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EMILY NORRIS ROEHL

Mrs. Roehl is a Metis from the Edmonton region of Alberta. Her mother was Cree and her father a wealthy and successful Scottish businessman. She is the sister of Malcolm Norris.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Growing up in the Norris family.
- The death of Norris Senior and the effect of this on the rest of the family.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Emily Norris Roehl is the older sister of Malcolm Norris. In this interview she talks about life in their family in the early 1900s in Edmonton - the relationships between family members; Malcolm as a young man; the hardships suffered after the death of their father and Malcolm's early identification with the underprivileged.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I sort of divided it up into various sections. I'm interested in your father a great deal. You mentioned that most often your big oval table was filled with people who weren't necessarily members of the family but visitors. I'm

wondering what types of people would come. Were they friends of your father, business men, native people? I'm just trying to get an impression of what kinds of people might be visiting.

Emily: Well, there were lots of different kinds of peoples. There would be a Mr. Lee, who was a lawyer, and a Mr. Gibbons, who was a very old friend and an old-timer like my father was. And there was Kirkpatrick, who was manager of the bank. And these people didn't come socially, they just came to see my father, you see. There was an awful lot of people that came. And, of course, I was only ten.

Murray: Right. So your memory might be a little fuzzy.

Emily: Hazy. And besides, I perhaps am not putting the proper value on these people or who they were, or what they were there for.

Murray: Right.

Emily: But it was always a very friendly sort of thing and the house was always filled with people.

Murray: Right.

Emily: And while my father lived, our dining room, which is quite a large room, was constantly filled with people. I don't think we ever sat down to a meal with just the family. There were always other people there. Of course my mother always had a girl to help do this, and there was always a man who took care of the horses and things.

Murray: They stayed with the family right at the house did they?

Emily: Pardon?

Murray: Did the servants stay in the house?

Emily: Well now, we didn't consider them servants.

Murray: I see.

Emily: No, in those days I don't think people did. The girl was designated as the hired girl, but she was usually just part of the family, you know.

Murray: Right. So she wasn't treated any differently from anyone else?

Emily: No. Not at all. And I think the hired man sat down at the table with the rest of the family, but the girl did not because she served.

Murray: Right.

Emily: You see, and that's the way it was.

Murray: Right. Your father was obviously fairly prominent as a business man, do you think a lot of the people - and you've described some of them - would have been equally prominent in Edmonton affairs, I suppose, then?

Emily: Yes, I think they would have been. Now when he had this partnership on Third or Fourth Street, that was, of course, before my time. He had sold that out before my time. Now I knew him, of course, as an old man because he was seventy-five when I was born.

Murray: Right.

Emily: And he no longer was in business. But he had a great many holdings, a great deal of land, you know, and then he farmed and various farm projects. Of course his older boys were mostly farmers. They had land which originally belonged to him.

Murray: So how would you describe the family in terms of the rest of Edmonton society? He was quite a wealthy man.

Emily: Yes, he was. But now we were not social at all - we were not social. I think perhaps because my mother was a Metis there was a stigma, and she was not socially accepted, you see.

Murray: Right.

Emily: But I don't think that our family cared because we were not social people, don't you see. We didn't feel as though we were left out of anything. It didn't hurt us at all.

Murray: Your father, certainly from what you've said, had no ill feelings towards native people?

Emily: No, no, none at all. He had no ill feelings towards anybody. There is a family story where he had a Negro, and in those days, of course, Edmonton had very few Negro people. And once, when all these people sat down at the same table and somebody criticized the fact that this Negro was sitting there, he said, "Well, anybody who objects may draw their paycheque and leave." And, of course they all went on with the meal.

Murray: Right. (laughs) Their principles weren't so strong as their need for money.

Emily: Yes, but he had no prejudices against anybody. He was a Protestant and my mother was a Catholic and he donated a great deal of money - both to the Catholics and to the Protestant churches. Also, his taxes were divided between the public schools and the separate schools, which was allowed in those days. You could pay your taxes wherever you pleased.

Murray: Right. I noticed in your letter you mentioned that you were always proud of your Indian ancestry. Was it encouraged from both parents?

Emily: Yes, I think so. It wasn't a stressed thing. It was just something that we knew we were, and accepted, and we didn't feel any shame about it, I'm sure. In fact, we were very proud of the fact. And my mother told us wonderful stories about the things that her father did. Of course he died too, before I was born.

Murray: Right. I'm a bit hazy about her father's background and her mother's. Were any of her Indian or Metis ancestors involved in the two rebellions at all, or were they connected with that?

Emily: Well now, I can not tell you that as an absolute fact, but I think perhaps some of her people must have been. Because the Riel story was told in our family a great many times. It was something that we also knew and understood and lived with.

Murray: Another thing you were proud of?

Emily: Pardon?

Murray: And it was a thing that you looked upon as being positive from the point of view of the native people?

Emily: That's right. It was a positive thing. It was something that we were proud of, that there was somebody big enough to defend a lesser people.

Murray: And that was part of your father's principles too, was to defend the underdog?

Emily: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. Although I do think that my father gained a great deal by that Riel rebellion because these people were given scrips, which entitled them to 160 acres of land or homestead rights. And I think that since these people thought all the prairies belonged to them and they were not going to be happy with a postage sized piece of ground, they sold this right for almost anything.

Murray: Not expecting that they would be a disenfranchised completely?

Emily: That's true.

Murray: Right. Now you've mentioned that your father probably bought up some of this. Did he feel badly about that at all, because some native people were robbed of their scrip?

Emily: Well, yes. Yes, I can remember my father saying that it was very sad that these people couldn't do more with it. Because a white man would take this 160 acres and make a living, but the Indians, or the halfbreeds too, were not

farming people.

Murray: Right.

Emily: And in those days the prairie was still wide open and hunting was good, and trapping was good, which they did in the wintertime.

Murray: So 160 acres as far as hunting was concerned was nothing to them.

Emily: That's right.

Murray: So they would just sell it for what they could get.

Emily: That's right, that's exactly it. And he did profit by it because there it was and somebody else would have got it if he didn't, you know. And other people did.

Murray: He had a substantial amount of land then did he when he died, or during the time he was active?

Emily: Yes. I think he had quite a substantial amount of land when he died. I remember that there was a great big holding in the Black Mud area bought by people called Billsborough. Well, he died in 1915 and his estate was not closed until about '39 or '40, which was a good many years. And in the process of this, all of these land holdings were sold. He did have land that he had sold, but in which he retained his mineral rights. And these, of course, were eventually sold and this money was divided among us, the four of us and the living older children. And when the older children were not living, their children profited by this. He did disinherit two of his older boys and gave their shares to their children, which would be his grandchildren.

Murray: I'm getting back for a second to his sort of defense of the underdog. Was this a principle that he tried to instill in the children or was it just picked up by you naturally, by example?

Emily: No, I think this was instilled in us by both my mother and my father. We were never allowed to downgrade anybody, you know. And our home and our table was always open to anyone who came to the door. I remember one particular time because it made an impression on a small girl. We had a man come to the door who was, well you'd call him a hobo I suppose. Anyway, he was hungry, and he sat down at the table and had dinner with us. And I remember this man who wasn't very clean and who my mother asked to wash (laughs), but he sat with the family at the table and he ate more food than anybody I had ever seen. And I think that's why that particular incident is in my mind.

Murray: Right. He probably thought he might not get another meal as good as that for a while.

Emily: Well, it could very well be. Hungry. And these are the things that he commonly did. Nobody was ever turned away, and nobody was ever considered...

Murray: Too low or something.

Emily: (Inaudible)

Murray: Yeah, right.

Emily: You know, it is possible that Malcolm drew his humanitarian outlook on life from these things.

Murray: I'm sure they must have had an effect on him.

Emily: Yes, I'm sure it did. He was always a great fighter for the underdog.

Murray: Malcolm and your father?

Emily: Yes, that is true.

Murray: He was about eighty-five, I guess, when he died then.

Emily: Yes, he was.

Murray: He still had an active mind at that time, did he?

Emily: Oh very, very, very active. I remember that I used to read to him. Now in his bedroom he had a huge brass bed and it was covered with a rug made out of plucked beaver. Oh, it was the joy of my life as a child. It was so beautiful and soft, you know. And I would lay beside him and read him the newspaper and he would make comments, sometimes laugh at the way I pronounced words and that sort of thing. But, you know, he was illiterate.

Murray: Oh I see, I didn't realize that. That's right, you did mention that. He didn't have an education.

Emily: None at all. He was completely illiterate and this, I think, is why that his stress for education was always such a very great thing.

Murray: That was so common in those days too, I think.

Emily: Yes, it was, quite common. And since he came from the northern part of Scotland, a place called Caithness, and in those days he probably came from a but and ben, which is a little tiny farm, much like the sharecroppers here. We don't know that, of course. This is just guessing.

Murray: Speculation, right.

Emily: Yeah, yeah. We have no idea of what kind of people

his were, because we never knew anybody that was his. At least I never did.

Murray: I have spoken to Betty and to Pauline, and one of them (and I can't recall which) mentioned to me that they felt - and I'm not sure if Malcolm told them this or whether they assumed this - that Malcolm had felt his father had favored Tom in some way over him, and this had bothered him. Do you recall this at all?

Emily: Well, no, I don't recollect that as we grew up as children. However, Tom was a very cheerful, happy-go-lucky sort of person. Not as brilliant as Malcolm. Malcolm was a very serious person, and he had a tremendously brilliant mind because he was through school when he was... well, father died when he was fifteen and, of course, he could no longer go to the Jesuit College. But he never went to a public school because he was always smarter than anybody else.

Murray: Right.

Emily: And I think perhaps my father enjoyed Tom's easygoing sort of way and he always was laughing and had lots of friends and had chums. Where Malcolm was a loner.

Murray: And perhaps wanted recognition from your father and felt that he didn't get it even if your father did admire him.

Emily: That's true, that's true. I think my father admired him very greatly, and I think that if Malcolm had been born to him in a younger time, when he was a younger man and needed this kind of intelligence, that Malcolm would have been very useful to him. But this didn't happen. And my father's older boys, as I said, were farmers. But he educated one boy to be a lawyer, who was an absolute rake - a drunkard. Now this is not being derogatory, this is just a simple fact.

Murray: Right.

Emily: That's the way it was. Of course, these people are all dead now.

Murray: I'm wondering if you could describe the kinds of conversations Malcolm might have with his father? I know that's a pretty tough question. If you could describe a bit of their relationship to me, so I get a feeling for how they might have related. Or did they? Maybe this is part of Malcolm's feelings about...

Emily: Well, I think perhaps that they didn't relate with each other enough. I think that Malcolm, being rather quick-tempered and a forceful person, would get impatient and perhaps leave, where Tom didn't, you see. And this perhaps is the thing that Malcolm felt after he'd grown up and was looking back on the situation. Tommy was always easier to live with

than Malcolm.

Murray: Right, Malcolm had a reputation for being hard to live with.

Emily: Oh very, very hard to live with even at home because his standards were high and because he had such a quick mind, he grasped things before any of the rest of us did, I guess.

Murray: And was impatient when you didn't grasp them as quickly?

Emily: He was very, very impatient and very cross at times. I think that Malcolm and I were closer than the rest of the family. I don't know why really, but I know that he never failed but to write to me very often all through the years when I didn't contact any of my family. When I was here and they were in Canada.

Murray: So he felt that tie with you?

Emily: Yes.

Murray: But perhaps not with the other two people in the family.

Emily: Yes. He didn't have the same tie with Tom or Jessie.

Murray: Did he feel sort of an intellectual tie with you perhaps, an interest in reading and that sort of thing?

Emily: Well, that might be, because I know as a youngster Malcolm and I did quite a lot of arguing. I didn't always agree with the things that he would say and maybe I was the only one who had courage enough to dispute what he had to say. The rest of the family just went along.

Murray: Right. Because they didn't want the conflict?

Emily: Right, right, or they couldn't handle the conflict, perhaps. I really don't know.

Murray: Of course, Malcolm in later years, obviously politics was almost his whole life. What kinds of things interested him in school? Was he interested in history and that sort of thing that early or was that a later development?

Emily: No, he was always very interested in history. This I am quite sure of. He liked people and he liked the things about people, and I remember that he and I both liked magazines that told us about different countries and different peoples and different cultures. This sort of thing he liked.

Murray: What other interests did he have? I think you've sort of described it in your letter that he was a loner and he didn't have that many friends. So you wouldn't describe him as a typical adolescent then?

Emily: No, I wouldn't. He never was really a boy, he was always more like a man. And I seem to come under that category of being a loner, too. Because I saw my sister about a year ago and she said, "Well, you and Malcolm you were always the loners." And this is true. We didn't make really close friends with anybody. Perhaps this is why we were close to each other. But I remember that he and Tom - speaking of children must play - and they would play marbles, you know. But they never got along. They would invariably end up in an argument and my mother would have to referee.

Murray: Yeah, you just jogged my memory. I think it was Pauline who told me that Malcolm was once very upset with his father because Tom was bigger than he, and his father had allowed them to fight and Tom beat him up.

Emily: Beat him up?

Murray: Do you recall that story at all?

Emily: (laughs) Well yes, there's a certain amount of truth in that. They had been bickering for a very long time and in order to end this thing my father said, "Okay, now you two guys just fight it out. Whoever wins and that will be that." And Malcolm lost. And Malcolm couldn't stand such a terrific wounding to his ego. He was a very egotistical person.

Murray: And he would have resented the physical determination of an argument rather than the intellectual, I suppose?

Emily: Yeah, yes, I think that's true.

Murray: And your father's background would have dictated that he would see a physical fight as being the way to settle this thing.

Emily: That's right. That's right. And Tom had exactly the same sort of physique that my father had. He was rather a short man but a very strong man.

Murray: A typical Scottish sort of build, I suppose.

Emily: Exactly. Very strong people physically. Now my father had a brilliant mind and he was a keen mathematician, and he used his hands like the Chinese use an abacus, you know. One finger would be ten and he would multiply by it from that. And it was amazing how he could add up almost any score.

Murray: Just by his own method?

Emily: Right.

Murray: Right.

Emily: It was his own method.

Murray: You did mention in your letter that all the children admired and were proud of your father.

Could you elaborate on that a bit for me? I mean, I can understand, already, some of it.

Emily: Well, he was a magnificent storyteller, you know. He told us stories about Scotland and he told us about how he came across on a little sailing boat which took six weeks. And, well, we just liked to sit and listen to him, you know. He had a lot of comments to make about everything. He was really a very interesting sort of person so... I can't elaborate exactly, because remember I'm only ten.

Murray: Right, right. I would hate anybody to ask me what I recall from the time I was ten.

Emily: Yes.

Murray: But obviously you would have admired him too for his humanitarianism and his kindness.

Emily: Oh, yeah. We admired him for that. He was a very fair, just man. He was a hard man, though, that you had to abide by his rules, but he was fair, absolutely fair. He treated everybody as near alike as it was possible to do.

Murray: Right. He would have been in the European tradition of families then, I suppose?

Emily: I suppose, yes.

Murray: In that he was the ruler of the house and that was to be accepted by his wife and his children.

Emily: Oh yes, very definitely. And we were not a religious family. My mother was a very, very devout person, and we all were very devout, or very, very good about going to church and catechism and all this sort of thing. But my father did not go to church. He was a Protestant, and his two best friends were Dr. McQueen, who was an Episcopalian bishop and, of course, Father Lacombe. Father Lacombe came to our house quite often.

Murray: I see. I didn't realize that.

Emily: My mother's friend, too.

Murray: Your father was then basically areligious and didn't have any strong feelings one way or the other about you getting a Catholic education?

Emily: That's right. My mother, of course, believed there was nothing on earth except to be a Catholic, and to abide by

Catholic rules.

Murray: Right, right.

Emily: And then there's a human interest story attached to that, but it doesn't concern this particular...

Murray: Well, I wish we had more time. Sometime when I'm in California, if I am in there, I'll look you up.

Emily: No. I was in Saskatoon in the first week in June. If I'd have known about you then I would have called on you.

Murray: Oh really, isn't that a pity. (laughs)

Emily: But you never know these things.

Murray: That's right. That's right. Well, I've been to California twice, so I expect I'll get there again.

Emily: Well, you're perfectly welcome to come call on us anytime that you are here.

Murray: I would really like to meet you. Now your mother was a strong Catholic. She strikes me as being a strong person in her own right as well.

Emily: Oh yes, very. She was a very strong person in her own right because she had a sort of a difficult thing. Now my father married a young person, you know, against the wishes of his older family. So, of course, we were resented, all of us, because we were just, I guess, mostly because there was just some more people to cut into the pie.

Murray: Right.

Emily: This usually happens when there's money involved. But he protected us against them in every way possible. In fact, when it became impossible for my mother to live with my father in his house, because he had a son and his family who lived there too, my father built her her own house in St. Albert.

Murray: That's interesting.

Emily: This is our first home, the one that we first remember.

Murray: Does that explain then - you mentioned in your letter that he would come home on weekends.

Emily: Right.

Murray: So he lived in Edmonton during the week and did his business and then came... So there was quite a serious conflict between the two families?

Emily: Oh, yes. There really was.

Murray: Did it have anything to do with the fact that your mother was native or was it because she was young?

Emily: Well, I guess it was just because she was young. Well, their mother was a native too, so I don't think that would have too much bearing on it. It was because she was young. Did I send you a picture of my mother?

Murray: I believe you did.

Emily: Yes. Well, of course, that was taken when she was older, but evidently in her youth she was a very lovely lady.

Murray: I could tell from the picture that she must have been.

Emily: Yes. And all of this, you know, would cause a certain amount of jealousy and conflict. Like I said, we cut into the pie, which we definitely did. He took really good care of us.

Murray: Right. Now when he died, he didn't leave enough money obviously for Malcolm's tuition.

Emily: No.

Murray: Was it determined in his will, or was that determined by sort of the struggle after he died?

Emily: Oh no, no. All of the things that were definitely determined in his will about us were carried out, because they couldn't do anything else about that. But the stocks and bonds and land that could have been sold, was sold. Because the older family, of course, went to a court and they broke down the parts of the will that they could and took over. And what they were doing was they were wanting to be paid off immediately. And the rest of us, the four of us, waited, you see, and we were paid through the years according to the way this other property would be sold. And the house in which we lived, there were sixteen acres and quite a big house. It's on the corner of 133rd Street and 118th Avenue, and the main part of the house is still there, but the portion at the back has been ripped off and there's no verandahs around them any more, and it's quite ugly. Although in our day we thought it was lovely. It was, too.

Murray: I'm curious as to why, with your father's emphasis on education, he wouldn't have provided in the will for a continuation of his tuition.

Emily: Well, I think this is the way this happened. He left this money which was paid to us when we were twenty-one, as I told you about. I think that he thought that Malcolm could use

that, or we could use that for an education if we so desired. But the trustees, and that was Mr. Kirkpatrick and Mr. Gibbons, they wouldn't let us use any of it at all.

Murray: They interpreted it to the letter rather than the spirit.

Emily: Exactly, exactly. But the money that he left to his sons, who he disinherited and gave their portion to his grandchildren, now the grandchildren were able to use this money to further their education. But we were not.

Murray: This would have just added injury to insults.

Emily: That's exactly, that's exactly what it was. And, of course, it built up a great deal of resentment in our hearts against these people. But we didn't do anything about it except to completely ignore them, which is all we could do really.

Murray: So Malcolm had looked forward to continuing on to university, had he?

Emily: Oh, I'm sure he had, I'm sure he had. He was very definitely the kind of person who would have profited greatly by an education. Of course, he acquired an education later.

Murray: One of the best educated people... I've talked to a vice-president of the university here who was astounded by Malcolm's grasp of history and everything else.

Emily: He was really a quite a genius. He had a keen, keen mind. And with any kind of opportunity - I think that Malcolm's opportunity would have been extended, or would have been better, had he not married so young. But you see, he was married when he was only about twenty.

Murray: Right and his wife was sixteen, I think.

Emily: Yes, very young girl. And, of course, they had a family, and there were five children in that family. And he had to make a living for kids.

Murray: That's right, that's right. It's pretty difficult.

Emily: Yes.

Murray: One last question about your mother. She obviously had a pride in her ancestry. Do you think that was common among the Metis and halfbreed people at the time?

Emily: No, no. I think one of the downfalls of Metis or halfbreed people is that they were ashamed of their nationality. They were ashamed that they were neither one nor the other. And you know, it is quite true that they were not accepted by either one or the other and I think that had a great deal to do with keeping them down.

Murray: Right. So that your family, your father's family was an exception to that rule.

Emily: Yes, yes, I think he was. He made us feel proud of what we were, regardless of what we were.

Murray: Regardless of what your background or ancestry was?

Emily: Yes, but I remember that he used to tell us - and I don't know why he picked a Chinaman particularly - because that he would say, "You know, I don't care if you're a Chinaman, be proud you're a Chinaman." You see, I think perhaps he used Chinaman because in our day, the Chinese people were laundry workers.

Murray: Right. They were the lowest on the totem pole, I suppose.

Emily: Right. They were lowest on the totem pole. That's exactly right.

Murray: So it was a teaching of tolerance more than anything else, not specifically pride in Indian ancestry?

Emily: It was. And I think perhaps, well, that's the root of Malcolm's humanitarianism. It was tolerance that we had lived with all of our lives.

Murray: Right. I'm wondering if you could describe, if there is such a thing, a typical evening at home when your father was still alive. Was the family a close family and taking part in recreational kinds of things or social things at home?

Emily: Yeah, well usually, because he was an old man, my father would retire to his room or I would read to him. Now he had a friend, a Mr. Bennett, who lived across the street from us who was also a Scotsman, and Mr. Bennett came over every single evening to read him the newspaper. Obviously he could do it better than I could.

Murray: Right.

Emily: (laughs) And that would happen. And then the rest of us would sit around the dining room table and we would do all sorts of things. Play games or play cards, although my mother didn't approve of cards, but we could play such games as children play. Sometimes my father would join us.

Murray: Would Malcolm take part in these things, too?

Emily: Once in a great while he would, but most of the time Malcolm had his nose in a book.

Murray: So he was reading from the earliest age? Would he have been reading as early as...? You mentioned that you were seven when you were, or ten when you were reading the paper to

your father.

Emily: Yes. I can't remember when or how I learned to read, but I think both Malcolm and I have always read a very great deal. I know that that was why Malcolm and I were closer as children because we were always reading books.

Murray: Right and exchanging information about books?

Emily: And trying to find books, because you know in our day, to find books was a difficult thing.

Murray: Right, especially if your father didn't read, there wouldn't be any around the house.

Emily: Neither my father nor mother read. So our home was not filled with books. We resorted to libraries and school. And these, of course, we brought home in arm loads and...

Murray: Devoured them, right.

Emily: Now we had no children's books such as they have now. Everyone has books nowadays, but in our day, books were scarce and hard to come by.

Murray: And they were precious, I suppose.

Emily: And they were very precious, very precious. Now we had no Bible in our home because Catholics don't read Bibles, or they didn't in those days. You know, we had a catechism.

Murray: Right, right. Were any of you children, other than Malcolm, religious at all? Did it have a lasting effect on you?

Emily: Well, I think deeply we are a religious people, but we are not a demonstrative people, we don't demonstrate this. But I think basically we're still, we're pretty religious, all of us.

Murray: You mentioned quite an interesting phrase on Malcolm's part that - oh, how did it go?

Emily: When he told me that religion was a...

Murray: Religion was a crutch and death oblivion. How old was he when he would have said that?

Emily: (laughs) Well, he was a little upset about religion as it was handed out to the Indians and halfbreeds in the north, in the mission. Now he said they exploited people. They had big farms and they made the Indians do all the work and they didn't give them as much as they took, and he was always really upset about this.

Murray: And so he saw religion in its exploitive role rather than its spiritual role?

Emily: Right. Yes he did, he did.

Murray: I'm wondering if there are any other experiences, religious experiences that Malcolm might have commented on, in which he was critical?

Emily: No, no, and I can't remember that. Of course, Malcolm had to go to church when my mother had control over him. He went to church, because we all did.

Murray: Right.

Emily: We all went to church about four times on Sunday.

Murray: My goodness, that's quite a busy day.

Emily: Yes it was, a very busy day.

Murray: Would Malcolm have resented that sort of...?

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Emily: I know that he knew the catechism from cover to cover, the questions and the answers. It was sort of a rote thing.

Murray: Right, but it may not have meant much.

Emily: No, no, it didn't. But you know the Catholics have a great many prayers, which after a while do become a rote thing, and you say them but are you thinking?

Murray: Right, right. You could be in your sleep saying that, I suppose?

Emily: Certainly, certainly.

Murray: You mentioned now, you grew up in two different houses, one in St. Albert and one in Edmonton. Could you describe the one in Edmonton? Was the one in St. Albert as well-appointed, if you like?

Emily: No, no. Well, the one in St. Albert was a much smaller house. It's still there, too. It was just a little cottage and there were four lots that went with that. And this

house and these four lots, my father gave to my mother and my sister and I in the will.

Murray: Oh, I see. Do you still have that house or you sold it, I suppose?

Emily: No, no we sold it long since, but it's still there. That very same little house is still there. Now when we moved to Edmonton, my father built a new house and we moved into it when I must have been about five or six, you see. In my fifth year I was in bed for a year with polio, and I had just again learned to walk when we went to Edmonton to live, all of us.

Murray: I see.

Emily: Now Malcolm had already finished the little local grade school in St. Albert, and there was no place else to go except to the seminary.

Murray: And that was in St. Albert as well?

Emily: Yes. And they accepted him there. Now this could not have lasted more than perhaps a year, two at the most.

Murray: So effectively what grade would he have completed in our terms today?

Emily: Well now, I suppose a little grade school went to grade eight.

Murray: And so he would have had one year of high school then?

Emily: Yes. And then when we went to Edmonton, he went to the Jesuit college.

Murray: So, I see. So he had to go to three schools then?

Emily: Yes.

Murray: How long did he go to Jesuit college?

Emily: Well, I think maybe four or five years, or four years, I guess, from the time that we moved to Edmonton until father died.

Murray: Oh, I see. So he would have completed at least the equivalent of our grade twelve?

Emily: I would say so, yes. I would say that is true.

Murray: I see. That's interesting. Yeah. I had gotten the impression that he'd only been to high school... but he obviously had finished that. And the Jesuit college would have been a pretty good educational institution.

Emily: Well the Jesuits are the world's best teachers.

Murray: Right.

Emily: This was not a college in the sense that it was

higher education, they took little children, too. So it was a grade school and a high school, sort of thing.

Murray: Tuition would have been fairly high, I suppose, would it?

Emily: Well now, I can't tell you anything at all about tuition. I haven't the faintest idea of what they would have to pay. But I suppose for those days it would be high; although, my father donated that land to the Jesuits and he may have gotten something out of that. Maybe the boys went to school there because of that. Now this is the surmise, this is not anything I have proof of.

Murray: Right, right. But he did give the land to that college?

Emily: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

Murray: You mentioned that you each received money when you were twenty-one. Do you recall how much money that was?

Emily: Well, now these were various sums. These are private sums that were left to each of us in our own individual names.

Murray: I see. So you didn't all get the same?

Emily: No.

Murray: How much would Malcolm have got?

Emily: Well I can't tell you that. I only know that I think mine was the largest, and my initial payment was about, oh maybe \$7,000, \$7,000 or \$8,000.

Murray: Do you think Malcolm's would have been in that range as well?

Emily: No, I think his was less.

Murray: Was less.

Emily: Yes. I think all the other children got less. Because of this illness and because I was my father's favorite child, I was favored.

Murray: Right.

Emily: But through the years, as the land was sold and the money was paid out, it amounted to quite a lot, although I couldn't specify now exactly how much. But I know that with my portion we bought a farm in Oregon, and we went through all the Depression years and we lived on that place for ten years. And we lived on what I received from the Royal Trust Company.

Murray: So it was a very substantial amount for those years?

Emily: It was.

Murray: Right. Malcolm would have received quite a bit less then, probably, is your guess.

Emily: Yes, I think so. And I think that Tommy and Jessie did, too. I'm sorry about that, but there's nothing I could do about it.

Murray: (laughs) Well, it's all history now anyway.

Emily: Yes, that's right, it is. It's all water under the bridge.

Murray: Right. Well, I suppose too that your father would have known Malcolm's capacity to deal with the world and would have thought he wouldn't have any trouble, which is true. If he had wanted to accumulate wealth, Malcolm certainly could have.

Emily: Yes, that's, that's true. But you see, we were still pretty young, you know, and you don't show your capacities for these things when you're that young. And well my father was, as I say, an old man. He spent a great deal of time sleeping.

Murray: Right, right. You mentioned that after Malcolm was married to his first wife he, I quote you here, "He would come to us each winter after working in the north." Now would he bring...?

Emily: Each summer. He worked in the north every winter with the trapping. And for the summertime, he would come home to us in Edmonton.

Murray: Right, right. Did he bring his wife and family with him?

Emily: Yes, he did.

Murray: And they all stayed in that big house that you described?

Emily: Yes, he brought his wife. And the first summer there was just he and Celina, and the next summer there was he and

Celina and Billy. Now you know who Billy is? I think they call him Willy nowadays.

Murray: Willy is the oldest son?

Emily: Yes.

Murray: Right. I met Willy in Calgary. He's an incredible likeness to Malcolm in his gestures and energy and...

Emily: Yes, yes.

Murray: And that kind of thing.

Emily: And he's a very talented person, too.

Murray: Oh, he is. I had a five-hour conversation with him one night when I only expected to talk to him for about a half an hour or so.

Emily: Yes. And then Betty Profitt is the oldest child of the next family.

Murray: Right. But I had a really good conversation with her as well. Well, I hope to meet Celina as well this fall sometime in Edmonton.

Emily: Celina is a very nice little lady. She lives in Edmonton, too.

Murray: Now there were two fairly traumatic experiences for Malcolm - the death of your father and the separation from

Celina. Could you describe the two things and how you perceived them as far as Malcolm's reaction to them?

Emily: Well, I know that Malcolm wrote me a letter when he and Celina, when it ended for them. It was such a traumatic, such a grievous letter that I just couldn't bear to have anybody else read it - and I burned it immediately. He was a broken man. He was just so hurt and so upset, but truly it was neither perhaps, neither his fault... Because he felt that he had to go up north to make a living, and he was leaving in Edmonton a very young woman with a family, and it was inevitable that they should have grown apart.

Murray: What was the basic cause of it? Was it just that she felt she couldn't cope with city life or what was the factor behind the breakdown?

Emily: No, well that might have been, that might have been it, too. I don't know. I think that she was young, remember, and I guess she wanted to do the things that young women do. She wanted a social life and entertainments.

Murray: She missed out on her...

Emily: And Malcolm wasn't that sort of person, he wasn't social at all. And he didn't like to dance or do any of these things you know, and it led to two people going their own way and it wasn't compatible.

Murray: Right. So it was on her initiation that the relationship broke up?

Emily: Well now, that I can't tell you for sure either, you

know. I really don't know.

Murray: Right. I gather after that first letter, he probably didn't talk about it too much?

Emily: No, he didn't talk about it.

Murray: It obviously lasted throughout his life because he refused to talk about his first family at all, with the children of his second family.

Emily: That's right, that's right. I'm not sorry that I burned that letter because it was something that was so deep, and so sad, and so sad for him really. And he couldn't have written such a letter to anybody but me.

Murray: Right. In what way do you think that it might have affected him in terms of how he saw the world after that, or how he might have dealt with his second family?

Emily: Well now, you know Malcolm had a brilliant mind, as we've already established, and he married a little girl who had no education, who had nothing to offer in the way of a keen, challenging personality. She was a little mousey type girl, a beautiful little girl, a good girl, but nothing that...

Murray: No challenge for him at all?

Emily: No challenge - nothing - no. I don't suppose he could even talk to her, you know, on an intellectual basis.

Murray: Right, right.

Emily: And because he was away so much, what did she have except the kids to talk about?

Murray: Right. I see, yeah. It becomes more clear in that sense. I think from what Pauline said that had they remained in the bush, their relationship would have lasted.

Emily: They would have gotten along. I'm sure they would have gotten along.

Murray: Because she was very competent at that kind of life.

Emily: Yes. Oh, yes.

Murray: According to Pauline?

Emily: Oh yes, she was. She's a very competent person in her own circles, you know.

Murray: Right.

Emily: But she just wasn't able to cope with his kind of intelligence, and she wasn't able to cope with being left alone

so much. And, of course, Mary was an entirely different person. She was a keener person, she had a better education and she was a challenge.

Murray: More of a match for Malcolm?

Emily: Yes, that's right, she was more a mental match.

Murray: Although I think that she found it pretty hard too, sometimes.

Emily: Well now I don't know her that well so I wouldn't make any derogatory statement about either one of these people.

Murray: Oh, no. I just say that because I have approached her to talk to her about Malcolm and she has declined because she doesn't want...

Emily: There's a wealth of material. Malcolm kept a diary every single day for years which would be a most enlightening document.

Murray: Right. One of his sons has the diary, I think.

Emily: I think Russell has that. Russell is the oldest, is the oldest boy.

Murray: Of the second family, right.

Emily: Of the second family.

Murray: I know he has most of the papers. I think Russell told me that his younger brother actually had the diaries, but I'm not certain of that. There's still some controversy over what's going to happen with the papers. I guess it hasn't been sorted out by the family yet.

Emily: No. Malcolm lost one son, also called Russell, in the Normandy invasion.

Murray: Right. That's right. I have a short, oh, about a ten page, that's called "Notes on the Life of Malcolm F. Norris," by Willy. I don't know if he ever sent you a copy of that.

Emily: No, I don't think he ever did.

Murray: I might send you a copy.

Emily: Oh, that would be nice, I'd like that.

Murray: I have two copies.

Emily: You know, when we were in Edmonton in June, I read this Roots thing that the Edmonton Journal put out, and of

course, there was a story about my dad. And because the last twenty-five years of his life had never been written and he had never been acknowledged at all, I wrote my version of his last twenty-five years and sent it to them. Received a very nice thank-you note in return. But I just thought that it should also be on record. He made it all happen.

Murray: Right, right. They didn't publish that I suppose - or did they?

Emily: Oh, I don't think so. I don't think so. They may have published it had I sent it before Roots was published. But if there should be another occasion when they write him up, why they might use it, I don't know.

Murray: Right.

Emily: I don't really care either.

Murray: No, it's just for the record that you were doing it, in any case.

Emily: Right, right.

Murray: Well, I've kept you on the phone for a long time. (laughs) I'm just going to check through my notes here, quickly, and see if there's anything I've forgotten. So I'll just pause here for a moment.

Emily: I hope you were able to read that letter. I write very badly.

Murray: Oh, you write exactly like I do, as a matter of fact (laughs), so it was quite easy. I always feel that my writing is terrible, too.

Emily: (laughs) I can type, I don't know why I didn't type it.

Murray: I always feel that I never progressed from about grade five on in my writing style. That's what my teachers always told me, too.

Emily: Oh, I never could write, never have been able to write.

Murray: There's just one thing about Malcolm, now he had a really fierce pride in his Indian ancestry and you mentioned that that was never particularly emphasized in your family. I'm wondering where he might have developed that particular...?

Emily: Well now, you know, my mother told us, of course, very interesting stories about the things that her father did. And I know that she had three brothers, there was Xavier, Gaston and Felix. And both of these men, who would be our

uncles, married mountain Indian woman. Now Malcolm, of course, travelling in the north as he did, probably knew all of these people real well. I never saw them so I don't know them. And maybe it developed from that, I don't know. I really don't know.

Murray: As I understand it, he learned Cree primarily from his half-sister, Elizabeth and her husband, when he visited their farm.

Emily: This is Dick. Now Dick and Elizabeth were very close people and we were at their house. But we learned Cree at home.

Murray: Oh I see, it was spoken at home as well?

Emily: Yeah. Malcolm and I spoke Cree and English and French real well. All three languages.

Murray: So those languages were pretty common around your home?

Emily: That's right. You played with children who spoke French and there were Cree people around you, and of course we spoke English in the home.

Murray: Right. Another thing, I've sort of asked this question from various angles, who did he aim his resentment at, about not being able to be educated? Was it the executors of the will, who wouldn't allow him to have that money, or was it a more general thing?

Emily: It was trustees who interpreted the will as this money should be paid to these children when they become twenty-one, you see. And since these were old country Scots people or English people, I think that they were a little resentful of all these people, you know, and they weren't about to do anything that would make us progress in any way.

Murray: Right. So there was racism involved in that decision?

Emily: I think so. Now this is the only explanation I can give you to that because they allowed the other, older children, the grandchildren to use their money to further their education, you see. But we were not allowed to do this.

Murray: Right, right.

Emily: And this could have built up a keen resentment in Malcolm, because he was keenly interested, of course, in education.

Murray: Right, and especially if he suspected that it was on that basis that the decision was made.

Emily: Right, right. Because I remember going to see Mr. Gibbons on various occasions and asking him if it would not be possible to draw money for the purpose of education. And he said, "No, that's not the way the will is written." You see.

Murray: He was just short and to the point.

Emily: Yes.

Murray: Isn't that interesting.

Emily: Of course, all of these people involved in this are long since dead.

Murray: When Malcolm went to work after he was denied tuition, did the money he make go to the family at all, or was that his own money?

Emily: Well, it was his own money. My mother never demanded that we give her anything that we earned, if we earned anything at all. She had a small income and we just managed. You see, there was no rent to pay or none of that.

Murray: Right. It was just a matter of buying food and clothing, I suppose?

Emily: Right, that's it. And we were a kind of enterprising, ingenious people. We always managed to get along real well.

Murray: Right.

Emily: We were always taught to be very proud of our own ability, too. You took care of yourself, because the prime rule in the north country is: an accident is stupid.

Murray: Right, right. And that was ingrained in you too, I imagine?

Emily: Yes, yes. You took care of all the eventualities.

Murray: I've heard a couple of stories and they vary slightly and I wanted to get this clear from you, about Malcolm's stay in the North West Mounted Police. Now I gather he didn't stay in it for very long.

Emily: No, he didn't. He joined, let me see, he would join in the beginning of the year, like in the early part of the year, and he joined because the Mounted Police were putting together a battalion that was going to be sent to Siberia.

Murray: Right.

Emily: Now he was only seventeen, and when this battalion was mobilized to be sent over there, they asked all the boys who had not yet reached an eighteenth birthday to withdraw. And,

of course, Malcolm was one of these.

Murray: Now I had heard a story from a couple of people that your mother had, in fact, informed the North West Mounted Police that he was underage. Now is that true at all?

Emily: Well now, that I don't know. I couldn't tell you that. I don't think so. I don't think my mother interfered at all.

Murray: I see. So Malcolm joined explicitly because he thought they were going to go to Siberia?

Emily: He wanted to go to Siberia.

Murray: I see, I didn't realize that. I thought that that was just circumstance that that was happening.

Emily: No, no. I know that for a fact, because he and I talked about it when, when he was going to join it. He said, oh, he was going to go to Siberia, that was why he was in the Royal Mounted Police.

Murray: (laughs) So he's going to fight the Communists.

Emily: Exactly.

Murray: (laughs) He must have thought that quite amusing, don't you think?

Emily: The Bolsheviks, in those days. (laughs)

Murray: Right, right, I see. Well that is really interesting. Because it seems to me that it was Willy that said that his mother had interfered, but it sounds more likely...

Emily: No, well I certainly have never been aware of that.

Murray: Right. Was he disappointed in that, or do you recall?

Emily: Yeah, I think he was terribly disappointed. He wanted to go so bad.

Murray: Right.

Emily: Yes, he was...

Murray: Anxious to see the world?

Emily: Yes. And then he came home when he was discharged. I have a picture taken of him, taken the day he was discharged. (laughs)

Murray: Oh really, that would be interesting.

Emily: It is interesting. I'll send it to you.

Murray: Well, I would love to have it. I could make a copy of it and return it to you.

Emily: If I still have it. I may have sent it to Willy. I sent Willy a lot of odds and ends just a couple of months ago, because I thought it was bits and pieces of his heritage and he would like to have it.

Murray: Right. Did you keep the Malcolm's letters by the way?

Emily: I kept a few of them, yes. I sent the last of those to Billy, too.

Murray: Right, right.

Emily: His letters were most interesting, very many pages and beautifully written, with beautiful command of the English language.

Murray: Right. Yeah, his letters are - there's never anything uninteresting about Malcolm's letters.

Emily: Never. He wrote beautiful letters.

Murray: Quite amazing. And there's always a bit of small talk, but there's always something of significance in them as well.

Emily: Yes. He was a deep thinker.

Murray: Well, I think I've exhausted all the questions, I hope I haven't exhausted you.

Emily: Oh no, oh no. It's been rather a joy and I hope that I have been able to help you.

Murray: Oh you have, very much, and I really appreciate your spending the time.

Emily: Now if you want to find out anything about my mother's people, I think if there are any records at all, they would be at Lac Ste. Anne in the church records.

Murray: Right. I intend to check that, because you did mention that in your letter.

Emily: That's the only place I know where you might find out anything at all about them.

Murray: Right, right. Well, thank you very much and I may be in touch with you again.

Emily: It's been a pleasure and I hope I meet you some day.

Murray: Right, I certainly would like to meet you. One last thing, I just remembered. I told you I was taping the interview over the phone, and I've been turning a lot of my tapes over to the Saskatchewan Archives, on Malcolm. I've done about one hundred interviews. Now would you be willing to have that tape in the Archives?

Emily: Yes, of course, if it's of any help. You know, the information I have given you are just as near fact as I can remember.

Murray: Right.

Emily: And they concern nothing or nobody. They won't hurt anybody certainly.

Murray: Right. No, I certainly don't think so. To have them in the Archives they require your consent, so what I'll do is send you a consent form for you to sign.

Emily: Okay, you may do that.

Murray: All right. Thank you very much.

Emily: You're entirely welcome, good night. Happy days.

Murray: Good night. Same to you, bye-bye.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)

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