, eh, they had a sanitorium before.

Wife: That's the first one I knew of.

Maxime: After that in Saskatoon, after that in P.A. Wife:
Yeah, that's where they send them to.

Brenda: So when the people had T.B. long ago they were sent away to one of these sanitoriums, the places that you named?

Maxime: Yeah.

Brenda: Do you know of anybody that ever died from T.B.?

Maxime: Well, there's some that died, I guess, there was some that died but...

Wife: They didn't really knew if it was T.B., because some people died, they didn't know, they said, "That's T.B., that's T.B."

Maxime: Take that Martin Benjamin, you knew it was, he went to the sanitorium. (Wife corrects him) No, he never went. Well, he died of T.B.

Wife: Aime went.

Maxime: Aime yeah, he went.

Wife: He was in the sanitorium but not for long, but his brother, oh, that family, that Juneau family there, that was there... his brothers, well, there's one, two...

Maxime: They all died of T.B.

Wife: Three, four, four that I know that died from T.B., and his mom too.

Brenda: Why could they not get, why weren't they sent away?

Maxime: Pardon?

Brenda: Why weren't they sent away to the sanitorium?

Wife: Well there was no sanitorium at that time, that's a long time ago. Well him he went...

Maxime: Oh yeah, they were older than us. They were men already, and we were small then.

Brenda: Do you remember when there were sanitoriums, when they first started being built?

Maxime: No, I don't remember.

Brenda: Do you remember if they were, who the people were that got sick? Were they mostly Indian and Metis that got sick with T.B., or did white people get sick with T.B. too?

Wife: Oh, I don't know. I don't know at all.

Maxime: At that time you didn't travel far enough to know who was in the sanitorium or not, just around.

Wife: Sanitorium was far away, first one was in Qu'Appelle. I know that.

Brenda: But you don't know when that time was?

Maxime: No. That's a long time ago.

Brenda: Would it be before your time?

Wife: No, not before maybe, but I don't remember when it started.

Brenda: Medical attention was hard to get, eh?

Maxime: Yeah.

Wife: You won't learn much from us. (laughs) You have to go some place else to know something, I guess.

(END OF SIDE A)

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