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MARTENSVILLE, SASKATCHEWAN
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MARTENSVILLE, SASKATCHEWAN
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INTERVIEWER: JUDY M. THIBODEAU
INTERPRETER:
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- responds in some detail to questions about experiences related to home, work and social situations.

Judy: Today is March 5, 1984, and I'm at the home of Mr. Felix Boyer in Martensville, Saskatchewan. Mr. Boyer, how do you see yourself as a person?

Felix: What do you mean?

Judy: How would you describe yourself: hardworking, honest?

Felix: Well, I just wish I had my health. If I had my health I could be working, eh.

Judy: When you look back at your life and everything that has happened in it, how would you describe your life? Has it been a hard life? A good life?

Felix: Yeah, hard.

Judy: Do you think your life is better than your father's life?

Felix: Oh, I don't know. He had a pretty hard life too.

Judy: How about your grandfather's life?

Felix: My grandfather I never knew.

Judy: What things in your life have mattered the most to you?

Felix: Well, most is my health, eh. I don't have my health -- like, I'm always under a doctor's care.

Judy: What about religion, has that mattered in your life?

Felix: Well I go to church once in a while.

Judy: What do you see as the native community's most important problems?

Felix: Well, I don't know. A lot of places is their housing, eh, their houses, the way they're living. A lot of them have got poor houses. But then now it's not getting too bad because there's a lot of them getting new homes, eh.

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

Felix: To be the head of the family?

Judy: Yes.

Felix: Well, not working for one thing it's bad. At least before when I used to work it wasn't so bad, eh; now can't work. And the pension they give you isn't very much.

Judy: Do you think it would be different for you if you were a white person?

Felix: No.

Judy: How about if you were a treaty person?

Felix: I don't think it would make a difference.

Judy: If you had a chance to be born again what would you do differently?

Felix: Well, one thing I know that I'd do differently is find a good job. Not like before, like I says, in my young days there is no work -- well, there's work but it's all hard labor, poor wages.

Judy: Would you choose to be a woman?

Felix: No.

Judy: Why?

Felix: They have got enough problems themselves without me being a woman. No, I'm glad of what I am and...

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

Felix: Well, the way this world's going today I don't know what... they're the ones that are going to suffer later on when they get older.

Judy: Where do you think native people will have a better future: in the city, the north, in the country?

Felix: Well, in the country I think they'd have a better future. They got the city beat. Well, the north country's not bad either -- things are more... More things they can do in the north, they can go hunting any time they want, fish.

Judy: When you were growing up, describe to me an ordinary day as a little boy that you remember, what you would do during the day.

Felix: Well, we went to school and then after school had to come home and work. The only free time we had we always had to work.

Judy: And that was around the farm?

Felix: Around the farm, yeah, around home.

Judy: Describe to me the home you grew up in, the furniture that was in it.

Felix: Well, we didn't have too much furniture. Just what, you know, mostly chairs, tables and beds mostly all we had, and a radio.

Judy: Were they store bought or were they hand made?

Felix: Some of it was hand made.

Judy: How about your house, what was it made out of?

Felix: Oh, we had an old log house.

Judy: Did it have a wooden floor?

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: How about running water or electricity?

Felix: No, we hauled water with a pail.

Judy: How was it heated? By wood or oil?

Felix: Wood.

Judy: Where was it located at?

Felix: St. Laurent, right about the river, above the prairie there.

Judy: How close was your nearest neighbor?

Felix: Oh, quarter of a mile, I guess.

Judy: When you were growing up do you remember hearing the term "road allowance people," and what did that mean to you?

Felix: Well, it was just a place, some place to stay where they didn't have to pay nothing. Just move there, build there; had no rent to pay or nothing.

Judy: When you grew up and raised a family of your own did things change for you, and if so how did they change?

Felix: Well, I had lots more responsibility when you start having kids there, married. Had to work all the time then, that much harder.

Judy: In general do you think things got better or worse?

Felix: Oh, sometimes it wasn't bad, but you had the good and bad together.

Judy: What do you remember as your chores at home?

Felix: Sawing wood, hauling water.

Judy: How about your brothers' and sisters' chores. Were they much different than yours?

Felix: No, they were all helping.

Judy: Did your family do special things together, like berry picking, or camping, hunting?

Felix: Yeah, picking berries. My dad couldn't work at all in his last few years. I had to do... I start working, I quit school and start working when I was twelve years old. I had to support the whole family then.

Judy: When you were young and you thought of the word "family," who all did that include? Did that include your aunts, your uncles?

Felix: No, it was just mom and dad and the kids.

Judy: How do you remember your mother?

Felix: Well, she's eighty-four years old now I think and she's in better shape than I am. She can go for a walk, go anyplace, you know, she stays by herself.

Judy: How about your father?

Felix: Oh, he died when he was fifty-nine years old.

Judy: How do you remember him as being?

Felix: Well, he was a jolly old guy. Then he had asthma so bad that that's what killed him. Couldn't even walk from here to the next building in the wintertime.

Judy: Are there any other family members that you remember especially?

Felix: I lost my brother here a couple of years ago. Well, me and him got along with, we was (inaudible) together.

Judy: Do you remember having strong family loyalty? Did you stick up for each other no matter what happened?

Felix: Oh, at times. But then I was mostly on my own all the time, you know. I didn't interfere with too much with some of the other kids, I was mostly by myself.

Judy: What do you remember your father doing for a living?

Felix: Farmed a little bit and that's about all he done that I can remember of.

Judy: Did he try to earn money in other ways such as maybe selling firewood?

Felix: Oh yeah. They used to make lime when we used to stay in Wood Hill, and then they'd sell that.

Judy: What did they use that for?

Felix: Whitewash your house instead of paint. That was our paint -- whitewash.

Judy: Do you remember your parents having a garden?

Felix: Yep. Grew enough stuff for us to eat, for our own use.

Judy: Did you have any livestock? A horse and a wagon?

Felix: Oh yeah, we had horses, wagons, few head of cattle.

Judy: Do you remember your father being unemployed certain times in his life?

Felix: Oh yeah, he didn't work too much, you know, he was...

Judy: How did that affect the family?

Felix: Well it was hard times. We had to make do with what we had. A lot of times we went without things we didn't have. Couldn't afford to get nothing.

Judy: What did your uncles or perhaps some of the other Metis people in that area do for a living?

Felix: Well, I was awful young when I left there, you know, I was two years old when I left St. Laurent.

Judy: So you don't remember too much of what they did?

Felix: No.

Judy: How old were you when you first got your first main job?

Felix: I think I was about ten years old.

Judy: What type of job was it?

Felix: Picking roots, picking rocks.

Judy: How much did you get paid for that?

Felix: A dollar and a half a day I think.

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

Felix: Well, I worked at the dam here at Outlook there for a while when it first opened up. I worked there -- I didn't work there too long because I had a heart attack up there -- had to quit. And then I was staying in Meadow Lake then, then we moved to Prince Albert, then I start seeing a doctor and they found out I had heart trouble, so they made arrangements for me to go to Rochester for a heart operation. That was 1964 when I went for heart surgery.

Judy: So then you experienced a lot of unemployment then?

Felix: Oh yeah. And I haven't worked since 1964, I haven't worked since.

Judy: What kinds of work do you remember the other Metis people, your age, doing during the same period?

Felix: Well, some of them work in the bush cutting lumber,

cutting posts.

Judy: What language was spoken in your parent's home when you were growing up?

Felix: French.

Judy: Were any other languages spoken?

Felix: English.

Judy: What was the first language you learned?

Felix: French. Well, yeah, it must be French -- talked French and English all the time, eh.

Judy: When were you first aware of being Metis?

Felix: Well, ever since I could remember.

Judy: How often did your parents think and speak of themselves as Metis?

Felix: Oh, quite a bit.

Judy: So they were proud of being Metis?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: What about other Metis families that you knew of, did they express pride in being Metis?

Felix: Oh yeah, they were proud of being a Metis.

Judy: Do you remember your parents or perhaps your grandparents, or uncles ever telling stories about Metis history?

Felix: No, not too much.

Judy: Do you remember the Metis families in your community getting together for social events?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: How about weddings and parties?

Felix: Weddings, stuff like that.

Judy: How about holidays?

Felix: Didn't have too much holidays, we couldn't afford holidays.

Judy: How about New Year's Day especially?

Felix: Well, it used to be quite an event at one time. They

used to celebrate, you know, for over a week, some of the Metis people, like us, you know.

Judy: In what ways did you celebrate?

Felix: Oh, go from house to house, visiting. And had parties just about every night, dance every night just about.

Judy: Do you remember your father ever wearing a Metis sash, or other traditional Metis clothing?

Felix: No.

Judy: How about your mother, do you remember her wearing any traditional clothing?

Felix: No.

Judy: Did your parents know how to jig?

Felix: Yeah. Dad used to, I know that. Well, dad used to be a violin player.

Judy: Did they teach you how to jig?

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: So jigging was a regular part of the local dances?

Felix: Oh yeah. Every time he went to a party they would jig.

Judy: Do you remember your father playing any Metis songs?

Felix: See, dad used to play for dances a lot, eh. He used to be the violin player for all the parties.

Judy: So what type of songs do you remember him playing?

Felix: Oh, he used to play all the old time music.

Judy: Did any white relatives live in your community?

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: What was your family's relationship with them?

Felix: They were good.

Judy: So they fit right in with the family?

Felix: Oh yeah, I got along with the white people.

Judy: Do you remember any of the elders in your family believing in and practising the traditional Indian medicine?

Felix: No.

Judy: Do you remember them every using sweat lodges?

Felix: No.

Judy: Do you remember any illnesses in that day, perhaps tuberculosis?

Felix: Yeah, T.B.

Judy: Do you remember how it was cured?

Felix: No, I think we lost two or three kids with T.B.

Judy: In your family?

Felix: Yeah, like brothers and sister.

Judy: And what happened, were they taken away to a hospital?

Felix: No, we couldn't get them in the hospital that time.

Judy: So it was just at home and your mother was treating them, or did the doctor come in?

Felix: No, just mother and grandmother.

Judy: When you moved into a city, say perhaps Saskatoon here, did your living standard increase or decrease? Did things get better or worse?

Felix: Oh, got better. You see, because after I moved from P.A. to Saskatoon, I don't know, some reason things seemed to have got better for us.

Judy: Did your ties with other Metis people, did they get stronger or weaker?

Felix: Oh, I don't know, I think about the average.

Judy: How would you describe the Metis community in Saskatoon, or here in Martensville?

Felix: Oh, it's not bad here, I would say for the amount of Metis, there's not too many here. But then we get along with all these people in Martensville, they're an awful nice community, nice people.

Judy: When you were growing up did your family get along with the white community?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: You never experienced any problems with them?

Felix: No.

Judy: When you were young did white kids every call you names because you were Metis?

Felix: No.

Judy: You never had any problems?

Felix: No.

Judy: Did you or any other Metis people that you remember receive less pay for doing the same type of work as a white person would do, that you know of?

Felix: Not that I know of.

Judy: Were you ever denied a job because you were Metis?

Felix: No.

Judy: Did you feel comfortable when you went into the stores in cities, perhaps for the first time when you went to a large store, where there was a lot of white people?

Felix: No, that's one thing that never did bother me.

Judy: It never bothered you?

Felix: No.

Judy: Did the city authorities such as the police treat your family fairly? Did you have any problems with them?

Felix: No.

Judy: Tell me some of your memories of dealing with the government such as the welfare, or unemployment insurance.

Felix: I only drew unemployment once in my life.

Judy: Did you have any problems with that?

Felix: Yeah, I had a lot of problem getting it.

Judy: What things were wrong?

Felix: It took so long to get my stamps, and then anyhow I only drew it for about six months. That's the only time I drew it in my life.

Judy: How about with welfare? Did you have any problems with them?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: What type of problems did you have?

Felix: Well, they just barely give you enough to live. And... well, there's always problem with welfare, you always, never give you enough to live and, you know, got to see them for something all the time if you want something more.

Judy: How about places of business such as the supermaket or a bank, do you ever have any problems with them?

Felix: No.

Judy: Did any of the towns that you moved to try and force the Metis people to move away?

Felix: No. No, wherever we moved we stayed, we always got along with people there. You know, we just seemed to fit right in there.

Judy: Did the church play an imporant role in your parents' life?

Felix: Well, they were good church-goers, eh.

Judy: Did they get a chance to attend church regularly?

Felix: No, they couldn't because it's too far away from the church. I think it was about eighteen miles to the church.

Judy: But they were still pretty, they had strong faith?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: How about in your life, did it play an important role?

Felix: Yeah, I go to church whenever I can.

Judy: Do you remember the priest ever visiting your home?

Felix: Well, couple of priests used to come and visit us all the time.

Judy: What did they used to talk about?

Felix: Well, about religion, make sure, see that you'd go to church all the time, eh.

Judy: So it had to do with things in regards to the church?

Felix: Well, be a good believer in church.

Judy: Did your belief in the church ever get weaker?

Felix: No.

Judy: No, it remained strong?

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: Do you think the church has more or less influence today than it did before?

Felix: Well, it seems to me there is less people going to church nowadays than there used to, years back. I don't know why, but...

Judy: Is that just Metis people, or just people in general?

Felix: People in general, I guess.

Judy: So you think that perhaps the church doesn't have as strong an influence as it once did?

Felix: No, I don't think so.

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

Felix: Oh I think so. The older generation anyways. I look at the younger generation now, it's... I don't know, changing so much, eh.

Judy: What do you remember about going to school?

Felix: I didn't like my teacher when I went there.

Judy: Was she a nun or just a...?

Felix: No, a woman teacher, a man teacher.

Judy: Why didn't you like them?

Felix: I don't know, bad boy, I guess.

Judy: What was the schools that you went to? What were they like?

Felix: Oh, not bad. It was a country school, eh. The only problem, I think, was that we had five miles to walk to school.

Judy: So were the children ever segregated, like boys on one side, girls on one side.

Felix: No, they all played together.

Judy: Were you allowed to speak, say perhaps French in school?

Felix: No.

Judy: There was just English?

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: What kind of things do you remember being taught in school?

Felix: Fighting once in a while.

Judy: How about the subjects of arithmetic, English...?

Felix: Oh, I was no good in that, I didn't like that arithmetic.

Judy: But they taught you things like that?

Felix: Oh yeah.

Judy: Did they ever teach you anything about Metis or Indian history?

Felix: No. Not in them days.

Judy: Did you feel that you belonged in school, or were you uncomfortable there?

Felix: Oh, I didn't like school. Like I said, school was nice but I didn't like it.

Judy: Did you like anything about it?

Felix: No.

Judy: How did the white kids treat you in school?

Felix: Good.

Judy: You never had any problems with them?

Felix: No.

Judy: So looking back at your school years, would you say they were good or bad years?

Felix: Oh, they were good years for the length of time I went to school.

Judy: What political party did your parents vote for?

Felix: I think they vote Conservative, I think.

Judy: Did they get involved with the parties, or did they just vote?

Felix: No, they just vote.

Judy: Who influenced them to vote the way they did? Did they just decide on themselves or did the other people get together?

Felix: I guess so, yeah.

Judy: Do you remember any politicians visiting your home?

Felix: No.

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

Felix: No.

Judy: What did most of the Metis people in your parents' day think about politics?

Felix: I don't know what they thought about it, they just went and vote and then there was no more said about it hardly.

Judy: Did they ever feel like they got the results that they wanted, the party they voted for?

Felix: Sometimes.

Judy: Do you feel like talking about the way you voted over the years?

Felix: I go and vote and that's about it.

Judy: Do you vote the same as your parents?

Felix: No.

Judy: Do you get involved in the parties, or do you just go and vote?

Felix: No. One is enough in there already. (laughs)

Judy: Did the Metis generally see one party as doing the best for all of the Metis people?

Felix: Oh, I don't know. People is never satisfied no matter who gets in.

Judy: Were you ever involved in the Saskatchewan Metis Society?

Felix: Yeah, I used to work for them like, you know, up in Batoche there.

Judy: What year was that in?

Felix: When it first started there. It would be what... Batoche started.

Judy: In the late '60s, or the early '70s?

Felix: No, in the late '70s.

Judy: How about... do you remember your parents ever being involved in the Metis Society, say in the 1930s, '40s?

Felix: I couldn't say.

Judy: What do you remember about that organization, the Metis Society?

Felix: Well ever since that Batoche started, I haven't missed one year there yet. And I worked just about every year we go there, eh. And when I go there, I'm the first one there and the last one out.

Judy: What did it try to do for the Metis people? Say in regards to Batoche.

Felix: Just lately now or years back?

Judy: Just lately or years back.

Felix: Oh, I don't know.

Judy: Do you think with this Batoche thing they're starting to build up their pride in being Metis once again.

Felix: It looks that way.

Judy: Do you think they are accomplishing it?

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Judy: So we've come quite far you figure since we've been able to get ahold of the Batoche area.

Felix: Yeah.

Judy: What do you feel about the future development in Batoche?

Felix: Oh, I guess pretty good.

Judy: In some of the meetings that you've went to perhaps, do you remember discrimination ever being talked about?

Felix: Sometimes.

Judy: What sort of things were brought up?

Felix: Different things.

Judy: Were jobs ever talked about?

Felix: By some people.

Judy: Do you remember ever hearing perhaps for yourself, or

from your parents, the names of perhaps Joe LaRocque?

Felix: No. The only one dad, you know, used to talk about was Louis Riel and them guys, eh, Dumont.

Judy: So you never heard of any... perhaps of the people that first organized the Saskatchewan Native Society?

Felix: No.

Judy: Sol Pritchard perhaps?

Felix: No.

Judy: Joe Ross? Tom Major?

Felix: No, never heard of them guys.

Judy: Okay, I'd like to thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Boyer.

Felix: You should go see Morrison.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)

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