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BELOW.

Brenda: April 17, 1984. I'm doing an interview with Lillian  
Nicolas. Lillian, can you tell me about growing up, what it  
was like growing up in Duck Lake. Maybe we should talk  
about... you were raised by foster parents?

Lillian: By foster parents, foster mother actually, because my  
father foster, my foster father died when I was, well, 6 or 7  
years old, maybe 6 years old. What I remember about him is,  
well, he was very nice really. He was good to me, actually  
better to me than my foster mother was.

Brenda: Oh your foster mother was the one that was...

Lillian: Oh, the strict... You didn't do this and you didn't  
do that.

Brenda: You got heck more often than you got praise?

Lillian: That's for sure. And schools weren't the best either. You know, like, my children have gone to the same school, eh, to Stobart, and that's where I went to school, and it was terrible there. The nuns had it then; now there's no nuns there, eh, it's just...

Brenda: What was it like when the nuns, when the nuns had it?

Lillian: They were terrible, to tell you the truth.

Brenda: Were they physically abusive?

Lillian: They were not physically abusive but I think their tongue lashing was worse than, you know, if they beat you. (laughs) I guess I shouldn't say things like that but it's true, I guess I shouldn't say things like that but it's true, you know. Like you were nothing, eh. You know, regardless how hard you tried, they never praised you. You never did it right. The next one did ten times worse than you did and he got the praise but you didn't, eh, because you were who you were. That's the way I always felt. You know, there was...

Brenda: Were they kind of prejudiced, do you think?

Lillian: Yeah, sure, definitely, very much so. I always...

Brenda: They discriminated against all the children?

Lillian: Sure, like our kind. See, there was no Indians in this school then, eh, it was just Metis. Just Metis people. Just because Beardys never sent their kids there. They were at the residence. See, now today, now the Indian kids are there too from Beardys'. They're all there. They're all together, eh, and at that time, no, there wasn't. There was no Indians there.

Brenda: All Metis children.

Lillian: So it was Metis children. Mind you, there wasn't that many either, you know, but you were picked out. It was unreal.

Oh, it was terrible really when you think about it.

Brenda: What other things... what else... what was it like?

Lillian: Like they made fun of you, eh, the way you dressed, the way you ate, the way you looked, what you said, You couldn't talk the proper French in the first place because you talked the Metis-French, eh, which is not the proper language actually. But that's the only language you knew, so that's the way you spoke, so you were made fun from day one with that.

Brenda: So the French people...

Lillian: And the French kids naturally you could just...

Brenda: ...they wuld laugh too?

Lillian: ...snicker. Aah, it was unreal. You know, like, my children don't feel that way, you know. They feel, well, they're just as good as the next guy and if you don't like it, well, you can go you-know- where.

Brenda: Did you have fun times at school, too?

Lillian: Oh, I guess it wasn't all bad really, you know. You had some pretty good friends, in your, in your kind of people, I would say, not with the white. You didn't really mix with the white kids because you knew how they felt, eh. You took one look at them and you knew that they were, well, you know. You could be as clean as they were and maybe a lot of times cleaner.

Brenda: But they would still look down at you?

Lillian: That's right. I, well, maybe I was just, I was just one of those people that are, you know, black's white and black's black and white's white and that's the way it was.

Brenda: You went there for six years?

Lillian: Yeah. Six terrible years. (laughs) And I had to quit school because there was no money to buy books or there was no money to... you know. That's why I quit, eh. I never had the right books. That was something else again, you know. You never had the right books so you didn't have the book that you were supposed to have, and there were the nuns questioning you how come you didn't have it, and why didn't your mother buy it for you, and...

Brenda: They were aware of how hard times were.

Lillian: Sure they were aware, but they were, you know... I suppose you shouldn't say things like that. They're supposed to be religious people and they were mean, you know, like deep down. They were always out to... I don't know, just to hurt your feelings, really, because they knew. They weren't without knowing, eh. And my foster mother never went to the school. Nowadays you go to the school for interviews and, you know, you meet the teachers. My foster mother never as much as stuck foot in Stobart School in the six years I was there. So they never knew who she was, or what she was like, or anything, eh.

Brenda: How, how long was she your foster mother? From the time you were a baby to...

Lillian: She died when... She died 22 years ago.

Brenda: You weren't with her though, eh?

Lillian: Yeah, I kept her. After I got married she came and stayed with me. I looked after her. Sure, I brought my kids

up and her along with it, because she didn't want to stay alone. She said she was sick and...

Brenda: She was an old lady?

Lillian: Yeah, she was fairly old then. She wasn't really that old when she died. She was only 77, 78 or something, but I kept her at my place, like, we were on the farm then, eh, and I kept her there too.

Brenda: Did she appreciate it?

Lillian: Well, I would imagine so, but then she got so senile the last year that we had to put her in a home. Her mind was completely gone by then.

Brenda: The way she treated you when you were younger, did she get better as she got older?

Lillian: Well, I suppose we tolerated one another then. I was... maybe I wasn't so... I don't know, maybe we got along better. We understood one another better or... I don't know. And then I had kids of my own and then, well, I was more tolerant I would say, maybe, eh.

Brenda: Did she help you with your children?

Lillian: Oh yeah, she did. Yeah.

Brenda: So at the end, in the long run, she did become a really good foster mother? Or she became fairer.

Lillian: Yeah. Like, it was different because I had children of my own and she shared the responsibility, I think. I think by seeing what I did with mine, with my kids, it kind of gave her an idea what she should have done with me, eh. It seems like she was different.

Brenda: She never had any children of her own?

Lillian: No, she never had any children of their own. See, they never... I guess, I don't know who, whether it was her or him that couldn't have children, but they never had any. So she... and they came from, she came from a big family but, you know, you would think that she would have known how to cope with kids. But, like I say, people didn't cope with kids then. You stayed out of the way and you never came to the table -- like my grandchildren today, when they come here they're at the table, "Grandma, we want to eat," and it's this way and that way -- you never did that then. You never went to the table unless you were told to come to the table, you know. And you never swore, or you never talked about God like my kids do today, you know. They talk about religion like, you know, we're talking about those curtains there. Things are so different sometimes I can't believe it.

Brenda: What, what changes do you see? Like your children,

they talk about religion now and something that they never did before. What things do they talk about when they talk about religion?

Lillian: Like they're... they don't believe in the religion like we used to, like we were brought up to believe, you know.

Brenda: Young people today, they question religion more...

Lillian: That's right, definitely.

Brenda: It's not just accepted.

Lillian: No it's not. They question everything today, not only religion but everything. And my children are... oh, some of them are good Catholics, you know, but there's some of them that could be improved, I guess. (laughs)

Brenda: When, when you were growing up were there hard times that your foster...

Lillian: Definitely, very hard. Well, I suppose everybody, the majority of people had a hard time then, eh, and we weren't the exception. Because she was alone, and then she was a widow, eh, and there was just no... nothing. And she was a midwife. That's how she made her living.

Brenda: Your foster mother?

Lillian: Yeah.

Brenda: How old was your foster father when he passed away?

Lillian: About 56.

Brenda: And you were 7 years old?

Lillian: Yeah, about 6 or 7. I wasn't 7 yet because I wasn't going to school.

Brenda: And your foster mother, she spent the rest of her life alone?

Lillian: Yeah.

Brenda: Just you and her.

Lillian: That's why she always used to tell me, eh, that if it hadn't been for me it wouldn't have been so hard for her, because it would have been just her to look after where I was an extra mouth to feed, and I shouldn't have been there, and my dad should have kept me.

Brenda: She didn't let you forget that?

Lillian: No. That's... I think that was the worst part really, always knowing that you were not wanted, eh, not wanted by your own father and not really wanted by your foster

parents. I don't know why they ever took me if that's the way she felt, where I think it had more to do with him than with her. Like, he wanted children so badly, eh.

Brenda: You remember good times with your foster father?

Lillian: Oh yes, I did. Yeah, he was really good to me. You know, I suppose I shouldn't complain. I had, well, I would say three, four years that I remember anyways, eh. Like, you know, by the time you're 3 years old, I suppose, you kind of remember the things that he did. But he was a good man. (laughs)

Brenda: What sort of things? Did he just kind of put you on his lap and...?

Lillian: Yeah, and I used to go with him all the time around the farm. Wherever he was, that's where I was too.

Brenda: And your foster mother didn't mind that?

Lillian: No, she didn't. Oh, they got into arguments with it, I guess, about it. And he used to come to town with the team and wagon, eh, and I used to wait. I'd hear the wagon coming down the road and I'd run up there and go and meet him, and he'd always bring me a bunch of candies, eh; that was the good part. (laughs) Yeah, but she was, well, she was strict, eh. It was like there was no give. It was, you do what you're supposed to do and nothing will be said, but if you don't, look out.

Brenda: That meant your chores?

Lillian: Chores and housework and your homework and everything, you know.

Brenda: Do you regret any of those days, like the hard work and that?

Lillian: That's... I do, I really do. Because, you know, when I look at my own children today and they think -- like, I've got a 19- year-old girl at home here and sometimes I think, you know, that she does so little, eh. But the way I look at it, okay, so she's going to school. She's getting an education, hopefully to do something with her life, eh. So, you always do for her along the way, hoping that it will encourage her to do something with her life, eh. But when you think of your own life and you were 13 years old and you're out there working, you know, like I am today. I'm still doing the same thing, I suppose by choice, but sometimes I think, you know, like, we live just on a pension so things aren't that great either anymore, you know.

Brenda: The hard work that you went through when you were younger, that's helped you through...

Lillian: Oh definitely. You know what hard work is. It's no...

Brenda: Something that your not afraid of.

Lillian: No. No, you're not.

Brenda: Do you find that young people today are afraid of...

Lillian: They are. They are definitely.

Brenda: ...afraid to go out and work and stand out on their own.

Lillian: Yeah.

Brenda: I wonder what causes that. Is it fear because there's so many people out there and not being accepted, or...

Lillian: Well, really I shouldn't say that, like about my own family. They all work, eh. They all work and they work hard. They're all (?). I've got four boys that work in Brick Lane right now and that's hard work, you know.

Brenda: But with other young people, other than your children, like, how do you see the other young people?

Lillian: Oh, the young people today don't want to work unless they're paid big wages, eh, and do as little work as possible, really. You know, it's...

Brenda: Wherever they can make more money than they should be is where you'll find them.

Lillian: Yeah. Yes, that's right. Oh, I guess there's lots of things that aren't right, but...

Brenda: They've really changed since you were a young girl.

Lillian: For sure.

Brenda: I was told by one lady that I had no imagination what it was like. And I imagine that's true, because I do have a hard time imagining what it was like in those days, in the '20 and '30s when times were tough.

Lillian: That's right. Yeah. Like we tell our own kids, eh... like, we have a daughter that's... like Marleen, she's 42 years old and she had it rough. She married young and she had an alcoholic husband and, I mean, she left him, and she had three boys. And we tried to tell her what it was like even when she was born, you know. "Ah," she said, "it couldn't have been that bad." (laughs)

Brenda: But times were, were...

Lillian: Were very... You know, you haven't... People don't have a clue what it was like then.

Brenda: No, I can't, I can't imagine what the land was like.

I can't imagine, you know, what it was like.

Lillian: It was terrible. When we, when my husband came back from the army we bought land, like, where our son lives now. We bought that quarter for \$500, and we paid that at \$52 a month, or at \$50 a month. He got a pension for \$52, so we gave \$50 out of that pension cheque, so that means we only had \$2.

Brenda: How did you, how did you manage?

Lillian: But we had... We milked cows and we had pigs and chickens, but we worked hard, you know.

Brenda: You had a garden too?

Lillian: And a garden, yeah. That's what the kids always tell me, say our garden always looked like the penitentiary garden. (laughs)

Brenda: Big. Great big garden. You had a big family so you had to have a big garden.

Lillian: Yeah, so it had to... Sure. And you know, it meant a lot of hard work, but we made a living, practically from what we had there on the farm, eh, like milk, and butter, and eggs, and cream, and garden, and..

Brenda: Meat.

Lillian: Yeah, we had our own meat and my husband is a great hunter so he went hunting. I used to go with him too.

Brenda: So you didn't lack for food?

Lillian: No, not really, no. There was... like after I got married really it was hard, but then we always had enough. We always managed to have enough food for our family. So we didn't do without but it meant a lot of hard work.

Brenda: And you still own, your husband still owns land?

Lillian: Yeah, he does. One of the boys lives on there now. He bought it from us but we still have two other quarters that we farm a bit. I don't know how much farming he's going to do after he comes home.

Brenda: But it will keep you all going for a long time.

Lillian: Yeah. Well, he has his veteran's pension, eh, so we kind of live on that.

Brenda: What comes to your mind when you think about family life then and now? Do you think families were closer together then than they are today?

Lillian: Well, families that were families, eh, like where there was a father and a mother, I think people were closer. Yes, they were. There wasn't so many distractions as there is

today, eh. People did things together, you know, like not today. One goes this way and the other one goes that way, and there's T.V., and there's videos, and there's... you know. Oh yeah, families were a lot closer then.

Brenda: Did you ever know any family that had just one or two children and that those children (?) back to them. Did you find that those children were more spoiled than the children that came from big families?

Lillian: No I couldn't say that.

Brenda: Everyone was more or less the same because there were less distractions then?

Lillian: Yes. And everybody was poor. Lets just put it that way, eh. Everybody had pretty well basically the same things and not trying to outdo one another.

Brenda: What was the hard part? The hard part? I mean, the food was there. Food was there in those days if a person worked hard enough and if they worked at it every day. But for people that didn't have that, that kind of luck or that kind of hard work, did they, those people, what was hard for them, the money part?

Lillian: Oh, definitely.

Brenda: Getting money?

Lillian: The money and everything, eh, medical attention and, you know, there was nothing. But, for me... Lot of those people weren't trying that hard either. You know, they just, well...

Brenda: They didn't want to work hard. They just didn't want to work?

Lillian: Yeah. That's, that's my impression. Mind you. I suppose, well, some did and some didn't, eh. Like, I know we had neighbours that could have done better, that could have made gardens. Why didn't they, you know? What was stopping them? They could have milked cows, and they could have kept chickens, and they could have had gardens, eh.

Brenda: Same way that your...

Lillian: Sure, you know. And like, my foster mother always made a garden, you know. We always had vegetables. We didn't have too much but there was always something.

Brenda: Little bit of hard work got you what you wanted.

Lillian: Yeah, that's right.

Brenda: When you went to school did they teach you French?

Lillian: Yes. I was in grade seven in French, too.

Brenda: They didn't want you to speak your Metis-French?

Lillian: No, definitely not.

Brenda: They wanted you to speak the real French?

Lillian: The right French, and I suppose that's the way it should have been, you know, but that was a hard habit to break, eh.

Brenda: What, what French do you speak now? Do you still speak your Metis-French?

Lillian: We don't speak French no more. That's the whole problem. Never, not my children, don't speak French, my grandchildren don't understand French, most of them, and my children don't. None of them speak French, not one. You know, like the older ones understand but they never speak it any more and we don't either. Like Archie and I, we never speak French any more.

Brenda: And that resulted from the school where...

Lillian: Yeah, and then from our kids now, eh. They all go to school and they don't want to speak French and most of them don't want to take French in school. They'll take German or Latin or something instead of taking French. So French is just... But like my foster mother spoke more Cree than French actually. She mixed it, eh, like it was... And that's the way I learned French, eh. It was a Cree word and a French word. (laughs)

Brenda: Do you still speak that kind of...

Lillian: Oh yeah, I still, and I understand quite a bit of Cree, I can't really speak it fluently but I understand it.

Brenda: You'd know if somebody was talking about you, eh.

Lillian: Oh, for sure. (laughs)

Brenda: (inaudible) social events? Did you and your husband go to social events?

Lillian: Oh after, yeah sure, after we were married there. Oh, yeah.

Brenda: You were quite young then. You and your husband would go to dances together?

Lillian: Yeah, yeah, house parties.

Brenda: Was that after the War?

Lillian: Well, before the War and after the War. See, he was

gone for five years.

Brenda: What year did your husband leave?

Lillian: In '41 and he came back in '45, '46.

Brenda: And you spent those years by yourself?

Lillian: Yeah.

Brenda: What was it like then?

Lillian: It was terrible.

Brenda: How many children did you have?

Lillian: I was pregnant for my first girl when he left.

Brenda: So you had the one child?

Lillian: So there I was again alone.

Brenda: That's why there's so many years between, there's five years between your first and your second.

Lillian: Yeah. That wasn't very good years then. It was terrible, really.

Brenda: Sad lonely years.

Lillian: That's right. But I had my little girl, eh, and, well, we made the best of it.

Brenda: Did you stay with your foster mother when your husband was gone?

Lillian: Most of the time, yeah. Then I stayed on my own for a while and I stayed with my in-laws.

Brenda: Did you think that your husband wouldn't come back?

Lillian: Oh no.

Brenda: Did you feel that or...

Lillian: No. He was wounded twice, eh, and the last time he wounded, well, then they sent him home. But he was in the hospital here in Canada for two years after.

Brenda: After he came back from the War? And it took two years for him to get well?

Lillian: Yeah. Well, that's what is bothering him now. Oh, he's had maybe 25 operations.

Brenda: Resulting from being wounded.

Lillian: From that, yeah. He was in a cast for I don't know

how long. He had it rough too, I guess. I guess maybe that's why he drank so much too after he came back, eh. Well, the army is, the army is the place for that, eh.

Brenda: A lot of men drank when they came back from the War. That's how my dad started drinking, too, when he came back from the War.

Lillian: Seems like that's all they did there for pastime, eh, is drink, drink, drink. Like he used to drink before he left, mind you, but he never made a habit of it, eh. He drank when he went to a party or something, or if we went to a dance. But after he came back he was really bad. He was really bad, say, ten years ago. But I stuck it out anyways. (laughs)

Brenda: What made him decide to quit? Is it just that he'd had enough and...

Lillian: Well, things were getting pretty rough there for a while, eh, and I had seven kids. I still had seven of them at home and, well, things were getting from bad to worse. And then one of the boys went to Edmonton to work. And he knew what it was like at home, eh; he knew things weren't good there. And he came home on holidays, well, in May and, you know, "Mom," he said, "you should come back to Edmonton with me. Come on," he said, "take the kids and let's go." He said, "It's no good here for you any more." "Oh well," I said, "maybe." You know, I never went anywheres, eh. What was I going to do in a big city like Edmonton, no money and nothing, didn't know how to do anything. So I said to Archie, "Well," I said, "look," I said, "it's about time you quit your drinking." I said, "You know, this isn't going nowhere. It's getting from bad to worse and it's no good for anybody, for you, for me, for the kids." I said, "Why don't you go to A.A.?" I said, "Let's go. Come on." "Okay," he said, "we'll go." So away we went with one of the boys that was home. We went to Rosthern. We went to see the cops that morning and they told him where to go to go see an A.A. personnel, and we went, just like that. And he went to see A.A. and he went to a meeting that night and that was it.

Brenda: Just like that.

Lillian: Just like that.

Brenda: Oh, that is beautiful.

Lillian: Yeah. But, like, he says he did it for himself but I think deep down he had an idea what I had in mind, eh. He knew that I really meant it this time that this is it. You either pick, you pick the bottle or you pick your family.

Brenda: Yeah, I think every man has to have that choice.

Lillian: And he says he didn't. After that, like, he says, "Well, I did it for myself." But it had a motivation anyways, eh, like this business of my leaving. I was just calling his

bluff. I guess he could have called mine too. (laughs) He could have said, "Well, go."

Brenda: Well, that was nice of your son. That was, would that be your oldest son?

Lillian: No, that was Elmer, the one that's on the farm now.

Brenda: Oh, he's the one that...

Lillian: Yeah. He was married and he figured... Well, he, they knew, eh. They were brought up with this so they knew how it was there. Mind you, we never did without food or anything like that but, you know, things... when there's an alcoholic in the family, I don't care who it is, it's no good. You know, whether it's the mother or the father, or both.

Brenda: Or the son, or daughter or any...

Lillian: That's right, yeah. And when you think of your own life and the way it was, you think your kids wouldn't drink, eh. They all do except the one. They all do, even the girls. You know, they don't make a habit of it but they drink. Yeah, it makes you wonder.

Brenda: It's something that I think for today...

Lillian: It's society the way it is, eh. It seems like you can't do nothing today, you can't watch a hockey game, you can't play cards, it's got to be drink. You know, why can't you just drink coffee. (laughs)

Brenda: When you went to social events with your husband what kind of music did they play? Was it fiddle music?

Lillian: Oh definitely. (laughs) Strictly fiddle. There was always a fiddle hanging on the wall, somebody's wall, eh. They took it down and, you know, everybody had a good time, eh, pushed the chairs, the tables away, take down the beds and... (laughs)

Brenda: It was always in a house?

Lillian: Sure it was, always. You never knew about going to a hall or like it is today, eh. It was all in a private home, eh, put the beds outside and...

Brenda: Was it more fun then than it is now?

Lillian: Oh definitely. It was, really, you know, but then again...

Brenda: What was close about it?

Lillian: It was people getting together and being friendly to one another, eh, just...

Brenda: Helping one another.

Lillian: Yeah, sure, sharing all that fiddle music, like you say, eh. One guy sat in the corner and played fiddle and everybody was dancing. (laughs) And you never quit at 12:00; you had to see daylight, eh. (laughs)

Brenda: No such thing as quitting your dance at 12 o'clock, eh.

Lillian: Oh, I guess not. If you went home at 12 o'clock you were a party-pooper. (laughs)

Brenda: Everyone wondered what was wrong with you.

Lillian: That's right. You had to be sick or something to go home early. I think things were a lot nicer then.

Brenda: When you go to a dance at a hall now, what do you see?

Lillian: Drunks. (laughs) Too much.

Brenda: Not enough time to dance.

Lillian: That's right. And big fancy band up there, eh, that's half the time so loud you can't even hear yourself talk, but people think they're having a good time, eh.

Brenda: I remember dances like that too when I was a young girl, house dances.

Lillian: Yeah, house parties, eh. Gee, at the drop of a hat somebody was having a house party, eh. (laughs)

Brenda: And you and your husband would go to these dances?

Lillian: Sure. I had five kids when I quit going to dances with my... haul those kids, eh, in winter. I wouldn't go across the...

Brenda: Oh, you would take the kids too?

Lillian: Oh sure. Everybody took their kids. You never got a babysitter, eh. Took those kids sleeping there, eh. Those kids knew better too, they slept. Kids today...

Brenda: Wherever they crashed, eh, they slept?

Lillian: Yeah, sure, in the bobsleigh in winter, cold. Archie would be half drunk and away we'd go. I wouldn't go across the street today they do that. (laughs)

Brenda: Oh it must have been fun.

Lillian: It was. And you never thought nothing of it, eh. Came home; it was cold in the house. They just light that old stove and warm up the blankets as best you could and shoved your kids in bed. (laughs)

Brenda: Oh those were the days.

Lillian: Yeah and it was a lot of fun.

Brenda: Were you ever denied work because you were a Metis woman?

Lillian: No. No I can't say that, not in my line of work anyway. Maybe it woulda been... No I can't say that. Like my daughters, they have good jobs. I still have one, Marleen, she has a good government job.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Brenda: Did the church play an important role in your life?

Lillian: In our lives it did, very much. Church was something that you never missed, that you abided by it, eh. It was law, you know. You never ate meat on Fridays; you never played cards during Lent; you never went to dances during Lent; you went to church Sunday morning regardless. If you had been out the night before, boy, you went to church. (laughs)

Brenda: And that was everybody's parents?

Lillian: Yeah, everybody, you know. There wasn't no question of, "I don't want to go to church," and, "I don't want to do this." and then you went to communion and you went to confession. Well, basically religion was really, a real big part of your life and mind you, if you went to school to the

nuns, well, there it was again, eh. Like, you prayed; then you learned catechism; then you learned religion from the time you walked into that school in the morning till you went home. They prayed in the morning, and they prayed before you left school. Nowadays, you know, the kids can't wait to get out of there, but you never left that school without praying before you left. You went to church on Fridays and went to communion and the whole bit.

Brenda: How many times a day did you have to pray when you were going to school?

Lillian: To school? Oh, you prayed in the morning, you prayed at noon, and you prayed before you went home.

Brenda: I remember praying 17 times a day.

Lillian: Is that right? See, and there was a chapel at the

convent -- and they used to have a convent here, eh -- and there was a chapel there and you went to the chapel.

Brenda: And everybody had to...

Lillian: And you never went in there without a hat on your head either, and long sleeves, eh. You didn't dare go in the church with bare arms. My God! it was a real disaster if you did. (telephone rings)

So now, what do you want to know?

Brenda: Did your family ever go to the priest for help?

Lillian: No.

Brenda: They didn't... they didn't need the priest for any...

Lillian: No.

Brenda: Do you find the church more influential then than it is today?

Lillian: Definitely. It's just like night and day. You know, the church was very... Well, like I say, you know, the people feared the law of God or the law of the church more than they did the law of the government in those days. That's the way it was.

Brenda: The church had complete control?

Lillian: Definitely.

Brenda: How about when it came to voting. Did the church try to influence people to vote a certain way? Like, did they say, "Okay, you're a Liberal. You're Catholic, you vote Liberal?"

Lillian: I don't think so. Not in our family anyways, not in our... as far as I know, you know. And once I was old enough to vote, well, the church never had anything to do with the way I voted. (laughs)

Brenda: Are you strong in the church today, or not as much?

Lillian: Not as... no, not as much as I used to.

Brenda: You don't go to church every Sunday?

Lillian: No, I don't. And I think I've lost faith in a lot of things that they do today, like going to communion without going to confession. I just can't see that because to me that was drilled into you, eh, that you didn't do anything like that, eh. That you never went to communion, Holy Communion, without going to confession first. Today, well, you go to church and everybody goes to communion with no confessions, or... you know. That's one thing that I just can't believe. (laughs)

Brenda: So it has changed in that way?

Lillian: Oh, it has changed a lot in... We have a priest that is very outgoing, like Father Gillis that we have here. He's just about as down-to-earth as bread and butter, you know.

Brenda: What does he do? Does he... how is he different from the priests before?

Lillian: Well, he talks like we do, eh, and he has a drink. And he'll come to your house and be like you come in here, and he's right at home with everybody, where years ago you didn't do that to a priest, eh. A priest walked in your house, well gee, you know, he was to be... well, I can't...

Brenda: Treated him special?

Lillian: That's right. You know, he was something special. Now we... the priest that we have now, here especially, he's just one of the regular guys, eh. (laughs)

Brenda: And he walks in here, he can help himself to a cup of coffee or...

Lillian: Exactly. You know, that's the difference. He talks about everyday things and personal things, and... you know, just no barriers there whatsoever. That's the change, eh. Then you even go dancing with your priest, eh. You know, he's a dancer, and he's dancing away with everybody, and here next morning you're supposed to go to confession and go to communion. You know, that's the difference, eh -- priests didn't do things like that before.

Brenda: Do you think it would have been nicer for people then if the priests were more like the priests today?

Lillian: Well, no. I don't think so. I think you have to draw a line somewhere, eh. You know, I think it would have been better if the people would abide by religion more today than they do, you know, because I know with the younger people, they're non-believers I think, really.

Brenda: Because they're non-believers you think that they have less morals than, than our parents did?

Lillian: Oh, well, I would think so.

Brenda: People today are more free than they were then.

Lillian: Yeah, they are. Oh, definitely. Just the way they dress, the way they talk, the things they do, the places they go.

Brenda: Their actions.

Lillian: Yeah.

Brenda: Show that...

Lillian: And more and more. That's what I often say. I said, "I wonder what the kids will be like ten years from now," you know. You know, 10-year-old kids are talking about, well, the most personal things that, you know, you would not dare talk if your window was open (laughs) or the door. Today they talk about that like, you know... I... like, I always say, there's no modesty today, you know, no respect or... I don't know. Like, they talk to their mom and dads like we talk to the neighbour kid, or not even that way, you know. Everything is so out in the open, eh. Just tell it the way it is. Like I say, there's no respect or modesty, you know. Like we often say that too, eh. It's just unreal.

Brenda: Has the church helped Metis people?

Lillian: It did, years ago.

Brenda: And how did the church help?

Lillian: Well, that was their... I don't know how to explain this, but it was the one thing that they believed in or that they... well, I don't know, maybe it was fear because, you know, like I said before, you didn't dance, you didn't play cards, you didn't, well, you didn't do anything during, like now, eh, Holy Week. Well, good Lord, you practically didn't go outside, eh, on Holy Week.

Brenda: Is this Holy Week this week?

Lillian: Yeah, this is Holy Week. Well, what's Holy Week? You tell the kids today, well, you're supposed to go to church, eh, go wear the cross and, you know, you go to communion, you go to confession, you go make your Easter duties. "What's that?" they tell you, you know. (laughs) Oh, it's just, things have changed drastically really.

Brenda: When your children were growing up, did you go to church with them?

Lillian: Yes, we did. We always did, you know. We went...

Brenda: So you taught your children to go to church. What they learned is all from the outside...

Lillian: Yeah, I think I changed too then, down the road, you know.

Brenda: As your children changed, you changed, as your children got older?

Lillian: Yeah, that's right. I go, I still go to church and I still believe in religion but not the same way I did when I was growing up, eh. Things are so different. But I think a lot has to do with the way my family, you know, are acting or doing or whatever. Well, the whole community actually, you know, things are not the way they used to be. You don't see people

going to church so much as they used to either any more.

Brenda: How did, how did the Metis people in your parent's day, how did they view Metis politics?

Lillian: I don't think they did, eh, because most of them weren't educated. It's the education that's doing all this today, eh. At that time, well, you know... things are the way they are, and let's just leave it be, eh. That's the way they were, to me anyways. I never heard anybody... like nobody ever made an issue of it.

Brenda: Metis people were, were Canadian citizens and that's the way it was?

Lillian: And that's the way it was, yeah.

Brenda: They didn't have any status as... they weren't recognized as Metis people?

Lillian: No, no. It was just the nuns that reminded you who you were, eh, (laughs) in no uncertain terms most of the time.

Brenda: So was the church involved in politics?

Lillian: I don't think so.

Brenda: Later on, as years...

Lillian: No, not that I know of.

Brenda: Was there ever a party that spoke best for the Metis people? Duck Lake and (inaudible)...

Lillian: Oh, I think the NDP actually, eh. You know, they opened a lot of doors for... you take like this SUNTEP business and this NATOMEN (? and all that in P.A., you know. That had a lot to do with the government, the NDP government actually -- to me anyways. And it's slowly ebbing away there, you know, because like what Shelly was saying there, they're thinkin' about cuttin' out the whole thing and I don't know if they will or not but...

Brenda: Did your foster mother, did she know anything about Indian medicine? Did she use any Indian medicine like herbs and roots?

Lillian: Yes, she did.

Brenda: Did she ever show any to you?

Lillian: No, she didn't, and I... sometimes I wonder. I should have... I guess, I should have been more observant but I wasn't. But she did. She used all the, oh God, I don't know what it was, but like herbs, like you say, she brewed this up and you drank this. I don't know what it was for but you drank it. (laughs) Like for fever, you know, a lot of people had

fever and they boiled this. Herbs they used to go and get, I don't know where. Oh yeah, she used that. She was a midwife and she had her own little peculiar little ways of doing things, eh.

Brenda: Yeah, you were saying that was how she made extra money.

Lillian: Yeah, that's how she made her living and they, like they never paid her outright. Nobody had any cash, eh. They maybe gave her a piece of meat, or they gave her some flour, or, you know, that's how she made a living. Oh, sometimes she was lucky, some people paid her. And she used to keep women at our place, like, they used to come there to have their babies, eh.

Brenda: And just for when they were going to have their babies?

Lillian: Yeah. Sure.

Brenda: What did you learn from that? How did you feel about that? Did you hear a woman going into labour?

Lillian: That's for sure. I even watched one time. (laughs)

Brenda: Did you?

Lillian: Yeah. There was a stovepipe thing, eh. And I laid up the stairs and I was watching this whole thing. Boy, did I ever catch heck.

Brenda: Is it, was it hard for your foster mother to be a midwife?

Lillian: No. It seemed like it just came natural to her, you know. Like she never got upset or... you know. She looked after all these women, you know.

Brenda: In an emergency do you think you could deliver a baby?

Lillian: Oh yeah. Especially after I've had so many, eh. I don't think I'd want to but if I had to, I would.

Brenda: You'd know the procedure?

Lillian: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Brenda: How, how do they do it? How did your mom do it? After the baby came out, did she cut the cord with something?  
Lillian: Yes. Oh yeah, she cut the cord and wrapped the baby and looked after the mother, eh, made sure that the afterbirth came, looked after this baby and when there was no facilities then, eh, just a wood stove and heated water there. It was all... like, she was good at it, she was a good midwife.

Brenda: She never lost any, any moms?

Lillian: No. Not that I know of anyways. But she did that a lot. Sometimes during... three o'clock in the morning somebody would come knocking at the door, come and pick her up. And that's what I didn't like either, and then I had to stay there by myself, eh. I just hated that. Sometimes I went with her, eh.

Brenda: You were just little then.

Lillian: Yeah. Sometimes I went with her. We stayed all over, eh. We used to go from Carleton to Horse Lake and to Rosthern and to St. LaRonge and, you know, I'd go along with her sometimes. She didn't like to leave me there especially in winter. She always was afraid I'd set fire to the house or something. But I used to go along. (laughs) Stay all those crazy place.

Brenda: What was your foster mother's name?

Lillian: Hannah Primeau.

Brenda: And she passed away long... quite a while ago?

Lillian: Yeah, 20, 22 years ago. When Lee was a baby, she passed away. That's how I know how long it was.

(END OF SIDE B)

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