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LANGHAM, SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of his life.

Judy: Today is April 17, 1984, and I am talking to Mr. Maurice Boyer. Mr. Boyer could you please describe to me the house that you grew up in?

Maurice: Well, what I remember most is the one right in Cochin. It was, it had a big livingroom and a big kitchen, and two bedrooms built off to one side. And we had beds in the basement for the boys. And we were right off Murray Lake. And it had a cottage roof on it, I remember that. It was a log house.

Judy: Did you have any running water or electricity?

Maurice: No. No, not for quite a few years.

Judy: How long did you live there for?

Maurice: Oh, we lived there for, oh, fourteen, fifteen years, I think.

Judy: And did you move to a city, or where else did you move to?

Maurice: Well, no, we... After I left there I went to work, I guess.

Judy: Can you describe to me the furniture that you had in your house at that time?

Maurice: Well, there's chesterfield and chairs, and some rocking chairs.

Judy: Was any of this furniture handmade or was it all store bought?

Maurice: It was all store bought, yeah.

Judy: Did your father own the house or the land that you lived in?

Maurice: He owned the house, but he didn't own the land. The house he bought, well, he built the house. They brought the logs down on the river from Onion Lake, on the Saskatchewan River to North Battleford.

Judy: Do you remember what year he built the house in?

Maurice: No, I don't. I was too young for that.

Judy: When you were young do you remember hearing the saying "road allowance" people?

Maurice: I've heard of it, yeah.

Judy: Can you tell me what that means to you?

Maurice: Well, to me it meant the people that didn't have any land and just built houses on road allowances. Get away from taxes and stuff, I guess, I don't know.

Judy: What were your chores as a young boy at home?

Maurice: Well, haul wood in, and milk cows, and cut wood, saw wood, chop wood down.

Judy: When you think of the word "family," who all did that include? Was that just your immediate family or did that include all your cousins and...?

Maurice: Well, grandparents and uncles and aunts, cousins.

Judy: Could you tell me how you remember your mother as being when you were growing up?

Maurice: Busy. (laughs) Twelve kids. (laughs) Yeah, there was, well, she was always doing something.

Judy: How about your father, how do you remember him?

Maurice: Well, when I was seven years old he had broken his hip and he was in the DVA Hospital from then until he died. So I don't remember too much about him being at home. He was in the hospital for years, in the DVA Hospital.

Judy: What types of jobs do you remember your father having before?

Maurice: Actually, he never. He was just was in the First World War and then... Well, I guess he did work some. Like I heard people talk about him working on farms and he had this, he couldn't be alone too long because he had what you call sleeping sickness and he could fall asleep anywhere, eh. He used to haul wood across the lake from Cochin to Meota in the wintertime and a couple of times while he was going across he'd fall asleep and the horses would turn around and come back to Cochin. Actually he couldn't work too much.

Judy: He was injured then in the War?

Maurice: Yes, he was gassed and shell shocked in the First War.

Judy: Do you remember if your parents ever had a garden?

Maurice: Yes, they had a big garden.

Judy: What sort of things did they grow in it?

Maurice: Well, there was one hell of a big potato patch, I remember. Well, pretty near all vegetables, you know, there's carrots, and beans, peas, and beets, and cucumbers, and...

Judy: You just mentioned that your father used to use a team of horses, did he own the team of horses?

Maurice: Yes, he did.

Judy: And did you have any other livestock?

Maurice: We used to have cattle, and chickens, pigs.

Judy: Do you remember how old you were when you got your first paying job?

Maurice: Oh, about sixteen, I guess. That was on a farm.

Judy: On a farm. Do you remember how much you were getting paid?

Maurice: I don't know, not very much. (laughs)

Judy: What other types of jobs have you had during your life?

Maurice: Well, I worked on farms, and constructions, building construction, road construction, and in the air force for three years, and then with the government insurance in the salvage division. That's where I'm employed now.

Judy: Do you remember what language was spoken in your parents' home when you were growing up?

Maurice: Well, when... my older sister and brother could only talk French before they went to school, and then from there on, well, the rest, like then the English kind of took over and we would... Well, my grandmother used to talk to us in French and we'd answer her in English.

Judy: What can you remember about the neighborhood in Cochin when you were growing up? Were there a lot of other Metis children around?

Maurice: Yes, there's quite a few, yeah. Well, Cochin was mostly Metis there.

Judy: So you had no problem fitting into the community?

Maurice: No, no, we never had no problem there.

Judy: When were you first aware of being Metis? Or did you even notice it?

Maurice: We never actually noticed it.

Judy: Do you think your parents were proud of being Metis?

Maurice: Yeah, they were proud.

Judy: Do you ever remember your grandparents, or other family members ever telling you stories about Metis history?

Maurice: Well, my grandmother used to talk about the rebellion there. She was there. She was only young but she remembered hiding in the church there when the rebellion was on. She used to talk about that once in a while. My grandfather, he was in the First War too. There was my grandfather, and my dad, and an uncle of mine were over at the same time. And then my uncle he, well, he died after, I don't know if it was over there but it was during the War anyway.

Judy: And your grandmother's and grandfather's names are?

Maurice: My grandfather's name was Jean Baptiste, and my grandmother's name was Virginia and she was a Nolan.

Judy: Do you remember the Metis families in your community ever getting together for holidays, or social events such as Christmas or New Year's?

Maurice: They used to have dances, yeah, New Year's. They'd have them at a school, and Christmas was pretty well family.

Judy: How about Easter, was there usually a big celebration?

Maurice: Well, that was pretty well family too, there was get-togethers.

Judy: Was jigging ever a part of the local dances there?

Maurice: Well, yeah. There was quite a bit of that there around Cochin; some pretty good jiggers come from there.

Judy: Do you know how to jig?

Maurice: No, if you get enough beer and wine in me I could jig a little bit, but I don't make sense to somebody else.

Judy: How about your parents, did they know how to jig?

Maurice: Oh, I got a daughter that jigs pretty good, and a brother, he was fairly good.

Judy: Did they ever play at the dance any Metis songs perhaps?

Maurice: Like what do you mean?

Judy: Well, some people now they call it the old time music.

Maurice: Oh yeah, my grandfather was a fiddle player and my dad used to play a little bit. And my grandfather he used to play at dances and... In fact I got a cousin, he plays right today at... I play the guitar with him so we started... Well, my cousin he played the fiddle. He started when he was about sixteen, I guess, when he started. He got a fiddle in November and he never knew how to play it and he played for dances New Year's Eve. He picked it up pretty fast.

Judy: Do you remember if your father or your grandfather ever wore a Metis sash?

Maurice: I don't remember, no.

Judy: Did your mother ever dress in the traditional Metis style, such as the long dress?

Maurice: Well, in her younger years I seen pictures of her with a dress like that, yeah. But I don't remember seeing her like, you know. I've seen pictures with her...

Judy: Before you were born?

Maurice: Must have been, yeah.

Judy: Did any of the elderly people in your family believe in and practise the traditional Indian religion?

Maurice: No, not that I know of, no.

Judy: How about the traditional Indian medicine?

Maurice: They never practised it but they knew of it.

Judy: They believed in it, though.

Maurice: Well, yeah, I think so. But we used to go right to Sundances and stuff in the reserve. See, there's two reserves up where we were living so when there was Sundance or something we'd all go up and take part in it.

Judy: When you went to school do you ever remember the white children perhaps in your school were teasing you because you were Metis?

Maurice: No, because they were scared of me. (laughs)

Judy: Do you have any memories of having to deal with unemployment or welfare perhaps, having any difficulties with them?

Maurice: Just unemployment insurance when I was working on construction.

Judy: They just gave you the general runaround?

Maurice: Yeah, quite a bit, yeah.

Judy: Do you remember if the church ever played an important role in your family's life?

Maurice: When I was young, yes, quite a bit. And as we grow older kind of grew away from it.

Judy: Did your parents attend church regularly?

Maurice: Yep.

Judy: Did the priest ever used to come and visit your home?

Maurice: Yes, they used to come quite often.

Judy: Do you remember what he talked about?

Maurice: Well I don't know, well, I don't actually remember, but he used to come for dinner, supper. Well, they're just

talking, joking a lot, you know.

Judy: Do you think the church has more or less influence today than it has in the past.

Maurice: Well, as far as I'm concerned it does.

Judy: It has more influence?

Maurice: It has less influence.

Judy: Why would you say that? Not as many people attending church?

Maurice: Well, yeah, there is quite a few things, I guess. I used to serve mass at church and I used to be a chauffeur for priests, and I... Overall found that -- seen quite a bit of things in it and it kind of put me away from it a little bit.

Judy: Do you think that the church has generally helped the Metis people face their problems?

Maurice: On some occasions I guess, yeah.

Judy: What do you remember about going to school?

Maurice: I didn't like it, that's what I remember. (laughs)

Judy: What do you remember about the school? Was it quite large or...?

Maurice: Yes, it was fairly large because I would say there was maybe forty kids in one room and it had to be a fairly big room.

Judy: Were the children ever segregated boys on one side, girls on the other?

Maurice: No.

Judy: What do you remember about your teachers?

Maurice: My teachers? Well, they were all fairly good teachers. We had one teacher, well, he used to use a janitor -- he'd make us -- you'd have to work. He made sure that one of us were bad to haul his wood in for him, made sure of that.

Judy: So you never had any problems with them?

Maurice: No, no.

Judy: Do you remember what types of subjects you were taught in school?

Maurice: Well, there was reading, writing, history, spelling, science, health. That's about all there is.

Judy: When you were taught history were you taught anything about Indian or Metis history?

Maurice: No, I don't think so, no.

Judy: What kind of things did you enjoy about school?

Maurice: I guess I enjoyed mathematics as far as the subjects were concerned, and recess, I liked that. (laughs)

Judy: I think we all did. Did your parents encourage you to do well in school?

Maurice: Well, yeah. You see my mother was alone, eh. Like my father was in the hospital, like I said, when I was seven. She had quite a chore, but she tried to get us to get an education.

Judy: At what age did you leave school?

Maurice: I was just about seventeen, I think.

Judy: For what reason did you leave school?

Maurice: My mother wanted me to keep going, but I didn't like it so I give it up.

Judy: Looking back at your school years that you attended, were the experiences at school good or bad for you?

Maurice: Well, it was good, yeah.

Judy: Do you remember what political parties your parents voted for?

Maurice: Well, them days, I don't know if they were forced to it, but it seemed like everybody was voting Liberal. They were Liberal for years and years as I remember.

Judy: Do you think the reason why they voted Liberal was because they thought it was the best party to represent the Metis people?

Maurice: I'm not too sure now why, but I know they, my grandfather, they were Liberals and my dad. Boy, if anybody voted something else they weren't on the right track. (laughs)

Judy: Do you know if the church was ever involved in politics?

Maurice: Not that I know of, I don't think so.

Judy: Do you remember anything about the Saskatchewan Metis Society in the 1930s and '40s?

Maurice: No that's...

Judy: Do you remember if your mother perhaps was ever involved in it?

Maurice: No, no, I don't think she was either.

Judy: How about your grandparents?

Maurice: Well, I don't know for sure.

Judy: How would you describe yourself as a person?

Maurice: (laughs) You should ask my wife that. (laughs)

Judy: Would you say you were hard-working?

Maurice: Average, at hard-working, average. (laughs)

Judy: When you look back at your life and everything that's happened in it, how would you describe your life? Was it a hard life?

Maurice: No, it wasn't hard, I don't think. It was average, I guess. I can't complain.

Judy: Do you feel that your life is better than that of your father's or grandfather's life?

Maurice: Oh well, my father's, yes. My grandfather, well he had a pretty good life, I guess. My father had been in the DVA Hospital for years, bedridden, so that's not a very good life.

Judy: What things matter most in your life?

Maurice: What matters most? My children.

Judy: What about religion or education?

Maurice: Oh, I'd be too old for that now.

Judy: How about financial security?

Maurice: (laughs) Been poor all my life, I guess I'm going to die that way.

Judy: What do you think the native community's most important problems are?

Maurice: The native community's? Oh, I don't know, alcoholism I guess, and money management.

Judy: What is it like for you as a man to be the centre of a family?

Maurice: What do you mean, like?

Judy: Like to have your wife depending on you, your

children.

Maurice: Proud, I guess.

Judy: Do you think your life would have been different if you would have been born white? Or perhaps full-blooded Indian?

Maurice: Oh, I don't know, I don't think so.

Judy: You think it would generally have gone along the same lines?

Maurice: Most likely, yeah.

Judy: If you had to be born again, would you do anything different?

Maurice: I'd pick a rich family. (laughs)

Judy: Would you choose to be a woman?

Maurice: No.

Judy: Why is that?

Maurice: I don't know, I'm happy to be a man.

Judy: How do you see your community's future?

Maurice: My community's future? I don't know. This community here?

Judy: Yes.

Maurice: Well, I don't know how long I'm going to be here, eh. I've only been here a year.

Judy: Oh, I see. Where were you living before you moved here?

Maurice: I was in Regina for two and a half years, and then I was in North Battleford before that with this S.G.I. Salvage.

Judy: What do you think the future of your children will be like?

Maurice: Well, I don't know. The way things are going now it don't look too good.

Judy: Is there anything else that you would like to discuss with me in this interview?

Maurice: Well, not that I can think of. Most likely if you have more questions...

Judy: Well, I'll ask you a few of these other ones then. Can you describe to me an ordinary day as a young boy as you remember during the summer?

Maurice: In the summertime?

Judy: Yeah.

Maurice: Well, it's not hard to do that. We lived by a lake and we were either fishing, or swimming, or boating or something.

Judy: Sounds like fun. How about as you got older, as a young man, say about twenty-five? Do you remember what an ordinary day was like then?

Maurice: Well, twenty-five I was married and I was working.

Judy: So you had a lot more responsibilities.

Maurice: Yeah, and a few parties on weekends.

Judy: When you grew up and raised a family of your own did things change for you much?

Maurice: Not really, no.

Judy: So things didn't in general get better or worse, they just more or less stayed the same?

Maurice: Yeah.

Judy: Are there any other family members that you especially remember besides your mother and father, and brothers?

Maurice: No, not really.

Judy: Just who you've mentioned so far?

Maurice: Yeah.

Judy: Do you remember your family having a strong family loyalty, sticking up for each other no matter what happens?

Maurice: Yes, I think they did, yeah.

Judy: Okay, that's about all I have to ask you, and that just about covers everything. Okay, thank you for your cooperation.

Maurice: It's my pleasure.

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