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SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN  
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INTERVIEWER: VICTORIA ROSE RACETTE  
INTERPRETER:  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of his life

Victoria: March 15, 1984. Subject: Fred Racette, Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan. Where were you born, Fred?

Fred: Dundurn.

Victoria: And how long did you live at Dundurn?

Fred: Oh, about a month, month or so, then moved to Battleford. And I was baptized in Battleford about a month after.

Victoria: What kind of houses did you live in when you were young?

Fred: Log house, mud house.

Victoria: Did they have electricty, running water?

Fred: No. Nothing at all.

Victoria: What did you use for heating?

Fred: Wood heaters.

Victoria: And what was your, did you have flooring in your house?

Fred: No.

Victoria: What did you have, just ground, on the ground?

Fred: Ground. Yeah.

Victoria: What kind of furniture did you have?

Fred: Homemade furniture. Dead... furniture, like made out of poplar.

Victoria: Do you know if you had owned your own house or your own land?

Fred: No, the old man had a quarter.

Victoria: That would be your dad?

Fred: No, grandfather.

Victoria: Your grandfather.

Fred: Yeah that's where I lived with...

Victoria: When did you live with your grandfather? How old were you when you lived with your grandpa?

Fred: Four years old, I guess. Yeah, my mother died in... when I was 3 years old, then my old grandfather took me and raised me till I was about 26 years old.

Victoria: Was your grandma alive at this time?

Fred: Yeah, they wereboth alive.

Victoria: What was your grandfather's name?

Fred: Grandfather was (name) Letendre

Victoria: Your grandma, what was her name?

Fred: Melanie Letendre.

Victoria: And that was in Fort Battleford, old Battleford?

Fred: Yeah, old Battleford.

Victoria: Were you right in town? Was there many neighbors around?

Fred: No, we lived out of town and there was hardly no neighbors around.

Victoria: The ones that... how far was the nearest neighbor away?

Fred: Oh, about two miles.

Victoria: Were they white people or were they Metis?

Fred: Yeah, they were Metis.

Victoria: Do you remember what their names were?

Fred: No, I don't.

Victoria: When you were growing up did you have any brothers and sisters?

Fred: Well, I had a younger brother but he died when he was 2 years old, a year older, I mean a year younger than I am.

Victoria: What kind of responsibility did your grandfather give you, like did you have jobs to do when you were young, as a kid? Did your grandpa give you certain work that you had to do?

Fred: No, just do the chores and wood, cutting wood and haul it in the house.

Victoria: Well, was this a sad or a happy time for you, when you were growing up?

Fred: Well, I guess I call it happy time.

Victoria: Did you ever do special things together, you know, like did you ever go fishing, or camping, or hunting, berry picking?

Fred: Oh yeah, we done a lot of berry picking, hauling wood for the winter.

Victoria: And how old were you when you left your grandma and grandpa's?

Fred: I was about 27, I guess.

Victoria: How long did they, how old was he when he died?

Fred: Oh, the old lady died when she was 102, and the old man died when he was about 101.

Victoria: Did he ever tell you stories, you know, like any kind of old stories about things he used to do when he was young, or about Metis people, or the breeds -- they used to call them breeds then?

Fred: Yeah, he used to tell me stories about when he was a scout for Gabriel Dumont, riding to Frog Lake where they fought.

Victoria: Frog Lake, where was that at?

Fred: Alberta. And then they moved down to Batoche over here where the fight ended.

Victoria: What kind of stories did he tell you about what happened at Batoche, do you remember any of them?

Fred: No, not that much. Forgot. He told me.

Victoria: What about... Where did they live out there?

Fred: In camps. In the summertime and then in the winter-time they were living in cabins, I guess, log houses.

Victoria: Where was your grandmother at this time? Was he married then?

Fred: Yeah, she was in old Battleford.

Victoria: Did he have, was there anybody else in his family that was in the Rebellion?

Fred: Not that I know.

Victoria: Did your grandmother do any tanning hides or do any beadwork at all that you remember?

Fred: Oh yeah, she done moccasins and then she used to tan deer skins.

Victoria: Did you ever watch her do that?

Fred: Well, once in a while.

Victoria: Do you know how to do it?

Fred: Oh, I got an idea.

Victoria: What about any traditional Metis clothing? Do you

know if they wore any of the... dressed like the Metis people did, you know, like with sashes?

Fred: Well, the old lady used to wear a black long dress. And the old man used to have a kind of a reddish-yellow and red belt which you tie on the side.

Victoria: What about moccasins, did they wear moccasins of any kind?

Fred: Yeah, the old man used to wear Indian moccasins.

Victoria: Do you remember if they ever sang any special songs, special type of songs about Metis people or any Indian songs, or anything like that?

Fred: No. Not that I know.

Victoria: Did anyone in your family play fiddle?

Fred: Yeah, my dad did.

Victoria: How about you?

Fred: Yeah, I learned as the years went by.

Victoria: Do you know how to jig? Was there anybody in your family that did any jigging, step dancing?

Fred: Yeah, my dad. He used to do 52 steps, while I can only do one.

Victoria: What about the Metis people in the community, did they get together, you know, for any special things?

Fred: Yeah, Christmas and New Year's.

Victoria: What did they do at these times?

Fred: Well, they just sit and drink. And then later on in the night they dance quadrilles and all that.

Victoria: Did they have lots of food, did they put food out?

Fred: Oh yes. Christmas cake, and pemmican, and all that. Bannock.

Victoria: What kind of language did they speak in the home while you were growing up?

Fred: Oh, Cree mixed with French.

Victoria: Do you know, did your grandparents refer to themselves as being Metis, or, you know, did they just not talk about it at all?

Fred: Oh yeah, they figured they were Metis.

Victoria: What about the people in the community that you knew of, did they talk about being a breed, or did they just not talk about it?

Fred: Oh yeah, they talked about it. They were breeds and...

Victoria: Did you know what you were when you were growing up?

Fred: Oh yeah. I know I was a half-breed.

Victoria: Did you know of anybody else, you know, when you were growing up, that lived in your community, did anybody have any steady jobs?

Fred: No, just part-time work.

Victoria: Well, what type of work did your relatives do? Do you remember if any of them had any steady jobs?

Fred: Well, some of them they cut cord wood, dollar a cord they would get, or 50 cents a cord.

Victoria: Did your grandfather do anything, you know, to bring in money, any other kind of work to help out at home?

Fred: Well, just digging seneca root, cutting wood.

Victoria: Where did he dig the seneca root at?

Fred: Well, along the bushes, prairies.

Victoria: Was that right in Battleford?

Fred: No, out of Battleford, maybe 20 miles out.

Victoria: And was it good pay for the seneca roots, did they pay good?

Fred: Oh 25 cents green, and 50 cents and 75 cents dry.

Victoria: How did they dry them?

Fred: In the sun, spread a blanket.

Victoria: And was there anything else that he done?

Fred: No. Not that I know.

Victoria: Did your grandparents get along with the white people in your community?

Fred: Oh yes, they got along pretty good.

Victoria: Was there very many white people around where you lived?

Fred: Not too many. A few.

Victoria: What was the first job you ever had?

Fred: My first job? Used to work as a drayman in Leask.

Victoria: And what was that doing? What is a drayman?

Fred: Well, you shovel coal and you haul groceries from the station to the stores. Haul the beer kegs to the stores, I mean to the hotel. Then look after the barn.

Victoria: What...

Fred: Like a livery barn.

Victoria: What is a livery barn? What do they do?

Fred: Well, they keep horses in the wintertime. When the farmers, they come in, they put them in there and we charge them a dollar.

Victoria: And what else did you do?

Fred: Well, just stay there till 12:00 o'clock, 1:00 o'clock.

Victoria: How old were you, about, at this time?

Fred: I was about 22.

Victoria: And what did you do after that? How long did you work at that?

Fred: Seven years.

Victoria: And then what did you do after that?

Fred: And then we used to pull, three of us used to pull the sawing machine around, cut wood, stove length wood, for the people in Leask. Then after about three winters I was getting 10 cents a load.

Victoria: A load, what kind of a load?

Fred: Well, 4 X 4 wood. We saw that for stove length.

Victoria: Was it a good living?

Fred: Well, at least we had something to do.

Victoria: And then, what did you do after that?

Fred: After that I... And then I moved to Saskatoon and I got a job for the city. I worked there about six months, and then I got laid off and then I went to the Quaker Oats.

Victoria: What were you doing, what kind of work did you do for the city?

Fred: City, I was digging trenches for water.

Victoria: And were you, did you get married in this time or were you still single?

Fred: No, no. I was divorced already.

Victoria: What... when did you get married? What year did you get married?

Fred: In '39.

Victoria: How old were you then?

Fred: I was about 28, I guess.

Victoria: Did you have any children at this time?

Fred: No.

Victoria: And then you worked for the city and then what did you do after that?

Fred: And then I joined the army. Spent two years in the army then I got discharged in '44. And I start working at the Quaker Oats. I worked there for about six months till I hurt my back then I was laid off for about a year. Then I...

Victoria: What did you do at the Quaker Oats? What was your job there?

Fred: Stacking flour. We used to call them GRs -- 200 pounds. That's where I hurt my back.

Victoria: What did you do after that?

Fred: Well I was laid off for a year, then I started at the St. Louis Hide and Fur Company. I worked there 25 years.

Victoria: What was your job at St. Louis?

Fred: Well, I was working inside, salting hides.

Victoria: How do you do that?

Fred: Well, you spread the hides, then put salt on them, coarse salt.

Victoria: Well, what do they put salt on them for?

Fred: To cure them.

Victoria: Is that before they tan them?

Fred: No, no, they tan them after.

Victoria: And you worked there for 25 years?

Fred: Twenty-five.

Victoria: And what did you do after that?

Fred: After that I, 1970 I joined the Metropolitan Security, spend there 10 years.

Victoria: What did you have to do there, what type of work was that?

Fred: Well, working in the buildings, looking after the places, schools.

Victoria: Was it sort of police work?

Fred: Yes. Some kind of a police work. And after 10 years then I worked for Sealy's Service.

Victoria: And what were you doing there?

Fred: Janitor, running pumps, gas pumps, and I'm still there.

Victoria: And how old are you now?

Fred: I'm going on 69.

Victoria: What do you remember about school, Fred? What types of things did they teach you in school, do you remember?

Fred: Well, they'd teach us about French, arithmetic, spelling.

Victoria: Where did you go to school at?

Fred: St. Mary's School.

Victoria: And where was that at?

Fred: In Saskatoon.

Victoria: Do you remember how many years you went to school there?

Fred: Oh, I went about four years, I guess.

Victoria: And what was your school like, I mean how many... was it just a big room or was there lots of rooms in it?

Fred: Oh, there's lots of rooms, lot of different, you know, grades.

Victoria: And what were your teachers, were they just teachers, or were they...

Fred: Well, they were nuns and there were men, but our principal, Mr. Feen, was my school teacher.

Victoria: And were you allowed to talk Cree or anything at school?

Fred: No.

Victoria: And did they... just ordinary school work they taught you, or was there something else that they...

Fred: No, no, just ordinary.

Victoria: Did you like going to school?

Fred: Oh, I didn't mind it.

Victoria: Did your parents encourage you to go to school, or your grandparents, did they...

Fred: Oh yeah. But we didn't stay long enough one place to keep on going to school, so I had to quit in grade four.

Victoria: You say that, like when you started school, it was in Saskatoon here?

Fred: Yeah.

Victoria: And when you were small you lived in Fort Battleford. Was this after your grandparents died or...

Fred: No, no, it's... I started in Battleford, I might as well say. I went there one year and then we moved to Saskatoon.

Victoria: Who did you move to Saskatoon with?

Fred: My grandfather.

Victoria: Oh he, did he leave the farm then?

Fred: Yeah, he sold it. And we moved to Saskatoon.

Victoria: And did they, your grandparents, they encouraged you to go to school?

Fred: Oh yeah.

Victoria: Did they teach you, ever teach you anything about Metis or Indian history in the school?

Fred: No.

Victoria: Was there white kids that went to school with you?

Fred: Oh yeah. All mixed.

Victoria: How did they treat you? The white kids, were they...

Fred: Oh, they were all right.

Victoria: Do you think that going to school was a good thing for you? You liked it, you said you didn't mind it, do you think that it was a good thing for you to have been to school?

Fred: Oh yeah.

Victoria: Did the white kids ever call you names because you were a Metis?

Fred: No, it wasn't on account of that. But they used to call me, one guy used to call me names. He used to call me monkey.

Victoria: What did he call you monkey for?

Fred: Well, I don't know, just to get smart, I guess. We used to fight all the time. One guy would have a black eye one day, and the next day I'd give him the same.

Victoria: Were you ever refused a job because you were Metis? Like did they ever...

Fred: No.

Victoria: What about church, did you go to church when you were young? Fred: Yeah. Every Sunday.

Victoria: Where was the church, is it right around close where you lived or where you grew up?

Fred: Oh, might have been a mile out, old Battleford Church.

Victoria: And what did, did your grandparents go to church every Sunday too?

Fred: Oh yeah, every Sunday.

Victoria: Did any of the rest of the Metis people in the community, did they go to church too?

Fred: Oh yeah. Most of them, they live around close and they went.

Victoria: Do you think the church was a really important thing for your grandparents in their life?

Fred: Oh yeah.

Victoria: What about yours, was it really important to you when you were young?

Fred: Oh yeah, them days.

Victoria: Did the priest ever come to your house to visit?

Fred: Yeah.

Victoria: Do you remember anything he talked about while he was there?

Fred: No, he was talking to the old man and the old lady, never heard nothing.

Victoria: Do you think that the church had a big influence on the old people in those days?

Fred: Oh yeah.

Victoria: Do you think it helped Metis people? I mean did, you know, like when they had problems and that, do you think that the church or the priest helped them?

Fred: Oh yeah, priest used to talk to them. Victoria: Did they ever help them in any way besides just, you know, with religious things? Did they ever give them money or help them with any other types of things?

Fred: No. Not if I know anything.

Victoria: Did, was there ever a time when your grandparents stopped going to church, or that you stopped going?

Fred: No, they kept going. The odd time maybe we never went if it was too cold or in the wintertime. But in the summer- time they went every Sunday. We was close to a church.

Victoria: What about when you got older, did you stop going or...

Fred: Yeah, I kind of quit.

Victoria: Was there any special reason for it?

Fred: No.

Victoria: When you were working was there a time when, you know, that you knew or anybody that you knew, like when whites and native people were working together, was there a white person that got paid more while they were doing the same job?

Fred: No, I don't think so, we all got paid the same.

Victoria: Did you ever feel uncomfortable, you know, around white people or, you know, when you're around police or judges or anything like that?

Fred: No.

Victoria: How about the town authorities, did they, were your

family treated, you know, honest and fair if they had to deal with any of the, you know, authorities, like government authorities or anything like that? Like did, well, first I should have asked you, did they ever have any dealings with judges or welfare people or anything like that that that you can remember?

Fred: Not them days anyway.

Victoria: So they really never had any problems with... Have you ever had any problems with, you know, people from the government, or from the welfare, or anything like that, the police.

Fred: No, I had a problem with the welfare.

Victoria: Was it anything that was really important or did you feel that you were discriminated against in any way?

Fred: Well, the time I had a sore back and they told me to go to work, I couldn't work.

Victoria: And why did they tell you you had to go? What did you have to do then when they told you to go to work?

Fred: Then I had to go to the doctor, but still I had a hell of a time to draw welfare. Because I had a big back operation, I couldn't work so finally they helped me out. Took a lot of coaxing.

Victoria: When you moved into the city did you still do some of the things that you, you know... like Leask was a small town and that, and you were with Metis people quite a bit, did things change for you after you moved into the city?

Fred: Well a little bit, yeah.

Victoria: Did you still do some of the same things that you did, you know, like when you were out, did you still have dances or...

Fred: Oh yeah, we went to a lot of dances.

Victoria: Were you still chumming around then with Metis people, or did that change?

Fred: No. Had white people for friends and Indians for friends, half-breeds, French Canadians.

Victoria: What did you, what do you think the Metis community is like in Saskatoon? How would you describe it? Is it all spread out or do they sort of stay in one bunch together?

Fred: Well my concern, I think they are stay in one bunch.

Victoria: What area is, do they have a special area that they stay together in? Well, like is there a part of the, is there one part of the city where most of them stay, or...

Fred: Yeah, I guess the west side, you might as well call it.

Victoria: So that's from Idylwyld up west, eh? It would be the west side of town. Were your grandparents or your parents ever involved in politics?

Fred: No.

Victoria: Did they vote at all?

Fred: Oh yeah, they used to vote for Liberal, and Conservative.

Victoria: Oh, they were more than one party. They were...

Fred: Well, just depends, eh.

Victoria: Do you know if they were involved in any kind of party politics?

Fred: Not that I know of.

Victoria: Do you, what do you think influenced them to vote the way they did, like for the different parties? Why do you think that they voted Liberal sometimes and then Conservatives next time?

Fred: Well, you know how people they talk, eh. They figure one party is better than the other and then kind of coax the old people to vote for their party.

Victoria: Was there somebody coming around visiting, any politicians?

Fred: Yeah, once in a while they come and talk.

Victoria: What did they talk about? Do you remember what they talked about?

Fred: Well, they're going to raise them old age pensions for the old people.

Victoria: Do you know for sure what the old age pension was in those days?

Fred: I think they used to get about \$73 a month.

Victoria: Back in them times? And did the man, just the man or the woman get a pension?

Fred: Well, both of them if they were 70, they weren't gettin' at 65 at that time, it was 70.

Victoria: Well, that was a fair good amount for back in those days.

Fred: See the old lady was getting \$73 and the old man was getting \$73, so that's \$146.

Victoria: Were they living in Saskatoon then?

Fred: No, that was the time we lived in Baljennie.

Victoria: Oh, you lived in Baljennie too, eh?

Fred: Yeah, for a year.

Victoria: Do you know if the church was ever involved in politics? Did you know about it or did your...

Fred: No.

Victoria: What did the Metis people think about politics? Had you ever heard it discussed or did they ever talk about it with you?

Fred: Oh yeah.

Victoria: And do you want to talk about how you voted over the years? Would you say how you voted?

Fred: Well, once in a while I'd vote for Conservative but very often I vote...

Victoria: And you didn't vote the way your grandparents did though, eh? Did you ever take any part in party politics, did you, you know, help them with elections or anything like that, campaign or something like that?

Fred: No.

Victoria: Do you know, did any of your friends ever get involved in it?

Fred: No.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Victoria: Do you think that Metis people voted for the party they figured would do the best for them?

Fred: Yeah, that's what they used to do.

Victoria: Do you remember the old Saskatchewan Metis Society?

Were you ever involved in it or did you ever hear of anybody who was?

Fred: No.

Victoria: You don't recall nothing about that organization at all, eh?

Fred: No.

Victoria: You never heard of the names of Joe LaRocque, or Joe Ross, Tom Major?

Fred: No.

Victoria: Joe McKenzie?

Fred: No, never heard of him.

Victoria: Solomon Pritchard?

Fred: Yeah, I heard of Solomon Pritchard.

Victoria: Do you know where he came from?

Fred: Geez, I don't know if he come from Frog Lake or Battleford.

Victoria: You don't remember what he done or anything, eh?

Fred: No.

Victoria: When you look back, you know, at your life and all the things that happened what do you, how would you consider your life? Was it interesting, or satisfying? Was it a good life?

Fred: Oh yeah, pretty good life.

Victoria: Do you think it was better than your parents' or your grandparents'?

Fred: Oh yes, it's better now. We got television, we got telephone, heat, live in apartments. Not much rent to pay.

Victoria: And what are some of the things that have really mattered the most in your life, like, you know, some of the things in the past? What are some of the most important things that you look back at?

Fred: Important about my life is working. And about my old parents.

Victoria: You enjoyed your work then?

Fred: Yeah. Every job I had I enjoyed it.

Victoria: What would you have changed in your life if... like, if you could live your life all over again was there, is there something you would have changed?

Fred: Go back to school. Start over.

Victoria: And after that would you have lived your life different if you would have had schooling?

Fred: Yeah. I'd try and get a better job.

Victoria: And what kind of a job would you have liked to have had?

Fred: Clerk.

Victoria: What kind of a clerk?

Fred: Store clerk.

Victoria: Manager?

Fred: Manager or something.

Victoria: What about... what do you see in the future for yourself? Are you... do you have enough money to retire on or do you think your life is going to be good from now on out?

Fred: Oh yeah, get raise every month, old age pension, I might as well say every three months. So I enjoy it, retirement.

Victoria: What do you think are native people's biggest problems that live in the city? I mean, what do you think is a problem for them? Would it be not enough schooling or...

Fred: Yeah, I guess they could have more schooling.

Victoria: Is there anything else that a person, you know, could do for them in the city here that is not being done? What do you think it's going to be like for you in the future? Do you think things are going to be better for you in the future or, you know, the same as what they have been?

Fred: I hope so.

Victoria: And what do you think about, you know, the children today? Are they, is it going to be better for them as the years go by, or will things change for them?

Fred: No, I think it's going to be hard for them.

Victoria: Why, in what...

Fred: There will be less work, not enough school.

Victoria: What do you think could be done about it now, like while we're still alive, what do you think would be some of the

things we could do to help better it for them?

Fred: They should go to school all they can.

Victoria: Do you think in the future native people would be better, you know, in the country, or way up in the far north, or do you think that they're going to be better off to be in the cities?

Fred: No, I think, to my knowledge, they'd be better off out in the country. At least they can go hunting, fishing.

Victoria: Were you ever involved in the Metis Society here in Saskatoon?

Fred: For a while.

Victoria: And was there any reason at all that you quit going?

Fred: Well, I was in there for two years and so there were too much... Yeah, they were too much together so...

Victoria: What do you mean by too much together?

Fred: One side, family.

Victoria: You mean just one family, like, involved in the whole thing. Fred: Yeah.

Victoria: And you just, you didn't...

Fred: I just give up.

Victoria: Was there some things that you figured they could have done for the people instead of, you know, all sticking up, this sticking together?

Fred: Well, they could treat all the people the same, eh, but they didn't.

Victoria: Do you think that there is some way that we could change that in this community in that now?

Fred: Break up the families.

Victoria: You think then that people should go and organize and go in there and get ahold of everybody totally different or...

Fred: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Victoria: Okay, Fred, thank you very much for the interview.

Fred: You're welcome.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)