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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of his life

Victoria: I'm interviewing Alfred Durocher at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It's Wednesday, March 7, 1984. Now Alfred, would you tell me what your father did for a living?

Alfred: My father was a trapper. But my father died when I was very young; in fact, I remember him only once, in Beauval. In the first place I was the first one born in Beauval. There was very, very few people there. I think there was, where the town is now, there was only three houses. But we were about three miles outside of Beauval, and that's where I was born. And Beauval was just starting then, you see. And my father died. I remember him only once. He killed a moose, I would say about a mile from there, and he towed it with a canoe to the river, you know, beside our house there, and he put me on top of the moose. And that's the only time that I remember my

father. I don't even remember when he died. But I tell you what we had. We had a bunch of cattle and we had a bunch of horses, but as far as the number, I don't know. That would be about ten maybe, ten cows, or ten head of cattle, and maybe that many horses too.

Victoria: You said there was three families there in Beauval.

Alfred: Yeah.

Victoria: ...at the time when you were small. Do you remember the names of the people that lived there?

Alfred: Yes. One of them was Laliberte, old Alexander Laliberte. And he was, he had an outpost for the Hudson's Bay. That's where we had our flour, tea, and staples that people got. And the other one was a brother of my father, Pierre Durocher. My father's name was Paul, and he had his brother Pierre. That's why there's so many Durochers, there was two families there. And they had big families, both of them had big families.

Victoria: Did you have a garden or did your parents have a garden?

Alfred: Yeah, we had a garden, we had a garden, yeah, but not much of anything. I remember potatoes, and carrots, and what do you call these things in French (French) -- turnips, yeah. That's about the only three things that I can remember, and onions.

Victoria: And did your dad, like you say he was a trapper and that, do you know if he did anything else for a living besides just trapping?

Alfred: No, there was nothing else that he could do -- trapping and hunting, that's the only thing.

Victoria: No other income, eh, no other way of making a living out there?

Alfred: No, there's just no other way. And there was a lot of fish but there was no commercial fishing.

Victoria: But your family made out okay. How was the living, was it a good living?

Alfred: Very good living, very good living until the conscription come in -- that's in, before 1918. The war finished in 1918 and conscription must have been about 1916. I remember that when all the men were gathered up north and my sisters' husbands went and my father was dead already. And so that left only women and the kids at home. And one by one, I guess, the cattle went, the horses went...

Victoria: You had to sell them?

Alfred: You had to sell them or eat them, I guess. Well,

there was nobody to make hay in the first place, for the long winters, you see, only women and kids. But there wasn't many people in Beauval then, very few. Now, my brothers-in-law that went to war, one of them was killed and the other one never come back, and I think he run away or something.

Victoria: Were they... were your brother-in-laws, were they Metis people too or were they white?

Alfred: One of them was a white man.

Victoria: Well, what was the Metis brothers' names? The ones that were Metis, what were their names?

Alfred: Kennedy, it was Kennedy, and the other was a (name). That's where the (name) come from. He was a Scotch man.

Victoria: And how long were they gone to war, do you remember that?

Alfred: Yeah, I think it was a couple of years anyway, until the... well, they were killed in the war. But the war ended in 1918 and I remember some of them that come home -- two of Alexander Laliberte's boys come back. They never got killed and they come back in 1918. I was in school then.

Victoria: How old were you?

Alfred: Well I must have been pretty small then. 1918 I was 9 years old, see, because I was born in 1909.

Victoria: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Alfred: Oh, we were thirteen all together, but a lot died, you know... I am the youngest of the family, but I remember the oldest, but she must have died soon after because... oh, there were a lot of us.

Victoria: Do you remember what some of them died from?

Alfred: No, I don't remember, no.

Victoria: No doctors, I suppose.

Alfred: No doctors. You know, those times a person just got sick and died. I think it was pneumonia most of the time, yeah, they call it fever. So the only thing that people, they have fever over there, at the time was pneumonia. I had a set of twins, you know, they both died the same year of the same thing. Just took sick, had fever, you know, in the fall or in the spring, and they died -- nobody ever knew what they died of.

Victoria: What school did you go to when you were small?

Alfred: Well I went to the Indian School in Beauval. There was no public school but... But in Ile a la Crosse, which is 35 miles from there, my sisters went to the convent. There was

a Catholic convent there but that wasn't a public school, it was just a convent. And there was no English, it was all French.

Victoria: What was school like for you, did you like it?

Alfred: Oh yes, I liked it, yeah, because we talked half French and half Cree anyways.

Victoria: Oh, you were allowed to talk Cree then?

Alfred: You know how it was, eh? Yeah, oh yes.

Victoria: And what type of a home did you grow up in, Alfred? What was your house like?

Alfred: The first house I remember... What do you mean the 'home', the house?

Victoria: Yeah, was it made of logs or lumber?

Alfred: It's logs, made of logs. And the first house that I remember, it wasn't a house, it was a log that my dad had moved there. And -- I don't know from where -- and there wasn't even a floor. It was a sod as I remember it. But they were building a house when I was very small, because I remember I used to go and watch them build. And that house stood for years and years.

Victoria: How many rooms was there in the house?

Alfred: There was two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. That's all there was.

Victoria: That's in the new one that they built?

Alfred: That's the new one they built.

Victoria: How about the old one?

Alfred: There old one there was two rooms. It's just two shacks put together with a door in the middle.

Victoria: And did you have electricity?

Alfred: Oh no.

Victoria: Running water?

Alfred: No, but we were right beside the Beaver River. Yeah, see, the Beaver River... When I think of that, when I think about writing a book, you know, I can visualize where we were. We were just over the bank, you see. We were about 50 feet from the river, from the river bank, so the water was just close by.

Victoria: What type of heat did you have for the house?

Alfred: We had a fireplace, yeah.

Victoria: One of those old-fashioned ones?

Alfred: Yeah, oh yes, one of those old-fashioned ones in the corner.

Victoria: And what about your furniture, what was it made of?

Alfred: There was no furniture, there was absolutely no furniture, I don't think. I think we sat on the floor, I think we slept on the floor -- I'm sure of that. But in the new building, in the new house that they built, there was lumber then. We had a lumber floor, and we had tables, and wooden beds, and some chairs. I remember there was some good chairs, and there was some stools that they had built.

Victoria: How old were you then?

Alfred: Well that was in my school days. You see, I went to, oh, I'd say between... I left Beauval at 10 years old. There was an old priest, Father Pinard, that was going up north to La Loche to retire. And he wanted to teach two boys to become priests, so out of the bunch of boys that they had there I was one of them selected, and another one was a Chipewyan from La Loche.

Victoria: So what happened, did you go?

Alfred: Yeah, I went. Sure, I went.

Victoria: And how long were you there?

Alfred: I was there for six years.

Victoria: And what did they teach you while you were there?

Alfred: They teach me French, French grammar, and Latin. Yeah, and they taught me arithmetic and reading, and what do you call geography then, and, you know, what they teach in schools, but not quite, nothing in grades. It was just what a missionary would need to understand.

Victoria: You were really serious about becoming a priest?

Alfred: No, no, it wasn't me, it was my mother that was pushing me. You know, those times, you know, a person never selected what they was going to be. It was the mother, the mother or the family that... even marriage. My sisters were telling me, the last two that lived till a few years ago, that they never selected the men that they were going to marry. Yeah, they were told to marry somebody and they married them. And they didn't even know what marriage was. See, they got married at 15, 16 years old, and some even younger than that.

Victoria: Getting back to the house now, did you own, did your father own the land and the house itself?

Alfred: There was no question about the land, because this is in the wild country. This is inaccessible country, nobody could go over there. There was no government or anything, so there was no question of who owned the land.

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

Alfred: A happy, very happy time, yeah. I'm very glad to think about it, all of it, even when I was a kid before I went to school, while I was going to school, and my days at La Loche with Father Pinard, they were very good. I think I had a very happy childhood.

Victoria: And did you have, what type of responsibilities did you have when you were young? Like what type of work did your father and mother give you to do?

Alfred: Not much of anything, not much of anything. I think just get the wood in, I guess, because we went home only in summertime for the vacation, the school holidays. The rest of the time we were in school, you see. But in La Loche I was doing the wood, cutting the wood and bringing the wood in, and the water in, and studying the rest of the time.

Victoria: Did your family do special things together? Like did they ever go camping and things?

Alfred: Oh yes, we did a lot of camping, picking berries, and there was places where you could catch small fish, a lot of fish that they smoked and dried. And we did it all together with other families too. Because when the fish run they run in one place, you see, so everybody goes there and catch as many as they can. And then they'd dry them and smoke them and store them for future use.

Victoria: What about any types of meat, did they have...

Alfred: Oh yeah, they had a lot of moose too.

Victoria: Do you have special ways of keeping it for the winter?

Alfred: Yes, drying them.

Victoria: Now how did you do that, do you remember?

Alfred: Oh yes. They built racks and they cut the meat in thin slices and put it on that rack, and build a fire under, and smoke it and dry. And that would keep, that never spoils. That's what they made pemmican with.

Victoria: Did you ever have anyone that done any storytelling in your family, or one of your neighbors or something? They told stories about the old days or about, you know, about Metis people or history or something.

Alfred: No, no, nothing, no. No, I've never heard any

stories from where we come from or where they come from. I've never heard any stories. I don't know how we happened to be in that wild country, I don't even know where we come from. And in the books that I've read the only place that I've seen the Durochers were at St. Paul des Metis in Alberta. Anywhere of those people that came from Winnipeg or La Riviere Rouge, there's no...

Victoria: So you don't know which area your descendants came from at all, eh?

Alfred: No, no.

Victoria: When you lived there, you said just one uncle lived in the same community. Was there anyone else, one of your other families, like your grandparents, or cousins, uncles?

Alfred: No, no, my grandparents were in Ile a La Crosse. That old Morin, Catholic Morin, that was my mother's dad. He had remarried there, his wife had died and he married another woman. But I've seen him a couple of times, we went and visited him a couple of times. He was an old man, he reminds me of Santa Claus when I see the picture of Santa Claus now. He had white hair and a big white beard, you know, and he talked French, mostly French. There was quite a few in there, the old people, that hardly spoke Cree -- it was mostly French.

Victoria: Is there anyone in your family members or friends that you especially remember, that really, you know, stood out, or did something that you really remember about?

Alfred: No, no, nothing. Like you mean in my childhood?

Victoria: Yeah, somebody that...

Alfred: Well, I'll tell you. I guess I can remember a lot that were original, that weren't like we are today. We all do the same thing the same way, we are all uniform today: then it was characters, everybody had his own character, you know. They done things differently, and they talked different or did things different, and now each other seem to follow one another.

Victoria: Did your family stick together a lot when you were young?

Alfred: Oh yes, oh yes, a lot and we still do.

Victoria: When you think of your family, Alfred, who does it include, like, all in your family? Who would you say your family were while you were growing up? Brothers, sisters? I guess there weren't too many that you can say because there was only one uncle, eh, and you visited just your...

Alfred: No, there was several uncles, there was several uncles. I don't know -- a lot of them stands out, a lot, because we were together all the time. My sister Caroline,

that's (name) -- the one that her husband didn't come back from the war -- well, that one was with my mother all the time. She lived with my mother to the last. She never remarried. She had three kids and they are still living -- one of them died just last week. That's what I was telling you about. And my sister Marie, that's another one that was, you know, in the middle of the family, I guess, that lived with us practically all the time. And one of my brothers that's still living, he's 90 years old but he's deaf, he's deaf, completely deaf. I can't... the only way I can communicate with him is writing in Cree, he writes in Cree. He never went to school because there was no school when he was a kid, you know, but he can write in the Cree.

Victoria: What is his name?

Alfred: William, William Durocher, in Beauval.

Victoria: What language did you talk in your family, like, in the house when you were growing up?

Alfred: Well both Cree and French, yeah, mixed.

Victoria: Did your mom and them, did they always talk about being Metis?

Alfred: Yeah, oh yes.

Victoria: When did you first become aware that you were Metis?

Alfred: Right from the start. Right from the start. My mother was so proud of being a half-breed. That's something that I always remembered, that my mother was always so proud of being a Metis, not being white and not being an Indian, just being what she was.

Victoria: What about the other Metis families around there, were they proud of being Metis or did some of them just not talk about being Metis?

Alfred: Well I don't know very much about the others because I was away most of the time, you see. I spend my days in La Loche where I learned Chipewyan. There was no Crees there, that's Chipewyans there. They call themselves Dene now. Dene in Chipewyan means people. See, that's the same thing like the Eskimos. They call themselves Inuit, and Inuit in their language means people. So I learned as a kid, you see, I played with Chipewyan kids so I learned their language. So I learned Chipewyan in La Loche and the French and the Latin.

Victoria: When you were at home, Alfred, did you, did the community ever have social events, like parties or weddings?

Alfred: Yes, they had weddings, yes. Yeah, and for Christmas or New Year's they had a banquet in every house, you know, like they have even now, I think. They still have in Meadow Lake the last time I was there. They still had those in every

house -- the table is set for the people that go around and...

Victoria: Everybody just goes and visits and eats?

Alfred: Yes, sit down and eat and... You've seen that, I guess.

Victoria: Oh yeah, I grew up with that.

Alfred: I think that's about... It's dying, if it isn't completely dead now.

Victoria: Did your father ever wear a Metis sash or any kind of traditional Metis clothing?

Alfred: No, I don't remember my dad, but the other ones, all the other people wear sash. All the other ones that I remember, the old people, they all wear sash.

Victoria: And your mom, how about your mom, did she dress like the ladies, Metis ladies did?

Alfred: Yeah, yeah, in black. In black, and long dresses.

Victoria: Kerchiefs?

Alfred: Yeah, oh yes. Even my sisters, I remember they had great big hats with a bunch of flowers on top and long dresses, big shoulders, you know, I remember that.

Victoria: Were there any fiddle players in your family?

Alfred: All of us. All the boys, and there was about six of us. And the fiddle was hanging on the wall -- it didn't even have a box. And we learned to play the fiddle that way.

Victoria: Did you dad play at all? Do you remember if he played at all?

Alfred: Who?

Victoria: Your dad.

Alfred: No, I don't remember my dad, no.

Victoria: Any of your uncles?

Alfred: No. Oh yes, oh yes.

Victoria: Was there much jigging in your family?

Alfred: Yeah, quite a bit, quite a bit. Quite a bit that dancing, yeah.

Victoria: Did they play or sing any kind of Metis songs that you remember?

Alfred: No, there is something that I often wonder why there was no singing in Cree or even in Chipewyan. There's no Indian songs -- that's funny. They sang in French. If they ever wanted to sing a song, well, they sang in French. But there is no songs in Cree.

Victoria: Was there anybody in your community that wasn't Metis?

Alfred: No, it was all Metis. There was no white people.

Victoria: Did anybody that you knew of, like elders or anything, or someone in your family, that practised Indian medicine?

Alfred: Yes.

Victoria: Do you remember much about it?

Alfred: No, not much. This is in later years -- when I was kid I didn't know of any -- but in later years I knew there was quite a few. In fact they said that they could cure T.B., you know. They killed a lot of T.B. patients like that. The people went out of the sanitorium in Prince Albert, went home. They said, "That man can cure me," but they didn't get cured. They died after. They did a lot of harm, those people. But they did a lot of good too, because there's a lot of medicine that is good. And not only that, there's... If you believe in the medicine, even if it's no good, well, just by believing -- that's what they call the faith healings -- it would help you.
Victoria: Did you ever see a sweat lodge?

Alfred: Oh yes, I did.

Victoria: Did you ever use one?

Alfred: Oh yes.

Victoria: What was it like?

Alfred: Oh, it's very hot, it's very hot.

Victoria: How, what do they look like?

Alfred: They are round, a cone. It's a cone that they built with willow branches. They make a cone first and then they put the tarp on top and blankets so that the heat won't escape. And on the outside they heat stones, big stones, and after they are real hot they put them inside. And everybody that wants to sweat goes inside with a little pail of water. Then they make steam. They throw a little water on the rocks -- that makes steam -- and you sweat, and you really sweat. Those that can stay to the end are pretty good. They generally go out before some of them are finished. Well, they go out one by one. I couldn't stay very long, it was too hot.

Victoria: Do you still practise some of the old Metis

traditions that your parents taught you, your mother?

Alfred: What would that be?

Victoria: Just... I imagine it's just your way of life. You still do the same things even though you're living in the city now?

Alfred: No, I don't think so. The only thing, that I make bannock once in a while -- that's one of them. But we used to say the rosary in the family every night. Well, I remember that and I still do it sometimes, not every night but...

Victoria: How about jigging and that?

Alfred: About what?

Victoria: Jigging, you know, step dancing.

Alfred: No, no, I didn't dance much. I played at dances but I didn't dance much.

Victoria: Do you still play sometimes?

Alfred: No, not now.

Victoria: Why, why did you quit?

Alfred: I was too busy. When I got married... I quit when I got married, I guess, because I had a store, you see. And with a store, you start at 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. The last time I played -- I played all night -- was on D-Day and we played until the sun was up. It was in May sometime, I think. You know, we played all night. That was the last time I played at a dance.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Victoria: How many years did you study to be a priest?

Alfred: Well, I was at La Loche with the same priest for five years, five or six years, approximately around there. And then they opened a seminary in Beauval. There was about a dozen young men there that were studying to be priests, but those were from Quebec, you see. They were all French from Quebec and they were way more advanced in education than me because they had their cassocks already, they were brothers already.

Victoria: What's a cassock?

Alfred: Cassock, that's the big black robe that they wear, you see, they called it a cassock. And I got there in 1926. I moved there and my teacher moved there and he was the one that was teaching theology. There was two schools, I mean two subjects, that those people were taking because they had

finished their schooling. They took... there was a school in philosophy first and then theology. Theology is studying about, you know, canon law, the laws of the church and that, and philosophy for two years. That's six years altogether before you become priest. But me, I hadn't gone there yet, I was still studying at the pre-school. I was still studying the French and the Latin. So I moved there, but in 1929 I had a hemorrhage, T.B. started, so they shipped me to Saskatoon to the sanitorium.

Victoria: And how long were you there?

Alfred: For nearly ten years, yeah, between here and Prince Albert and out in summertime. That was all... not all in one stretch, because I went out many times and come back in the fall. Because when you have T.B., then they could arrest it. But that's when you had a cold or the flu that the germs come back. So to prevent it from spreading it to others, well, you go back to the sanitorium.

Victoria: How did they find out that you had T.B.?

Alfred: Well they always send you a, what you call it, little container to send your sputum in, you know. So, in fact, you always carry one and when you have a cold or something, you spit in it and send it in.

Victoria: And that's how they were able to tell?

Alfred: Yeah. They inform you that you have T.B. and that you got to come in, so you come in. And then I had... in 1937 I had an operation to stop the T.B., and by not taking the lung out but stopping it from working, what do they call that now? And so that's why I only got one lung now. And in 1967 I got T.B. again on the good lung at that time. It was in the year 1967, but then they had drugs. Then in one month it was all finished. And that's what saved me from being a priest. When I went back in again after three years I went back to Beauval to the seminary where I was, and they told me they couldn't accept me any more, because once you have T.B., T.B. is never cured, so they didn't want to take a chance in taking me back. So anyway I was glad because I didn't want to be a priest. It was mother that was pushing me to be a priest. In a way it's a good thing because it give me an education.

Victoria: So what did you do after that?

Alfred: After that, when the... After I had the operation then I become wed. And in 1937... I didn't do anything until 1939. 1939 when the war broke out I was selected to take the -- now what would they call that -- to take the names of everybody. That was from the government, a job from the government, to take the names of everybody. And it's not...

Victoria: The ones that were enlisting, you mean?

Alfred: No, not enlisting, no. I took the names, registering

people, that's what it is, it's a registration, yeah. I registered everybody in Beauval. And you had two weeks to do it. And the only place that you could do that was at the Hudson's Bay store. Well, for the amount of people that is there, in one day I registered the whole thing. But I had to stay there just the same. And after you registered, well you had to make some reports -- but that didn't take long.

Victoria: That was your first job?

Alfred: That was my first job, yeah, with the government. But I had a job before that too, because I learned telegraph when I was in the sanitorium. And I work for the government in Ile a la Crosse in between the time that I was in the sanitorium in summertime, relieving the telegraph operator in his vacation, you see, his holidays.

Victoria: That was in the early '30s then?

Alfred: In the early '30s yeah, during the '30s, before the war. And I only relieved twice, yeah, twice, and my next job was that registering people. And while I was working in the store there, the clerk that was working there had to join the army. So the manager was alone, and he had too much work to do, to work in his books and to attend to the store, so he hired me to work in the store for him, that's at the Hudson's Bay store. So I started working there for close to one year, I guess. And from there I was hired to go and open a store in Ile a la Crosse. That's how I started working in the store, and the year after I owned that store. The man that owned that store went to war too so, about a year after, he wanted me to buy it out from him.

Victoria: Was there much employment then for Metis people?

Alfred: There was a lot of fish. Yeah, in the winter there was a lot of employment. But just in the wintertime, but nothing at all in summertime.

Victoria: So then it would be more or less seasonal work?

Alfred: Oh yeah, it was season work, yeah.

Victoria: Was there times that you were unemployed?

Alfred: For myself I was never unemployed, I never was unemployed.

Victoria: So most of the people up there then would have done fishing. Is that the type of work they did?

Alfred: Just fishing and trapping in wintertime. But there was no job in summertime, there was none whatever, there was nothing to do, just...

Victoria: So what happened after you bought the store then?

Alfred: Well, I work at the store for over ten years, maybe

twelve years, I guess. I got married and that's where Norman was born, and all the kids was born there. Victoria: Who is the oldest one?

Alfred: Norman is the oldest one. All the kids were there, even... Rose is the youngest, she was born over there too.

Victoria: What was your wife's name before she was married?

Alfred: Adeline Caisse. Caisse is C-A-I-S-S-E, it's not C-A-S-E, it's C-A-I-S-S-E, French.

Victoria: Where was she from?

Alfred: She's from there. There is some Caisses there, a lot of them. Yeah, and I went bankrupt when the CCF took over the fishing and the fur when they come in power. In 1946, is it? I think it was 1946. Well, they took over the fish and the fur, you see, so we couldn't buy fish any more and we couldn't buy fur. Well you could buy fur but they opened that fur marketing service where the people could sent their fur to, you see. That did us a lot of damage. Anyway I was fully tired of having the store then.

Victoria: Was there a lot of people that did trapping up there?

Alfred: Oh everybody. Oh yes, the trapping was good and the fur was good. But after that the fur went down to practically nothing. Now it's way up again, but the fur was very good. The red fox, when I started working there, was worth \$25. \$25 those days was a lot of money. It would be like \$500 now.

Victoria: What other types of animals did they trap?

Alfred: There was foxes, coyotes.

Victoria: How much did they pay for coyote fur?

Alfred: They wasn't worth as much, maybe \$10 or so. And then there was squirrels which weren't worth much, say 10, 15 cents then. And then there was squirrels, yes...

Victoria: Weasels, how much were they?

Alfred: Weasels, they were worth pretty good, yeah. And minks, white minks. And in the spring it's rats and beavers. That's where they make money.

Victoria: How much was a beaver hide worth?

Alfred: Oh, it was worth around \$40 anyways, \$40, \$50, and the rats were about \$1 apiece. But when you could get about ten a day it was good, you know.

Victoria: Did you skin beavers and muskrats and that yourself?

Alfred: Not a beaver, but muskrat I skinned a lot.

Victoria: Did you see anybody else skinning beavers?

Alfred: Oh yes, yeah.

Victoria: How did they do it?

Alfred: Oh, they do it with a knife, with a knife. There's a lot of fat, and they leave the fat, a lot of fat, on the skin because they're scared to damage the skin. But after that you have to scrape the fat off the pelt.

Victoria: Is there any special thing that they have to do while they're... you know, to make the hides good for selling?

Alfred: Yes, oh yes. They have to take all the fat off in the first place, because that's what spoils the fur. And you got to stretch it right at its full size so that it will be big, and not put it in any place where it will shrink. And there's quite a bit to that.

Victoria: Quite a knack to doing it, is there?

Alfred: Yeah.

Victoria: What did you do after you left the store? You went bankrupt?

Alfred: After I left the store, no, no. We opened a Co-op store then. We opened a Co-op store -- not right away, but in time, in time. I owned the Co-op store for a while. And in summertime there's always fighting fire, so I fought fire as a camp manager. I was... what do you call the camp manager? He's the man who handles the two-way radio; he's at the camp all the time; he orders the food and he makes his report about the fires; and he orders what do the men need. I did that every summer. And then in wintertime, well, I started working... After the war, when they started working on Cold Lake Army Base, I went and worked there. I went there and I started working there in an office. And from there, when they finished that, there was a company, a lumber company. Well, you know that company from Big River. You're from Big River, aren't you?

Victoria: Yeah. Alfred: You know that Oscar (name) in (name).
They had the
lumber company. Well they had to go to the bombing range to go and salvage the timber there before it was turned over to the bombing range, before they made the bombing range. But we stayed there for three years. I was the bookkeeper there, the bookkeeper and the storekeeper, and I did quite a bit of work there.

Victoria: Were wages good back then? Were they, like all the jobs that you had and how you made out with the store, were they fairly good, reasonable pay?

Alfred: Oh yes. You mean at the store?

Victoria: Yeah.

Alfred: Oh, the store, I could have made quite a fortune at the store. But a person without any previous experience in the store, you won't... especially buying fur and fish. And even just in the store without any experience, you won't make much, especially the way they were doing business then. It was all credit. There was no money, you see, it was all credit. So you lose a half of the stuff that you give away. And being soft-hearted like I am, well, I lost.

Victoria: How about at the air base, was it good wages there?

Alfred: Oh yes, it was good wages, I think. The wages wasn't very good, I don't think, maybe \$100 a week, \$400 a month, but then it was good wages, I think. In 1946 or '47, and I went to work three years in the sawmill at north of Cold Lake there, Primrose Lake. I went there and I took my family there, I sent for my family.

Victoria: How many was there at that time?

Alfred: Oh, I think altogether there was about 600. It's a big operation. We took out 12,000,000 feet, 12,000,000 feet out of that place.

Victoria: What kind of families were there, were they Metis?

Alfred: There was white people and Metis people from Ile a la Crosse. There was three or four Metis people from Ile a la Crosse. The rest was mostly from Big River. The people that stayed with (name), you know. And then all that lumber had to be freighted out. They had to make roads in first and then they had to freight out all that lumber that was produced over there. It had to be freighted out so it was a big operation. I scaled the lumber that went out and paid to the people that the freight, that freighted that lumber. And I was the pay clerk for the people that work there, and I work at the store at the same time. But I had some helpers, the boss, you know, Oscar Eagle. I wonder if you know him?

Victoria: I think so.

Alfred: A short fellow. He had two daughters. Well I always had one of them that come in and work there. Yeah, and his wife, his wife was pretty good too, his wife helped a lot.

Victoria: How did you travel back then, Alfred?

Alfred: By truck.

Victoria: How about earlier, what about when you were in Ile a la Crosse, did you have horses?

Alfred: By horse in the summertime and by canoe in summertime.

Victoria: Did you ever come out to the south when you were there?

Alfred: Yeah, I come out in the south in wintertime with the freight, the freight trains, with horses. It took about four or five days to get to Big River. Do you remember when the... when all the fish used to come in by horses, you know, from the north. All the fish hunters, they fished the whole lake out. They come into Big River to Len Waite Fisheries. And I come in there...

Victoria: How did they do along the road. You said it took five days, what...

Alfred: They just stayed there and...

Victoria: But did you camp overnight?

Alfred: Camped over... there's stopping places. We didn't sleep outside. There's stopping places in so many areas and, you see, every 20 miles.

Victoria: About how many wagons came at once?

Alfred: Well I'll tell you what happened one time. At one place they call Rabbit Hill there was 60 teams going out, and we met 60 teams coming in, right in one place. There was 120 teams right in one place. Some people going out with the freight for the Hudson's Bay and the stores, and the missions, and there was Reveillon Freres then too, you see, there was another big company there. And all the fish coming in, so...

Victoria: So it must have been a real sight, eh?

Alfred: Oh yes, lot of people. You could see the horses all over, tied all over outside, you know.

Victoria: When you came by canoe, where did you come from then? From Beauval, Ile a la Crosse, or La Loche?

Alfred: Yeah, well, by river, the Beaver River. The Beaver River comes up to Green Lake, you see, and from Green Lake, not quite to Green Lake, you take the Cowan River. Cowan River, they call it Crooked River, it goes to Big River. That big lake you see right in front of Big River there, it has a river. That river gets into the Beaver River -- that's the one we follow.

Victoria: Where did you come from though, what place up north?

Alfred: From Beauval.

Victoria: Did you sleep, how long did it take you to come from Beauval to Big River?

Alfred: That's quite a while, two or three days.

Victoria: How did you get back? Did it take longer going?

Alfred: Oh no, it doesn't take long to go because you go in the water, you see, going back up. Going up, coming up is hard because the water flows down that way, flows to the north, you see. It's coming up is hard. That's why the scows can go down, but they can never come up on account of the rapids, you see, they can't come up. But we come up, like, by canoe. At one time before they had the engines, the motors, well we paddled. And when they got the motors, well then the motors.

Victoria: How many times did you come alone?

Alfred: Alone?

Victoria: Yeah.

Alfred: We never travelled alone.

Victoria: But who all came with you? Did you come with lots of boats?

Alfred: Oh yes. Well, not lots of boats, in boats there's usually three or four in a boat. But in wintertime there's always a long string of horses.

Victoria: When you came with your canoe though, or your boat, was there more than one family come at one time? Was there more than one boat?

Alfred: No, there was no family coming. It was just a person, the people that travelled to come and get something. People come there to meet scows, to take the freight down to the Hudson's Bay, to Ile a la Crosse, or to Buffalo Narrows, or Beauval. Two men generally come in and they stay there for two weeks to meet the scow. You know what a scow is?

Victoria: Yeah.

Alfred: And they put it in the lake, and then they load it with freight, and they go down the river with it with a motor behind. Went that way twice, twice or three times.

Victoria: After you moved up there into that logging business, well then, what did you do after that?

Alfred: After that I started working for the government.

Victoria: Doing what, what was that doing?

Alfred: Accounting.

Victoria: And where were you living then?

Alfred: I lived in Prince Albert. I moved to Prince Albert. Look what happened. I made an application in Ile a la Crosse to work for them, and I gave them the experience that I had.

And so they told me to go to the... They came and got me, to the road gangs, the people that were building the road from Beauval to Buffalo Narrows -- there was no road then, you see. They put me there as a timekeeper and the radio operator there, the two-way radio, all the time, because I told them that I knew how to operate the radio. And they put me there, and I was the one who was doing all the ordering and talking on the radio to Big River, or to Prince Albert, or to Meadow Lake, and I was the timekeeper. I was the one that was doing the payroll, the payroll, I did the payroll. Now I didn't make a single mistake all summer. Now, they said that the man that can do that and not make a mistake all summer should be in the office. So they moved me from Ile a la Crosse, with my family, they brought me to Prince Albert, and I started working there for the D.N.R.

Victoria: For the D.N.R.?

Alfred: Yeah, for the D.N.R.

Victoria: How long were you there?

Alfred: I was there for about 12 years, I guess, 12 or 15 years. And then I got transferred to Regina. I worked at the administration building in Regina for another few years.

Victoria: What was your job title there, what did you do there?

Alfred: Accounting clerk.

Victoria: How did your family adjust to being in the city after...

Alfred: Oh, at first they didn't adjust at all. They were lonely and miserable, and for at least a year, I think, they didn't like it at all. And then as soon as they start knowing the people and knowing the ways of the city, then they liked it. Well with me, I liked it right from the beginning, because I was always busy anyway. Not only that, I built a house. In my first year in Prince Albert I built myself a house, on 14th Street, and it's still there. It's just an ordinary house like you've seen. And even the numbers outside, they are still there, 1117.

Victoria: The same one?

Alfred: Yeah, the same one. I made them myself.

Victoria: Do you think that the church played a big part in the people's lives, like in the north?

Alfred: Oh yes, oh yes, a lot, an awful lot. Yeah.

Victoria: How did they do that? I mean how...

Alfred: Well, in the first place, if it hadn't been for the church there wouldn't have been anybody that could read, because they are the ones that brought in the Sisters for

educating the kids. That's from way years ago it would have been. What year was it now that the Sisters went over there -- I thought I knew? But for a long time they started with a convent, and that's where they learned how to write and read. And the Indian school, it was the missionaries that opened it too, you see. The Indian department wouldn't build the school, the missionaries had to build it. And then after they got the kids there, then the government just pay so much a head to be in there.

Victoria: Well, you went to church regularly. How about the rest of your family, like, did they go to church often? Was there a church in your community?

Alfred: My own family or do you mean them?

Victoria: Well most of the Metis families there, did they attend church regularly?

Alfred: They were very, very religious, very religious. In Beauval when I was a kid there was nobody that ever missed. Even after that, even when I was in the seminary there, I was 16, 17, 18 years old, nobody ever missed.

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of his life

Victoria: Did the priest come out and visit the homes in your community back then?

Alfred: Yes. Yes, not too much but they did.

Victoria: Do you remember the things they talked about and that?

Alfred: No, I don't.

Victoria: Do you remember if your parents voted? Was there a place to vote up north there where you lived?

Alfred: Oh yes, we always voted. That's the only time we seen outsiders was election time, that was the only time...

Victoria: How did they go about setting up their... Was it a regular voting poll that they had?

Alfred: Yeah, a regular voting poll, yeah.

Victoria: Whereabouts did they have it?

Alfred: They have it right in town. They had it right in town, in Beauval there, and everybody generally voted for one person.

Victoria: Did you ever get involved in the politics, or your mom?

Alfred: Yes, I was involved in politics, yes. Especially at Ile a la Crosse when I had a store. You know, one time, the second time, the first time that the CCF won they didn't have a single vote. It was all the Liberals, and I don't think there was a Conservative either. But the second time, well, four of us voted and we talked about it, because they had done so good over there. We had a lot of work done by them, by the CCF. The second time we said we should vote for them because they done so much for us, you know. And of course people wouldn't listen, they always voted for Liberals. Well, they voted Liberal. But there was four votes that were CCF, so they knew who it was -- one of them was me and the other one was George, one was Tom, and then the other one was the man that works for the government there, you see, so they knew who it was. So everybody celebrated. There was a big dance, you know, but I couldn't go, we couldn't go. We stayed at home in my place; we was scared to get out.

Victoria: What party did your mom vote for, do you know?

Alfred: Oh, she was Liberal all the time, yeah.

Victoria: You must have scared to go to your mom's too.

Alfred: Yeah, she was Liberal, she died Liberal.

Victoria: What do you think influenced them, you know, the people, you know, that you knew? What made them vote that way?

Alfred: Well, I don't know. I think, sometimes I think they didn't know any better, or...

Victoria: Do you think it was maybe it was because of the, like the promises that they made to the people?

Alfred: No, they never went to any meetings, they never went to any meetings. There was no meetings.

Victoria: Just on election day?

Alfred: Yeah, election day, just election day.

Victoria: There never was any visiting?

Alfred: Well, look at Quebec now, they are Liberals. Well, they come from there so they've been Liberal. He says the other ones that vote another way, they call them turncoats, you see. Well, I was the first one to be turncoat, you see, because I voted for the people that did something.

Victoria: So they never even went around visiting before election time at all, eh?

Alfred: No, no, there was no... we never had a meeting.

Victoria: The church wasn't involved in any politics at all?

Alfred: Oh the church, some, but not in church. But they talked about it, you know. I had an argument with a priest once about that, because I voted for a non-Catholic. There was a Catholic running and a non-Catholic, well, I voted for the non-Catholic because the Catholic was worse than the non-Catholic. You know, he was staying with a woman that didn't belong to him. And not only that he was crooked as hell, so... Well, he didn't like me voting for the other one. So I had to straighten him up a little bit.

Victoria: When you moved into town, Alfred, do you think your relationship with Metis people or your involvement in the Metis community, did it get stronger or do you think it sort of weakened after?

Alfred: I didn't quite understand. You mean now?

Victoria: Like, when you first moved from the north into, like, P.A. there, did you still keep in touch with a lot of the Metis people there?

Alfred: Oh yes. Not only the Metis people, the Indians. I went to the Indians and talk Cree to them and they couldn't understand me. Yeah, I had an argument with Indians many times. They didn't know their own language, and I wasn't an Indian and I could speak their language. Yeah. The people

from John Smith Reserve, there's none of them that can speak Cree.

Victoria: How was the Metis community or even the Indian community there, was it spread out in P.A., or did they sort of all go into one area of the city?

Alfred: No they don't go to one area now. They don't congregate. Like, maybe they congregate in one place in here, at 20th Street, because it's so small in there. They just do their business, they just do their business in town, and they don't... I never seen them anywhere...

Victoria: Do you think it's different here in Saskatoon?

Alfred: Yes, I think so. But in Prince Albert the half-breeds or the Metis did, because north P.A., what they call the Fox Farm -- remember the Fox Farm? That was all the Metis people that lived there across the river, and I don't know if it's still the same.

Victoria: Yeah, I think so. You see when you go by on the highway, they've got their little mailboxes. And you think in Saskatoon it's quite different then, eh, like, the Metis community?

Alfred: Right in town, yes, I think it's different. Because in town, well, they go on the 20th Street because that's where the Metis people are, and maybe that's because the Salvation Army, the Sally Ann is there. But I work for the Sally Ann there, and there's a lot of Metis people and Indians that go there, and white people.

Victoria: Do... were you ever involved in the 1930s elections, like for the, I believe then it was called Saskatchewan Metis Society? Alfred: No, I never was involved.

Victoria: There was no locals at all in your area?

Alfred: No, no. The only time that I knew there was a Metis Society was one time I come to Green Lake and talk to Alec Bishop, and he told me about the Metis Society. That's the only time that I knew there was a society.

Victoria: What year was that?

Alfred: I don't remember what we talked about. But I've always wanted to join the Metis Society because I was interested in the Metis people. But I didn't know who to contact or where it was because nobody ever talked about it.

Victoria: Do you remember what year it was then?

Alfred: It must have been in the '40s, yes, because I never heard anything in the '30s about it.

Victoria: Do you remember any names like Joe LaRocque?

Alfred: No.

Victoria: Joe Ross?

Alfred: No.

Victoria: Tom Major? Joe McKenzie?

Alfred: No.

Victoria: Soloman Pritchard?

Alfred: No.

Victoria: They were all involved in the early Metis Society.

Alfred: Oh yes, no.

Victoria: Why do you think that it was that nobody had heard of the Metis Society?

Alfred: Because nobody ever told us anything about it. I'm sure people would have been interested and joined up in the Metis Society if they had known it existed. Nobody knew it existed, because everybody was glad and proud that they were Metis, and they would have been glad to belong to a society like the Metis Society.

Victoria: Do you think it was because they were too far north?

Alfred: Yeah, it was inaccessible. People couldn't get there.

Victoria: After you moved to P.A., was it different then? Was there anybody that came around talking about the Metis Society?

Alfred: No.

Victoria: How do you think things are different now from back in your parents' time? Is there some things that you think are different about their way of life?

Alfred: Oh yes, a lot of difference. In the first place the housing, houses are different, electricity, and the water, running water in the houses. And ready-made furniture which we never had, it was all made. Now over there up north it's all bought furniture. Before, even when I came here, there was hardly any. There was some iron beds, that's about all the bought furniture there was. But the rest, like chairs and that, I don't think there was any that wasn't, in the '40s.

Victoria: What kind of life, how would you class your life, Alfred, would you say it was interesting, difficult, satisfying?

Alfred: Very interesting and very satisfying, yeah. But I made a lot of mistakes that I wish I could start over again to

prevent. In the first place I didn't know enough about the business. There was enough business there to be a millionaire if I had known how to go about it, if I knew what I knew now. And I'm too soft-hearted to have a person be short of something. I think all of us half-breeds are like that, poor business people because we help each other too much. I've seen people at the Salvation Army, they give their meal tickets to the ones that didn't have any -- that was their meals. They were given three for the day, you see. Well, I've seen them giving it too, or their last dollar. Yeah, they are so hospitable.

Victoria: What are some of the other things you would have changed in your life if you could go back and relive your live over again? What are some of the main things you would have changed?

Alfred: Well, it's pretty hard to tell things. They'd be too intimate to repeat, I wouldn't want to say. I had a good wife, that's one good thing. I had a very good wife and I spoiled her. Well, I would have changed that. And I think I was too honest in believing that the other people are too honest. They took advantage of me. Like my fish that I was selling, well, I was losing on it because they were deducting too much over there. They were taking all my profit. I was being robbed of all my profit. And I didn't mark things in my book until at the end of the year and I was way short.

Victoria: You were selling to who then?

Alfred: Selling to the Clark, to Meadow Lake. You heard of Clark?

Victoria: Yeah. That was a fishing... yeah, fisheries.

Alfred: Yeah. Well you see, you have to give it. They give you the cash to pay the, to buy the fish. Any amount of cash that you want, well, they give it to you, but you have to give them the fish. So I was kind of obliged to give them the fish. Now if I had had enough money so that I could work independently and then sell the fish wherever the market was high, then I would have been better.

Victoria: They weren't fair then, they were cheating the people?

Alfred: Oh, they were cheating, yeah. They were cheating the people a lot.

Victoria: Was this...

Alfred: They were not cheating the people, they were cheating me. I was giving the right measure and the right price to the people but I didn't get the right weight from them.

Victoria: Were they an independent company or did they work for the government somehow?

Alfred: Oh no, they were independent, yeah, independent. And when I complained about it I couldn't find the... Clark said, "Well, I'm not the one that weigh your fish," he says. "Go and talk to this fellow." It was a Frenchman, I don't remember his name. I went there, to where they weigh the fish. It says, "FOR STAFF ONLY". I went in anyway and ask for the man that run the place. Well, they told me that he wasn't there. So I couldn't stay there any longer and wait for him, I had to go home because I was running a business.

Victoria: What is the most important things that mattered in your life, or people, whatever? What is the most important things about your life? Alfred: Well, it isn't money, that's one sure thing, because

I never... when I was doing a job I never thought of the money that I was earning. I was trying to do the work that I was doing as good as I could. I used to say that if he can do it, I can do it better, and I always did better. And I didn't want to be rich. I don't know what would be, what I could say, I guess...

Victoria: What about your family?

Alfred: My family, well, I didn't stay much with my family. I didn't stay much with my family.

Victoria: How about education, were they some of the imporant things?

Alfred: Oh yes, yes, I would have liked to be more educated. I would have liked to go to university. But there was no way of going to university, you see. I learned telegraph by myself, and I learned accounting by going to the business course in Prince Albert and that was by myself. And I had to earn the money to go there.

Victoria: What do you think is the most important need that they have in the north, or even in any native community?

Alfred: Yeah, education. I think it's education.

Victoria: Housing?

Alfred: Well housing, they did need housing very bad. But when I went to the north last time, well, the housing was pretty well licked. I didn't see any shacks any more like there used to be. If there is any, they're not in town, they must be out some place.

Victoria: The housing in the old days up north, was it poor?

Alfred: Oh, very poor. I mean, at the time it was the same like at Batoche, or they had here at the beginning, sod houses and that. But then it was (inaudible) maybe with an upstairs. They were the stereotype, you know, with an upstairs, two rooms upstairs, and with a lean-to behind for the kitchen -- they

were all the same.

Victoria: What do you think about medicine and that? Is it an important thing to have in the north?

Alfred: Oh yes, yes. I think we lost a lot of people by not having a doctor or a nurse. We lost a lot of babies and a lot of women died in giving birth, in labor. I think that's very important.

Victoria: When people got sick up there in the old days how did they bring them out, how did they get them to doctors?

Alfred: To the hospital you mean?

Victoria: Yeah, or in to a doctor or to the hospital. I imagine they would have to be pretty sick.

Alfred: Yeah. Yeah, you had to be pretty sick.

Victoria: Do you remember of any time where they had to bring them out?

Alfred: No, I don't think anybody went to the hospital from Beauval that I can remember. And with me, well, I was sick at the seminary, so the doctor came there. The doctor come there and look at me, and he said that I had T.B., and he made arrangements in here to get into the sanitorium. It was hard to get into a sanitorium because there was a long waiting list.

Victoria: How long did you have to wait?

Alfred: I didn't wait at all, they took me right away.

Victoria: They just sent you right in, eh?

Alfred: Yeah. They send me in and there was no bed in here. There was no bed, they put me in the hall.

Victoria: There was that many?

Alfred: Oh, it was full all the time, all the halls. At the end of each hall there was a bed. There was that many.

Victoria: Where were the people all from?

Alfred: It was right from around here, all white people. They didn't have no Indians, they didn't have no room for Indians, no. No half-breeds, I was the only half-breed in there.

Victoria: Well, why do you think that was?

Alfred: Well, because there were too many. They were dying. There were two or three dead every day, practically every day. It was something that had -- I don't know if it had been neglected or we didn't know, you know, when one family has it

they were giving it to the others. If one had it in one family it would infect the whole household.

Victoria: Why do you think there were more whites, though, than any native people?

Alfred: Well because they didn't go to the reserves. Even if they discovered T.B. in the reserve they had no place to send them.

Victoria: So I guess they just didn't bother.

Alfred: They were the last ones to be looked after. That's why now when there's T.B. it'll be in the reserve or in a remote area, because they looked after the white people first and the Indians the last. The last time I was here in the sanitorium in '67 it was all native from the north. There was one or two white people, the rest was all Indians. In Prince Albert it was the same. The last few years it was open it was all Indians.

Victoria: Do you think that native people, like, in the future now as things are changing, do you think it's going to be better for them in the north or in the cities, or out in the country some place?

Alfred: Yeah, I think it will be better all over. But I think education is what is going to improve their lot, but nothing else. If it stays like the way it is now, keeping them in ignorance, we'll have trouble in this province, because the Indian population is growing and then the white population is going down. So look at the cities now. Regina, there is a big native population, and in Saskatoon is the same. So they say that in so many years from now there will be more Indians or more natives in Regina and Saskatoon than white people.

Victoria: How do you see your future? Do you think it's going to improve, or...

Alfred: No, I'm going to be the same. Well I'm old now, you know, I can't get younger. I wish I could get younger.

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

Alfred: Okay.

(END OF SIDE A)
(END OF INTERVIEW)

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