

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: ALBERTINE VERMETTE
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: REGINA,
SASKATCHEWAN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: REGINA,
SASKATCHEWAN
TRIBE/NATION:
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 21, 1982
INTERVIEWER: CONNIE REGNIER
INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
SOURCE: GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE
TAPE NUMBER: #IH-SD.99
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC #190
PAGES: 26
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Connie: I guess today is Mrs. Albertine Vermette and she has
agreed to do an interview with us concerning native history.
We'll start with your schooling. Where did you and your
parents attend school? Where did your parents attend school?

Albertine: My dad went to Shell Lake school.

Connie: And how long did he go to school?

Albertine: Now maybe he went to Mistawasis school. I'm not really certain because they were on, Izbisters lived between Mount Nebo and Leask. And there is a reserve there and that's where they homesteaded. As far as I know.

Connie: Do you know how far he went to school? What grade he made?

Albertine: Oh, about grade four I think. But my mother, I don't really know what kind of schooling she had because I was five when she died and I never did try and find out.

Connie: When did you start school?

Albertine: I started at Sandy Lake.

Connie: Did you finish your grade twelve?

Albertine: No, no, I just went to grade seven.

Connie: I see.

Albertine: But we were moved to, when our mother died, we were all moved to my uncle's because the welfare was going to take us but instead of letting welfare take us, he took us in at Sandy Lake.

Connie: Do you know if your father liked school? Did he ever talk about it?

Albertine: No.

Connie: How about yourself, did you like school or was there any reason...?

Albertine: No, not too much, I didn't care for it too much.

Connie: Was there any reason why you didn't like it, were you handled poorly or...?

Albertine: No, I just didn't like it because I never, ever missed.

Connie: You just didn't feel it was something important for you.

Albertine: Well, I knew we had to go. We always had to do as we were told. And we just had to go, that's all there was to it. You never even thought about missing. But I knew if I got sick that I wouldn't have to go and I never did get sick. (laughs)

Connie: Did your parents speak another language? Did your mother speak English or did your father speak English?

Albertine:Yeah, they talked to me in Cree.

Connie: Your mother spoke Cree as well?

Albertine:And my dad does too, yeah.

Connie: What about yourself?

Albertine:Yeah, I can speak it but I can't read it.

Connie: Oh, I see. When did you learn to speak English or were you raised up with both, right from when you were young?

Albertine:I was talking English when I went to the reserve and I had to learn Cree there because I went to school there.

Connie: At Sandy Lake, right.

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: What was your parent's native language? Did they speak Cree mainly and then English or English mainly?

Albertine:I think they spoke English.

Connie: So Cree was a second language for them?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: I see. Okay. We'll talk a bit about work history now then. What did your parents do for a living? What did your father...?

Albertine:My father trapped. That's all that I remember. He used to go out hunting and he brought meat back and he'd hunt for mink and for linx, I think. And otters and anything, any kind of a fur that was valuable to sell.

Connie: And what about in the off season, what did he do, any odd jobs, labor work or anything like that for farms or anything like that?

Albertine:I think so. I think he used to go and pick stones and pick rocks and...

Connie: Brush cutting.

Albertine:Brush cutting, like, he had horses. He always had horses and a stoneboat and a wagon. That's all I remember anyway.

Connie: Did he do any threshing or anything like that?

Albertine:Well, he did after our mother died. Now, he used to overhaul all the machinery in the wintertime for my uncle

because he had a big farm on the reserve. And all the equipment like the threshing machine and...

Connie: This is your uncle's farm?

Albertine:Yeah, Uncle Adam's farm. All that stuff was overhauled in the wintertime. That was my dad's job.

Connie: So he hunted mostly in the spring and in the fall then?

Albertine:In, I'd say, yeah, I suppose. From what I remember. But I know he used to go out hunting and we were left alone.

Connie: For quite a long time?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: For weeks at a time?

Albertine:Yeah, for months.

Connie: Months? What work and wages were available to him? Like, you said he did odd jobs, what kind of wages did they make, do you know?

Albertine:I don't think they made too much. I think he used to get...

Connie: As much for trapping as he did for everything else?

Albertine:He used to get flour and stuff like that as payment.

Connie: Where did your family live to do their work? Like, if your father was out on the trapline, did he have camps?

Albertine:No, he just went out trapping by himself. I think he used to go out trapping with the Indians at Whitefish. That's out by (name) and those places.

Connie: Yeah. And the rest of the family stayed in Sandy Lake?

Albertine:No, we lived at Camp Lake.

Connie: Camp Lake.

Albertine:That's where our family was. It's just on the outskirts of Sandy Lake Reserve.

Connie: I see.

Albertine:But we were all born on the reserve because my grandmother was the nurse, you know, like the midwife, eh.

Connie: Okay. We'll talk a little bit about social life.

How and where did your parents meet, do you know?

Albertine:Pardon?

Connie: How and where did your parents meet, do you know?
Did they ever talk about where they first met?

Albertine:My dad said that they met at my uncle's. You see, my uncle and my mother were brother and sister and my dad and my uncle's wife, Auntie Maggie, well they were brother and sister too, you see.

Connie: I see.

Albertine:And they eloped to Prince Albert and got married at St. Alvin's.

Connie: How large was the family unit when you were a child?
Was it just your family with the parents and the children or did you ever have any relatives in the family?

Albertine:No. When we, we had one house with one, well it must have been a small house. I always used to think it was so big. But we just had two rooms.

Connie: And that was for how many people?

Albertine:Eight.

Connie: Did you ever have the old folks in the community, ever lived with the children? Like, a lot of times now when the old folks get too old to look after themselves, the young people usually send them to an old folks home or else they take them in in their own home. Did that ever happen your community? Or were the old folks left pretty much to live their lives as they chose?

Albertine:No, they pretty well were like, on the reserve is what I'm most familiar with from long ago. Everybody was grown up when I, you know, they used to look after their old folks. Some day they stayed with their son or, like, my grandmother, they looked after her right until she -- there was never no question about putting them in homes.

Connie: Another person that we talked to said that they never, they never considered taking the old folks into their own home because the old folks would live their own lives. They'd live wherever they started life, they'd finish there. They would be self sufficient right till the end.

Albertine:Well, this wasn't the case, like, not from, ever since I can remember my grandmother, someone was looking after her. And my dad's mother too. They were always living with one of their children.

Connie: Okay, that's good. What kind of songs or dances or games did you take part in as a child or did your parents take

part in? Were there any particular dances or songs that you can remember? Like, living that close to the reserve, maybe, did you go to powwows every once in a while?

Albertine:No, we used to have dances.

Connie: You used to have dances. What kind of dances, jigs, reels, that sort of thing?

Albertine:Yeah, jigs and reels and Dropsy Brandy and stuff like that, they used to dance.

Connie: What's a Dropsy Brandy? I know what a jig and I know what a reel is but that's a new one.

Albertine:Well, they go up and down, you go up and down like that with your partner, they form two lines. Then you go up each couple takes turns. But I kind of forget, I used to watch my dad dancing, you know.

Connie: What about the jiggling steps, was there a certain pattern that a family would adapt or did everybody just kind of do their own thing when they did the jig? I've tried that a little bit myself but I just make it up as I go along. Is that kind of the way people did it? They'd make it up as they go along or was there kind of a pattern that they'd follow?

Albertine:No, I think there's a certain way to dance it. Like, you know, just depends how, the Red River Jig, well that tune was never ever changed as long as I can remember. You know, it's still the same way.

Connie: Right.

Albertine:And I said every time that tune changes, well, there's a certain way to dance, eh. At least that's what they said but I never ever knew how to do it.

Connie: You don't remember any little games or songs in particular that your parents might have taught you?

Albertine:No.

Connie: Like, string games or something like that.

Albertine:You mean those ones playing with your hands?

Connie: Yeah.

Albertine:We used to do that. Yeah. Just got a string off of the flour sacks to play with. We used to (inaudible) that I remember. We never had any books or anything.

Connie: What about for toys when you were a kid, do you remember homemade toys or were they just not, not really thought of? Did your parents make little carved toys or anything like that?

Albertine:No, well, whistles, outside of whistles, you know those wooden whistles.

Connie: Yeah, I can remember making some of those. Who provided the entertainment, like, when you said you had dances, who supplied the food and the music?

Albertine:Well, you never, ever ate. I don't remember eating at the dance, you know. But they didn't drink either. You know, like they used to dance just like that.

Connie: Just for the dance, eh?

Albertine:Yeah. There was always someone that just all he had was a guitar and a violin, yeah.

Connie: Do you remember any names in particular that, you know, that played dances regularly? Regular music makers?

Albertine:Well, old Andrew Ahenakew used to play for all the dances that I went to and of course that's on the reserve, that's all I know is what is on the reserve. That's where I was brought up.

Connie: Okay.

Albertine:And anybody that come and asked us to dance, we didn't dare say no. I don't care how he looked. (laughs)

Connie: Did, how old were you when you started going to dances? Like, I talked to one person yesterday and they said that you had to go with your parents till you were about sixteen, seventeen and then after that you had to ask permission from your parents before you could go out on your own. Do you remember any of that?

Albertine:Well, I never lived there that long. I stayed until I was twelve but I had to go. I was still going with my aunt, you know. My uncle never went to dances because he wasn't all that healthy.

Connie: Do you remember anything like that about your parents? Did they have certain rules for courtship or for going to dances or anything like that that were of particular interest?

Albertine:Well, I don't think, I don't think our, my sisters were ever allowed to go anyplace. Like, you know, we had an older brother and I remember him, like, he, if Ole and them were allowed to go, he had to be along. Now, he was the watchman but I don't remember any of that. Like I said, after I got off the reserve, I was by myself and I had myself to answer for, whether he went or not I could go whenever I felt like it, you know.

Connie: Do you know if your parents were affected much by

prejudism? Kind of a heavy word there.

Albertine:No, I don't think so. You know.

Connie: Everybody was pretty much in the same boat.

Albertine:Yeah. And they never went all over, not the way it is now. You know.

Connie: It was mostly the native community with everybody.

Albertine:Yeah (someone knocks on the door), come in!

(Break in tape)

Connie: We'll talk a bit about religion now. How much influence did the church have on your family or your parents?

Albertine:An awful lot. I remember going, that's all I remember about my mother is that we had to go to church every Sunday, regardless.

Connie: What church?

Albertine:At St. Mark's I think in Sandy Lake.

Connie: Do you know what religion it was?

Albertine:Yeah, Anglican.

Connie: Anglican.

Albertine:It was an English church they used to call it. And they always had a minister that was English. It was never anybody from the reserve. Although Kevin Ahenakew was an ordained minister you know, but very seldom he used to come to the reserve.

Connie: So that church was sort of something that you were forced to go to again, like school? Or was it voluntary?

Albertine:No, no, no, it's quite, I didn't mind it because I liked singing, you know. I always got to sing and that's the only tunes that I knew and I knew all the words, you know, because you do it so much, eh.

Connie: How did the church laws compare to today's? Were they a lot firmer, stricter? Or do you remember any of the particular laws?

Albertine:No, I don't think so. I think people just don't listen, you know, like as much, eh. Like, long ago there wasn't that much to occupy your time for one thing. And the, they used to do things like on the reserve, like they'd all get together. You wouldn't clean the graveyard, nobody ever, they all did it together. You'd have a big meal later, stay there

all day and weed the graves, like, and all that, you know.

Connie: Do you remember your parents going to any shrines or retreats?

Albertine:No.

Connie: Never did those eh?

Albertine:No.

Connie: How did your parents or your community celebrate weddings, Christmas or special occasions like that? Was there any special big feasts or preparations?

Albertine:Yeah, for weddings. Used to drive around all over and we'd decorate with, decorate your horses in the wintertime. And they all had bells on and we used to drive a certain route that was taken when somebody got married. Then we went to the, the girls family, parents and then you had a big feast there and then you always had a dance at the hall.

Connie: So the daughter's parents covered most of the costs for the wedding?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: Did the community put in a lot of effort towards the wedding as well?

Albertine:No. You always went and ate for nothing. Like, there was never, there was no charge like, and I don't know if they even ever questioned it.

Connie: Their relatives wouldn't bring food to help pay for, you know, for help for the...?

Albertine:Not as far as I know. Now maybe they did, maybe they did but I remember when my brother got married. That's what they did and I don't remember anyone hauling food, like, you know, like you say.

Connie: Do you remember any special celebrations for Christmas?

Albertine:Oh yeah, we used to have a big celebration for Christmas time. Christmas concert and a great, huge tree. It went right up the ceiling. All decorated and those dolls. One year I won a doll because we used to have little concerts.

Connie: What kind of a doll, porcelain?

Albertine:Just the face and the arms. And nobody ever had anything like that in them days.

Connie: Was it china, porcelain or was it wooden or...?

Albertine:I think it was porcelain really. It was hard, eh. But the body was all stuffed and me and my brother, we sang 'Allouette' and we won first prize and that's what I got was that doll.

Connie: There was probably a big feast again at Christmas time?

Albertine:Yeah, well, they had candies and, like, even the adults got stuff, you know, off the Christmas tree.

Connie: Was there a big church service before, like a midnight mass or anything like that?

Albertine:No. You see, they only had that English church there. As far as I can remember on that reserve. No matter where we lived, we went to church there.

Connie: I see. And it wasn't a custom for them to make any special mass for Christmas at all?

Albertine:I don't remember going to church, you mean at night eh?

Connie: Yeah, midnight mass.

Albertine:I don't remember. Always on Christmas Day like, we went to church but I don't remember going at night.

Connie: So you'd go afternoon Christmas Day?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: And then have dinner after mass?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: I see. Okay. Do you remember any other special occasions during the year? You know, that were celebrated every year? Thanksgiving harvest or something like that?

Albertine:Easter.

Connie: Easter.

Albertine:Easter. And Good Friday and, you know.

Connie: Then again it was just a big feast.

Albertine:And Good Friday was, kind of, you were fasting eh. Like, you didn't really fast but you were supposed to, how can I say that, you were supposed to be really concentrate on the church, the Lord like. You weren't supposed to be celebrating anything. Until Easter and then you went to church to do that first before you did anything else.

Connie: And then at Easter, you'd have an Easter dinner, big feast again?

Albertine:Yeah. Oh, that place used to be so full. I just used to get sick of washing dishes because we had to wash three places. That's true! We had a great big long table right from here to there, I guess, and they used to seat three times and we had to wash dishes for all of them. We always thought it was lots of work but now I know that.

Connie: When you were young you did dishes for the church?

Albertine:Yeah, no at home! This was at my uncle's place.

Connie: At home? Oh, I see, I see, yes.

Albertine:On Christmas or anything like that, we always got, that house was always full.

Connie: And full of dishes.

Albertine:(laughs) That's all I remember is the dishes.
(laughs)

Connie: Okay, let's talk a little bit about food and clothing. Do you remember any special foods that your father would bring home? Like, how did most of the food come home? Mostly from his hunting? Well, you mentioned also that he traded sometimes for, or he'd work sometimes for a farmer for flour.

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: What kind of meat did he bring home when he was hunting?

Albertine:Mostly wild meat. Yeah.

Connie: Deer, rabbit.

Albertine:Yeah, deer and rabbit and gophers, I think. Yes, I remember eating gopher.

Connie: Muskrat?

Albertine:Mustkrat.

Connie: Beaver.

Albertine:I ate beaver but I didn't like it. And bear meat. Now there was a gray squirrel that used to always be in the fields, in the wheat fields because he always knew where to go and track you.

Connie: That's ground squirrel?

Albertine:A gray squirrel, like, he was kind of silvery. He

had a nice tail.

Connie: Was it a ground squirrel?

Albertine: Yeah. That's, we used to eat that a lot because they were quite plentiful.

Connie: Was there any kind of a store nearby where you could get staples, like sugar and flour and...?

Albertine: Shell Lake. Shell Lake and...

Connie: How often would you go out and get food from there?

Albertine: Well, we never went. Whatever my dad bought or...

Connie: When he took his furs in more or less, then he'd bring back food.

Albertine: That's the only time that we ever went to town for anything.

Connie: What about for the special feasts like Christmas and weddings? Where did the food come from for that? Was it mostly saved up from the hunt and fur saved?

Albertine: Well, those feasts and weddings that I'm talking about, that's on the reserve. My, anything that went on there, we were never short of anything to eat on the reserve. My uncle's farm because he had everything. He even had a car.

Connie: Then say he'd have cattle and...?

Albertine: Oh yes. He had all kinds of cattle. We used to milk twenty-three cows in the morning and at night.

Connie: This was after you were twelve?

Albertine: No, no, this, I went there when I was five.

Connie: I see.

Albertine: Now, I went to school there naturally on the reserve until they sent me to Onion Lake School. That was a residential school. Me and my sister went there for two years but I never did go back to the reserve since.

Connie: Do you remember any special ways that the food was prepared or any special way that clothing was made or prepared?

Albertine: Well, my mother used to sew all our clothes out of mostly flour sack and she made all my dad's shirts, I know that. And she used to make his overalls too.

Connie: Where did she get the material for that?

Albertine:But I don't remember what, you know, there's that striped material? Did you ever see it in overalls? In those bib overalls?

Connie: Railroad stripes. Black and white. So your father would probably bring that home with him when he traded his furs maybe?

Albertine:Yeah, that kind. Oh yes, that come from a store, yeah.

Connie: Okay. I guess we covered all the special foods. Do you remember any shortages of food when you were young or with your parents?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: Do you remember what time? Like, why there was a shortage?

Albertine:Well, we just didn't have it. I remember that time when we never used to have anything to eat on, when my mother first died there. And we didn't have any flour or anything to make bannock.

Connie: Was your mother, was your father at home when your mother died?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: I see. Okay, let's talk a little bit about medical care. Was there a doctor anywhere near your community or near your parents?

Albertine:No, not that I remember.

Connie: Who got medicine for the people? Who looked after the medicine for the people?

Albertine:I think Indian Affairs had a doctor, like, you know. But we, our doctor was our grandmother. You know, we never went to a doctor or anything for, I used to have sore eyes, really a lot of trouble with my eyes. In fact, I felt I would go blind. But she used to put stuff in my eyes.

Connie: What kind of medicines did she make up and how did she make them up?

Albertine:Mostly out of roots. I don't know. I don't know.

Connie: Do you know what kind of roots? Seneca root and that?

Albertine:The only one I remember mostly is Bluestone. Seems to me she used Bluestone for almost everything. That's when

she was mixing.

Connie: How would she prepare it? She'd make a...?

Albertine:She'd make a paste. She'd make a paste and she'd put it on top of my eyes, eh. And then I'd just rest for a little while and then she'd wipe them enough so's I could look out, see, like, you know, manage without burning, eh.

Connie: Was there any other special people in your community that would help out with medical? You mentioned your grandmother. She also helped the rest of the members of the community or more or less just your family?

Albertine:No, just her grandchildren. Like, mostly.

Connie: So most doctored their own.

Albertine:Everybody seemed to have their own someone that looked after them, like, you know. You mean a midwife don't you, or something like that?

Connie: Yeah. Sometimes there was a midwife that would help other people in the community and mostly it was just the grandmother would help all her children?

Albertine:Yeah.

Connie: I see. Okay, let's talk a little bit about the Depression years in particular. What kind of jobs do you remember were available. Like, you were probably still quite young when the first part of the Depression, what sorts of things do you remember about it? Can you remember any particular jobs or work that was available?

Albertine:No. I don't think so. Like you mean on, what my dad did and that?

Connie: Yeah. Or did he just keep the same work that he was doing?

Albertine:I don't think he hardly ever worked really. Like, he used to go out hunting all the time.

Connie: I see.

Albertine:And he'd go in the wintertime and come back in the spring.

Connie: During the Depression years was there, were you ever really short of food or clothing or anything like that?

Albertine:No. I wasn't, not when we were, when, like what year would that be now?

Connie: The '30s.

Albertine:The '30s. See, I was born in '29.

Connie: So you were still quite young.

Albertine:So I'd be about, 1936 you're talking about, eh?

Connie: Yeah.

Albertine:See, all those times I was on the reserve. But I said there was no Depression there. Not, we always had lots to

eat because, and a big house and I had my own room and everything. Like, and we, you know, we was quite, my uncle was quite well to do. If he was living today, he'd have been a millionaire. That's true. And they all worked. He always had everybody working and when we milked cows and took our milk and separated it, the Indian ladies used to come and get the skimmed milk. Brought their milk cans every night and he'd give them milk in them.

Connie: Would they work for that then?

Albertine:No, not the women as far as I know. They used to come and get that and he used to give them a lot of potatoes and stuff too. He had his own garden too.

Connie: So he helped out the other people a lot.

Albertine:Yeah, he helped out the other people. Now I know that he was really generous. You know.

Connie: Okay, just for a second on politics and leaders. How active was your community? How politically active was it when you were a child? Like, your parents, were your parents involved in politics in any way?

Albertine:No. I don't think so.

Connie: You don't remember of any political leaders that your parents looked up to or that they completely disliked?

Albertine:No, I don't.

Connie: They didn't talk about the government at all?

Albertine:No, not too much.

Connie: Okay, do you remember any stories about native leaders or experiences about native leaders? Maybe when you were growing up, did you ever hear any stories about, say, Riel or Dumont or Poundmaker or Almighty Grace?

Albertine:Maybe Poundmaker. Because Poundmaker used to, one of the Poundmakers stayed with Uncle Adam. But he never used to say much. You know. If he lived there, he lived there for

nothing too. Just like all the rest of us. (laughs)

Connie: Okay...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

NOTE: Although there is documentation for Side B on this tape, the tape in the collection is blank on this side.

(END OF INTERVIEW)