

Transcription  
Tommy Francis  
- Interviewed Jan. 4/89 -  
by: Don McLean

Tommy: Francis.

Don: What I'll do is, be very careful with that.

Tommy: I brought a...

Don: Oh you've got the negative.

Tommy: I've got a negative, I don't know if you'll be able to use, looks like it's pretty dusty.

Don: It looks like it's pretty \_\_\_\_\_ Tom. If I can have that one I'll take very good care of it and Camera One does a beautiful job of reproducing them. Takes a little longer but they're just as good as the originals. Okay, this is January, what, the 4th today, and I'm talking with Reverend Tommy Francis. And Tommy, I understand you're a veteran of World War II. Airforce was it?

Tommy: Yes, Royal Canadian Airforce.

Don: Tommy what were you doing before the war?

Tommy: I was working here in Regina as a motor mechanic and also did some welding, I think I was working with Brian Tiliptik for awhile making grain augers at his...

Don: Welding up grain augers.

Tommy: Yeah.

Don: Manufacturing them here. Were you born and raised in Regina Tom?

Tommy: No, I was born in Broadview in Saskatchewan.

Don: Are you Metis, Non-Status or are you a status Indian now?

Tommy: Well I was status and then I became non-status

Don: When you joined up?

Tommy: No, no after I came back from overseas, and just within 35 years I've been a non-status and when bill C-31 came in I got my status back.

Don: So you were raised out in the country then and went to school there?

Tommy: Yes, I went to a residential school really.

Don: Did you. Do you have any memories of the residential school Tom?

Tommy: Quite a number?

Don: Could you tell us a little about some of your feelings of the residential school?

Tommy: Well I think when I first went to school, what year was that, 1931.

Don: 31, when you started?

Tommy: Yes, I was about 6 years old. I was born in 1924, so I was about

Don: How did you wind up in the residential school?

Tommy: Well, this was the going thing for the people from the reserve, the children, they all went to one of the residential schools for their education.

Don: So were you separated from your parents when you went to those schools? You lived and boarded there?

Tommy: Yes, we live and boarded there 9 months out of the year.

Don: That must have been quite an experience when you were 7 years old?

Tommy: Well it changed the whole lifestyle in that environment?

Don: Did you find it quite a shock?

Tommy: Well, I did. As a young fellow I did find it quite a shock?

Don: How did it effect you?

Tommy: Well, being away from home naturally it affects the loneliness from being taken away from the family setting and being in a situation like that. And also as we were in school, we spoke Cree many of us, matter of fact we all did, but as we got into school we were forbidden to speak Cree I guess to more or less get us to speak English.

Don: And you were forbidden? Were you punished if you spoke it?

Tommy: Yes, as times

Don: Physically?

Tommy: If we were caught.

Don: Physically punished?

Tommy: Yes.

Don: Is that a fact. For speaking your own language. How did that affect the kids?

Tommy: Well it did bring quite, as you were growing up, it just almost was something that you had to follow, in our young years we didn't understand too much, but it did affect us quite a bit.

Don: Make you angry as a child, or just scared?

Tommy: It did some.

Don: Scare you a bit?

Tommy: Scared some. It did affect us quite a bit. But when we were alone, we spoke Cree.

Don: And you'd get home in the summer months for 3 months and that was it?

Tommy: Well, for I guess, June and July.

Don: Were your parents allowed to visit you at all?

Tommy: Oh yes, they came at least every Sunday, or every other Sunday they'd come down.

Don: What about Christmas, would you be free for Christmas at least?

Tommy: Yes, we'd go home for Christmas holidays. So that was a break there?

Don: Did that leave you with a feeling of rootlessness Tom? Did it leave you with a feeling of being cut off from your roots and things like that?

Tommy: It did some. In fact quite a little bit.

Don: So you really, once cut off from your roots you had to get in and learn the new culture.

Tommy: It was an altogether new thing. I guess in a setting like that, you kind of begin adapting to that type of environment in the school there, in with the other boys.

Don: By that type of environment, what do you mean?

Tommy: Well, you know

Don: Discipline?

Tommy: Along with that, with the discipline of being with a group of boys.

Don: Pretty tight little world wasn't it?

Tommy: I guess it was what they would call an Indian Residential school where you'd begin maybe learning how to milk cows and doing that type of thing and some of the older boys working out in the fields. And we'd go to school for half a day and half a day we would be working on the farm until we got into higher grades of course.

Don: Would you be working on private farms?

Tommy: No, no. In the school farm. The school had a farm setting.

Don: What do you remember about the authority figures there?

Tommy: Well, we knew that we had to listen.

Don: Were you scared, did they generate fear or what? Respect, or were they white authority figures?

Tommy: I thought, thinking back those years, I thought there were some of them that used a little more sternness than others, and you get to know them. And

Don: But you really got to have a notion about authority there? And did you have that notion at home, that same notion about authority?

Tommy: Not really. We were a little more free at home.

Don: Less harsh?

Tommy: Yes, very much.

Don: So you went from, when you left your childhood behind you, that's really what you did, you went into a strange environment with very harsh authority figures in a strange world? God, what an experience?

Tommy: This was like light to darkness.

Don: Well, the army must have been a piece of cake after that? The airforce discipline would be nothing after that.

Tommy: I guess I shouldn't be too critical because I should I guess appreciate the discipline in school.

Don: Yeah, but do you feel like appreciating it?

Tommy: At the time you didn't but as you grow up, it does affect later on in your lifestyle.

Don: I suppose if you can handle that you can handle anything? So how many years did you go there Tom?

Tommy: I'd say, I would say about 10 years I guess.

Don: So you pretty well come out with your high school?

Tommy: Yes.

Don: And what happened when you got out. How old were you and where did you go, Regina?

Tommy: Well 16 was the age that you went to school, and I had got encouragement from my parents to go on in school, but as the lifestyle of a lot of young people at that time, well they wanted to get out and begin working, and naturally the ordinary farm work was quite a big thing. So

Don: Get a dollar in your pocket. You wouldn't have a dollar in your pocket all the years you're going to school, would you?

Tommy: Well in those years, you know the wages were very low, in fact, I could remember when we went out with our thrashing time came along, and we had our wagon and rack and a team of horses and we went out to help thrash. And we got \$2 a day, for \_\_\_\_\_ and your labour. And those were high wages.

Don: What years would that be now. That would be in the late 30's, early 40's?

Tommy: Late 30's early 40's.

Don: \$2 a day, whether you needed it or not. What would a package of cigarettes cost in those days? Maybe 50 cents.

Tommy: No, not that much. Maybe 15 cents.

Don: Still, that would be almost an hour of work for a package of smokes. You'd put in a ten hour day would you?

Tommy: And sometimes longer. And then for stoking, we use to go out and stoke for 35, 40 cents a \_\_\_\_\_. That was real good money in those years.

Don: Okay Tom, how old were you then in Regina?

Tommy: We moved into Regina

Don: You mean your family?

Tommy: My family, well at the time, when my dad was overseas, mom moved to Regina, and naturally us kids moved also.

Don: So your dad joined up for World War II as well, and he was in before you?

Tommy: World War I also, yes.

Don: And he was overseas when you moved to Regina? What year did you move to Regina Tom?

Tommy: I think it was around 1939, 40.

Don: So he joined up as soon as it started?

Tommy: Pardon?

Don: He must have joined up as soon as it started?

Tommy: Oh yes, he joined up immediately.

Don: What was your dad and mom's names?

Tommy: My dad's name was Bert Francis, and mom's name was Mariah.

Don: And what year did you join?

Tommy: I joined in 43. I think it was a few months after my dad got home from overseas he was, found himself getting sick over there, and he was over there for 2 years or more. When he came back, then I enlisted.

Don: Was he airforce as well Tom?

Tommy: No, no, he was in the army.

Don: Okay, 1943? How old were you?

Tommy: Let's see, 18 maybe, 17 anyways.

Don: What made you join?

Tommy: Well I think in those years, it was the excitement of the war, the armed forces, and I guess the desire of contributing a little bit to the effort. I didn't join the army but the airforce appealed to me quite a bit. So I enlisted into the airforce and I was quite surprised when they accepted me.

Don: Here in Regina?

Tommy: Here in Regina. Then I was shipped to, it was quite an experience when I enlisted. I knew I was going into the armed forces, but I didn't know what I was getting myself into. The

moment that you sign your name to that piece of paper, giving yourself to your country, that was

Don: What did they do first, cut your hair? Give you a haircut?

Tommy: You no longer belong to yourself, you were there to

Don: Do there bit?

Tommy: So I was shipped to Edmonton for my manning, and I was there

Don: What does that mean, for your manning? Is that your basic training?

Tommy: The basic training. And then I think I was there for, how long was it about, maybe 3 or 4 weeks.

Don: What did basic training consist of Tom?

Tommy: Well I guess it was learning a whole lot of discipline.

Don: Parade square?

Tommy: Parade square, you know your dress. Getting up and polishing up, making your bed, washing your clothes. It involves your whole basic lifestyle of army life and along with that was the being punctual for everything. And I guess this is where the residential school system kind of helped me along.

Don: Did you notice any similarities?

Tommy: A little more fierce I think in the army, in the armed forces, because boy you had to abide by there regulations there, if not you met up with it. You could give yourself a hard time.

Don: Yeah, confined to barracks, extra duties, more parade square. Did you ever wind up on extra duty?

Tommy: No, I didn't. I was abiding.

Don: That was the easiest way to do it?

Tommy: We stuck to the roads pretty well.

Don: What did you do after basic Tom?

Tommy: We were transferred to Walkon, Alberta. I think it was a place for training bombs. I think they had the old planes and they called the ANSON

Don: Is that up near the Primrose

Tommy: Southern Alberta anyways, south of Calgary.

Don: Oh it's southern

Tommy: Up in that area. Not too many miles south of Calgary, but out on the prairies there they had this airfield.

Don: What was the name of the plane again?

Tommy: Balkan. The ANSON.

Don: ANSEN? I've never heard of that one. What was it a trainer?

Tommy: The Saskatchewan Government use to have a fleet of them

Don: So they were big planes?

Tommy: They were twin, a twin engine.

Don: And there was pilot training going on out there and navigation training?

Tommy: And bombing training.

Don: And bombing training. They were a good size aircraft. What did it have about a 5 man crew?

Tommy: Maybe 3 depending the type of pilots and maybe training \_\_\_\_\_ operators and maybe gunners at the same time. They'd have all these.

Don: So which of those crafts did you get into?

Tommy: I stayed in the ground crew. I stayed in more of the Administration and later on in Motor Transport mechanics. But I stayed the first part mostly in Administration. And we were there just a short time, maybe 3 or 4 months and they asked for volunteers. They needed some ground crew help in some of there airfields or squadrons, overseas. So they asked for some

volunteers being full of life I put my name down, and that same year I was overseas.

Don: Which \_\_\_\_\_ did you go to?

Tommy: Mostly, we landed in Montreal, and we were there to get our final gear and shots and everything else.

Don: Did you get an embarkation leave?

Tommy: No.

Don: You didn't even get an embarkation leave.

Tommy: We were just evenings out.

Don: But no way to get home for a couple of days?

Tommy: No. We were there and after about 3 or 4 days we went by train to New York and got on a troop ship there and went overseas. It took us about 12 days to cross that ocean. Ordinarily I think it would take about 3 1/2 4 days

Don: Any U-boats or any incidents on the way over?

Tommy: I understand, the information I got is that we had to turn back for one whole day because they ran into a school of submarines I guess. A pack of submarines.

Don: A U-boat pack. Did you have any escort, air or destroyer?

Tommy: Well we did for the first day and a half.

Don: And then they turned back.

Tommy: And then the escort left and we were alone. Because the troops travelled a lot faster. So once it was turned loose, it went into it's own speed. It turned back and I think it went a way north to get away, and we landed in Liverpool. And then we were down to

Don: What were your first impressions of Britain when you landed?

Tommy: I thought it was a very damp, cold, chilly place.

Don: What month was it?

Tommy: It was in December. It was in the winter months and it was really damp and cold. And so we landed in Liverpool and we got on a train there and we went all the way down to Bournemouth, along the \_\_\_\_\_ coast.

Don: That was the December of 43 now?

Tommy: That was December of 43. And we landed down there and got kind of oriented for 3 or 4 days. And then those of us who landed there were shipped out or transferred over to bombing squadrons or fighters.

Don: Where did you get assigned to?

Tommy: I got assigned to a spitfire squadron. And I stayed with them for all of the time.

Don: So you were working as a repair man on the spitfires?

Tommy: Not on the aircraft, but

Don: On the motor transport and that.

Tommy: On the motor transport, I serviced that squadron. So that whole unit stayed together.

Don: Now they were Canadian. Was that a Canadian or British?

Tommy: Canadian.

Don: That was a Canadian unit eh, of Spitfire fighters. Well they were really a famous plane, they saw a lot of action.

Tommy: They were, I guess in those days they were the number one fighting plane.

Don: Suppose to have saved Britain a couple of years previous.

Tommy: Right.

Don: Were they still, were they making attacks on the coast of France or were they just strictly on the defensive?

Tommy: I think they were more or less accompanying bombers many of them, and a lot of times they would go up on there own attacks themselves.

Don: But they were escorts for the bombers.

Tommy: They were escorting the bombers.

Don: Now in 43 they started those heavy raids against Germany, hadn't they. Late 43. It began in 44, 1000 bombers in one shot. Did you ever see any of that?

Tommy: Oh yeah, we seen many, many hundreds of bombers.

Don: What were your impressions when you saw those planes, any memories of that?

Tommy: Oh yeah, I have a lot of memories. Well today it's just like a big dream.

Don: What do you remember of it though?

Tommy: Oh, looking at the roar, when those things would take off they will take almost a full hour for them to get their altitude and once they got there

Don: They'd circle around above until they'd get there formation together.

Tommy: Until they'd get there formation and off they would go. Get there height.

Don: How long would it take for that fleet of bombers to pass overhead? Did the sound almost shake the earth?

Tommy: Well, the roar was quite high, so it was just a heavy groan.

Don: An exciting sound.

Tommy: Well it became such an everyday thing that it didn't affect you, but we knew that they were

Don: Were there many raids or attempted raids in 43 and 44 when you got there? Were the Germans, they were pretty well on the defensive?

Tommy: Well I think the blitz was pretty well over, although the odd time you get a bomb the enemy would come and bomb. Mostly in the London area, but we were more

Don: Were you affected by those U2's, the German guided missiles?

Tommy: Yes, as a matter of fact, we were at a camouflaged airview

Don: You'd be a target for them wouldn't you?

Tommy: Yeah, this would be in 44 when they first start coming over. The first group of them that came over, we were right in there direct line and we were in a place called, Essex anyways, just south of London, and we heard these

Don: They called them buzzbombs, did they make a buzz?

Tommy: Buzzboms, right. Oh yeah, what it was that it sounded like a rocket, that type of

Don: Whistle or a whine?

Tommy: Well almost like a motor or a jetlike sound.

Don: Could you hear the air reverberating behind them?

Tommy: Oh yeah, I would say they would be travelling about 500 miles an hour.

Don: Around the speed of sound.

Tommy: And we were in this airport there, south of London in Essex, and those things came over in the evening and we just wondered, what on earth is coming over. There must have been about 10 or 12 of them.

Don: You didn't know what it was at first?

Tommy: We didn't know what it was until the sirens sounded, and then the ack-ack guns would be firing at them.

Don: Could hardly hit them at that speed.

Tommy: That was my first experience with those things. And with those things, when the motor of them would stop, you knew that they were on there way down.

Don: Did you know they were bombs at first, or did you think they were some sort of man flight?

Tommy: We didn't know until we heard about 2 or 3 of them stop and then we'd hear a big boom.

Don: I guess they were big bombs, right? Must have played hell with London?

Tommy: Oh yeah.

Don: London was the target, it wasn't the military base, it was London. They were going to get the people themselves.

Tommy: They were all geared to go to London.

Don: To London and down they'd come. Punishment I suppose for the destruction of Berlin and Amberg and those cities by the 1000 plane raids.

Tommy: So they got on to them

Don: Was the ack-ack able to bring any of them down?

Tommy: Well the odd one.

Don: They'd be too fast for a fighter plane.

Tommy: Sometimes the ack-ack would maybe hit an instrument or something and that silly thing would turn around and turn around the other way.

Don: That would be a son of a bitch to come back and hit them.

Tommy: Yeah, but it would only go so far though, because they were geared with only so much fuel

Don: They'd probably go into the ditch, or into the channel?

Tommy: Either in the channel or further back on the land, and they would do all kinds. Sometimes they would hit them and then they would make a loop and then come down. When you hit the instruments of those. But after awhile when the radar was known, those things would come in and the fighter planes would go up and get there altitude, come back, dive down on them and shoot them.

Don: How fast could a spit go, about 300?

Tommy: I would say about 300 when they're diving. They can go quite fast. They got the Spitfire-E's. And they were 5 propped, and the ones we had were 3 propped. They were quite fast.

Don: Did you have any time off at all in London and England?

Tommy: Oh yeah.

Don: Where did you go on leave?

Tommy: I went to London a couple of times, and that was quite an experience to see a city that big.

Don: From a young Canadian from Broadview.

Tommy: To see a city that size. You'd go into those things by train and it would be at least a half an hour before you got into the centre.

Don: Going through city streets at that speed. How were the Londoners? How did they treat Canadians?

Tommy: Very good.

Don: How did they treat native Canadians, any different than anybody else?

Tommy: No different. Incidentally, I was the only native person on our squadron.

Don: How did you get along with the other guys?

Tommy: Very good we got along.

Don: Was there any racism?

Tommy: None at all. Very, very good. Good friendships.

Don: And the British people, they liked Canadians I understand.

Tommy: Oh yes, we had good communication with them and friendliness. In fact I was very pleased with the way they had accepted me. What I found quite funny I guess as I look back now, when I joined in with the spitfires squadron we were on an

airfield, moving from airfield to airfield, I don't think we were on any one airfield for more than 4 weeks.

Don: I wonder why they moved around?

Tommy: I come to think that they didn't have that many aircraft yet, but they had a lot of airfields, and maybe a lot of their aircraft during those first years were being shot down. And so to make the enemy believe that the country was loaded with fighter planes and aircraft. We were all over.

Don: I betcha a dollar that was it. Especially the spits, because the life of a spitfire pilot wasn't guaranteed for too long was it?

Tommy: Yeah, and then we in one of the moves, we were in a place called Oakston, right along that \_\_\_\_\_ coast there and from Oakston you could see across the channel and I think it was Calet or

Don: You could see France on a clear day. What is it 18 miles or something like that?

Tommy: Something like that 18-20 miles. You know though, they use to shoot there shells and they would actually hit the town.

Don: The coastal batteries would shoot 18 miles. Oh that was those great big, they had the artillery that was on tracks, the Germans did, huge things.

Tommy: I don't know what they were, but they must have been huge things.

Don: Oh they were monstrous, they wheeled them out on tracks. I've seen pictures of them. And they had barrels on them probably as long as a really good size power pole.

Tommy: And you would hear those things coming. Through the air and when they hit it

Don: Just a huge explosion.

Tommy: And the airport was not too far from

Don: Was the airport within range of those batteries?

Tommy: Oh definitely. I could never forget this one night that one of those shells made a direct hit on our water tower on the

air field. And about a couple of hundred feet beyond was our barracks.

Don: So you were just a couple of hundred feet from getting blown

Tommy: I was just so glad that, that fire tower was in the way.

Don: Or else you could have been hit?

Tommy: Yeah, it could. And when it hit it just made one terrible, you know the chrapnel went through our barrack, and the ceiling started coming down. I think within a split second, everybody was under the bed. We all found ourselves

Don: Must have been an ear shattering sound? Those things were huge. What would they blow up, about a city block all in one shot?

Tommy: Well the shells not that much, they'd make some damage, but the buzzbombs did. Some of them would make a crater, probably the chrapnel would spread. Some of the bombs would make quite a crater, I would say 10 feet deep, maybe 20 feet.

Don: Well they must have been pretty hard on the morale of the people, because you never could tell when they were coming? 24 hours a day.

Tommy: Toward the end of the time they were coming out quite frequently. And after awhile they made these V-2's, those ones are the rocket types.

Don: It was the V-2, not the U-2. The U-2 was a spy plane the American put up. It was the V-2.

Tommy: The V-2's was the ones that went aways up.

Don: V-1 and V-2's is that what they called them?

Tommy: There was a big one and when they would come down they would destroy quite a large area.

Don: Did they get any of your buddies? Did you guys come through it okay?

Tommy: During the manoeuvres and things they'd lose the odd plane, but when D-day came, then we were right close.

Don: Now that was June 6, 44 wasn't it Tom?

Tommy: June 6, 44 or 45, I just forget the date.

Don: Well it must have been 44.

Tommy: 44 D-day came. And we were busy. Our squadron was really, really busy. Accompanied some of the bombers, and eventually made, very low flying.

Don: Supporting the ground troops.

Tommy: Then we would be losing sometimes 2 planes a day. And then they would come back with big holes and you'd wonder how they ever got back with the chrapnel holes that they had.

Don: Well what were they up against, Luftwapt itself was in bad shape, the big ground fire, 88's?

Tommy: I don't think they'd have too much of there own planes, but maybe the odd one, but I think most of it was ground fire.

Don: Did you ever hear the pilots talking about the 88's?

Tommy: Not too much.

Don: I guess they were a deadly accurate gun. So you had quite a few casualties on D-day. So where were you when the war ended Tom?

Tommy: I was in one of the airfields in England. We were all over, southern England, and central England \_\_\_\_\_ in Scotland and even a way up in the Yortoney Islands. Our squadron was up there for 5 weeks in one winter, and boy talk about, you think Saskatchewan has wind, but you get up there and it's just

Don: What are the Yortoney's like, they're just rocks eh?

Tommy: Rolling hills and rocks. Very little bit of farming.

Don: There's two towns there, Stromness and Kirkwall.

Tommy: Yeah, we were inbetween those two areas.

Don: So interrupted again Tommy. You know, a lot of guys, despite the dangers and everything, a lot of guys recall there

time in Britain with a little bit of nostalgia. There must have been some good times too?

Tommy: Yeah, well the idea, even though you may have been in danger all the time, but that fear seem to just have gone. I wasn't afraid. We knew it was a war thing. We knew we had to do the job that we were suppose to do, and when we think of someone getting killed, how we know it was in the line of duty, and you almost expected it because of

Don: How did that affect your friendships Tom?

Tommy: I think it drew the men very, very close. Especially when you get into, our squadron was almost like a family, with the pilots and the ground crew and mechanics and everyone involved. It was just like one big family during those years.

Don: So if a guy was shot down, everybody felt it eh?

Tommy: Oh yeah. You knew that it was part of the team. But on the other hand you kind of expected that. We knew that if we didn't have any casualties then it was grateful. There was a lot of buddies.

Don: Did that affect your sense of your spiritualism? You're a minister now.

Tommy: I'm a minister now, but not at that time. It didn't affect too much, but I think after I got back overseas, that was in 46 I think I got back, in the spring of 46, in May that I got back from overseas. While I was over there during the course of our I guess a lot of the troops didn't come immediately back. Some stayed maybe a year

Don: Were you getting anxious to get back?

Tommy: We were getting anxious to get back.

Don: There were some riots weren't there. Aldershot?

Tommy: Oh yeah. Well I guess that was the army place. And I think there was also one of the airfields there were there were a lot of men congregated

Don: Did you guys have any sort of civil disobedience in your outfit in order to get back?

Tommy: Not where we were. We were I guess more patient. Knowing that things like that weren't going to do any good to you.

Don: Some of the guys had signs up in Aldershot, Liberate the Liberators.

Tommy: I guess some of those guys were real anxious to get back. I guess you don't blame them because some of those men went through some real hard times, rough times. I guess they were quite anxious to get home.

Don: There's a movie about World War I Tom, and the same thing happened and they executed a bunch of Canadians in Wales. The War was over and they kept them sitting there and they were dying of the flu, remember that after World War I there was a horrible flu epidemic. These people were dying from flu. The Canadians had went on a riot and they thought that they had turned Communist and they shot about 30 of them. And these were front line heros. But nothing like that happened in the Second World War did it?

Tommy: Oh no.

Don: Nobody was killed in the Aldershot riots?

Tommy: No, I don't think so. At least I didn't hear of them there.

Don: So what was it like when you got back home Tom, were you, you were a kid when you went over. What did you feel like when you came home, were you the same person? What did Canada look like?

Tommy: I was just so grateful to come back home after being away for 2 1/2 years or more.

Don: And your folks were still living when you got back?

Tommy: Oh yes, they were still living.

Don: What was that reunion like?

Tommy: It was very good.

Don: You didn't marry over there or anything?

Tommy: No no. I was too young and full of life.

Don: So when did you marry Tom?

Tommy: Well it wasn't until, what happened was that when I got home I came back to Regina and I was here for maybe 5 months. And that same fall I knew of a friend who was in the airforce and he was working with the department of natural resources in Prince Albert, and he gave me a phone call. He knew that I was native. He gave me a phone call and he says, what are you doing? And I said, well not too much right now. I says, I might be going back to work shortly. He says, I'll tell you what, we could use a man like you to work among the native people in the north if you are interested. I said yeah. So I went.

Don: Where did you move to?

Tommy: To Prince Albert. And then I worked with in the conservation area. One of the trips during the winter or that same fall, I think we were up in La Ronge, we went up by snowmobile, and took a trip by Cat Train up into the northern areas.

Don: North of La Ronge yet.

Tommy: North of La Ronge. It was Fisheries I think. The Cat Train type. And that was quite an experience to go in and see this type of lifestyle.

Don: What struck you about it?

Tommy: Well I think it was the going into a new areas. Almost like a pioneering spirit, because some of the roots they were making there, they made new roots through the bush and with there big cats and their blades knocking down

Don: Cutting down the pine scrub.

Tommy: The pine and shrubs to make there roadways

Don: Were the people living by fishing and hunting yet in the north there?

Tommy: Oh yes, very much so.

Don: And what were the communities like, were they pretty happy places, or what were they poverty stricken or what?

Tommy: They were quite happy in there own lifestyle, fishing and trapping, and doing all that, of course this was a

Don: Tom, what was it like when you got up there, white society hadn't sort of hit this place yet, that road was moving white society in. Were the people, where there social problems then as there is today?

Tommy: Well, they may have had, I don't think that there was that much of a problem as you would see today because of the

Don: It was still a pretty healthy lifestyle I imagine eh?

Tommy: Oh yeah. Looking back today, see this was back in 46, so that's quite, what is that 42 years ago.

Don: What is that, 42 years. Boy time flies when you're having fun.

Tommy: So you get to meet a lot of the older, I was still quite a young man in those years, and I met a lot of people there, new experience. It was a learning process for me. And later that same year I went into the Loon Lake area and Fire Patrol, Fur Patrol, with the Department of Natural Resources, and during that time I had an opportunity to take a 2 year course to train as a conservation officer, so I took that. I trained for that.

Don: In the north, you trained in the north?

Tommy: Well the training centre was in Prince Albert. Our classroom situation there was in Prince Albert, it was a 2 year \_\_\_\_\_ in the field for about, during the spring and summer months and in the fall we would come back and take our classroom courses. So this was, it took 2 years to complete. Took up there from fur to forestry.

Don: Did the people speak a different dialect of Cree there Tom did your Cree in the south, or was it pretty much the same?

Tommy: Well, here in the south, we have the Y dialect and in La Ronge and in those areas there they have the TH dialect. And where my wife comes from Cumberland House, they had the N dialect. So

Don: Well was there difficulty in understanding cross the dialects?

Tommy: Not really.

Don: It was just a matter of what's the term. Like the English have an accent sort of thing.

Tommy: Right. Well you get to pick out

Don: You can tell where a person is from by there accent.

Tommy: After you're there for a little while you can pick out the dialect and what they're saying. There was enough of the language, the Cree there that you could pick out.

Don: So you met your wife in Cumberland House when you were a conservation officer?

Tommy: I was a conservation officer then and I had moved to Cumberland. In fact I was there I think in 1948.

Don: Is that when you got married?

Tommy: No, no. I was in there one time for a visit to go with a timber crew, you know patrol or crew to look at the tree stands, or timber stands up along the Saskatchewan River there and in those areas, we were there for probably around 2 weeks making a survey. And then back. That was part of the course that we were in to go in some of these

Don: Sort of figuring the economic value of it and that kind of thing?

Tommy: And there was some beautiful big timber stands along that Saskatchewan River. And then in the winter of 49 I completed, or I guess 48/49 in that spring of 49 I was shipped there. That was my first post.

Don: How did you like Cumberland?

Tommy: Beautiful. Lovely country. Met my wife there. She was Helen Cook. That's a very, very special community. I guess it's the oldest

Don: And your children were born there?

Tommy: No, we were married in October. I was there in April, we were married that October. I guess we just known each other for a short while then we got married then that same March, I

think the department was quite short of qualified officers, conservation officers so they transferred me to a place called La Loche, North Western Saskatchewan. Among the Chipewyan.

Don: Yeah, different language now and everything.

Tommy: Different language, completely different language.

Don: How did you like it, what was it like?

Tommy: I thought it was very interesting.

Don: You're pioneering again now.

Tommy: In fact I guess I was the first resident conservation officer at La Loche that year. And that same, I think it was that same winter

Don: I'm sorry, what year was Tom again?

Tommy: That was in 1950. That was in the spring of 1950 and then that following winter was 51 and that was the year that the caribou came down.

Don: Oh that must have been a sight.

Tommy: That was to me, it was just like a dream. When you saw the caribou

Don: The numbers you mean.

Tommy: Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them. We made a patrol there once out toward the Alberta border, just beyond the La Loche settlement there, \_\_\_\_\_ Lake. And just

Don: Now, is that tundra Tom, is that open country?

Tommy: No, no this is

Don: Still bush?

Tommy: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Don: So the caribou come through the bush by the thousands.

Tommy: I don't know how far south they went, but I think they were pretty close to Buffalo Narrows, and that was 100 miles south yet.

Don: Well they'd hang around the bush country I suppose in the winter and then they'd head north to the tundra in the spring would they? Is that what they do on there annual migration?

Tommy: Yes. I don't know how many times they've come into that north western area where I was at but as far as I know that was the only time that those caribou had come down that year. And I could remember seeing a herd of about 4-600 caribou in one bunch. There were several bunches up to 50 or 200, but this one herd of at least 5 or 600.

Don: Were they the sort of staple food of the Chipewyan?

Tommy: Well,

Don: They wouldn't hunt them that often, because they didn't come that far south that often.

Tommy: They didn't come that far south, they would have to go pretty close to Lake Athabasca in that area.

Don: What did the Chipewyan people live on mainly in those days?

Tommy: Well, they fished, and they trapped.

Don: Commercial fishing?

Tommy: Some, not \_\_\_\_\_

Don: They weren't living purely off hunting and fishing though, or were they?

Tommy: Well, that was there main economy.

Don: They were pretty well living off it eh?

Tommy: This was there lifestyle.

Don: And were you living in log houses the Chipewyan people?

Tommy: Some of them have log houses, some of them had lumber houses, but mostly log houses.

Don: How big would the village be in those days?

Tommy: I would say around 400 maybe or more.

Don: Pretty good size.

Tommy: Fair size.

Don: Was there a Hudson's Bay Company and the usual Northern

Tommy: Oh yeah.

Don: And they traded there furs off to the HB?

Tommy: Yeah.

Don: You never ran into Norris and Brady did you?

Tommy: Oh yes. Oh yeah. They were with the Department at that time.

Don: Did you get to know them?

Tommy: Yeah. In fact, Jim Brady was also the conservation officer at Cumberland House when I was transferred.

Don: What was your impression of Brady?

Tommy: I thought he was a, how do you say, quite an intelligent man. Very interesting.

Don: Were you concerned about his politics? He was pegged as a radical by the government?

Tommy: Well I didn't find him that way.

Don: Well the CCF would be in power then wouldn't it?

Tommy: Yeah. The CCF at that time, and I don't know if I knew him that long but I didn't find him that way at all.

Don: Well most of the time, radicals, so called radicals are setting up Co-ops are very quiet, spoken, gentle people, but they get that name.

Tommy: I didn't find him such a radical person at all.

Don: Just logical.

Tommy: I could see that he was really concerned

Don: Where was that now when you met him?

Tommy: That was Cumberland House. He was also stationed there at the time.

Don: And you met Norris as well?

Tommy: I met Norris I think it was before that. Before I moved, during the course of my involvement with the Department of Natural Resources.

Don: Now they say Norris was quite a passionate speaker, whereas Brady was sort of almost an introvert, that Norris would get up and get people crying and everything else. He was emotional. Did you ever attend any of his meetings?

Tommy: I did once or twice, and he was quite, he was outspoken. I appreciated his concern and interest that he had with the people. And I think he was involved with Mineral Resources at the time.

Don: Brady was setting up Co-ops, Fur marketing Co-ops and that sort of thing, for the government wasn't he, or what was he doing?

Tommy: Well I think he was there at Cumberland House, he may have been instrumental in setting up maybe a Co-op deal there, but such in it's beginning stages when I was there, in fact I don't think that it was even, that was in 49, I don't think it was even established yet when I was there. And then when I was already transferred over to La Loche.

Don: According to Murray Dobbin, the Catholic Church was taking a pretty strong stand against Brady and Norris. Do you have any recollection of the church being involved?

Tommy: Not at all.

Don: No. Was the Catholic Church a pretty strong influence in La Loche and those places?

Tommy: Well, they were. Yes, Cumberland they were quite influential and La Loche more so, and in those areas. I was later transferred to Ile-a-la-Crosse which was also a very strong Roman Catholic area.

Don: When did you get involved in the priesthood Don, or it isn't priesthood, it's ministry, you're not Catholic are you?

Tommy: Actually, I met in my transfer to La Loche, this was where we came in contact with a couple, missionaries that were working among the Chipewyan native people there.

Don: Were these Anglican?

Tommy: No, no these would be interdenominational.

Don: Interdenominational?

Tommy: Interdenominational people. And we, from what I knew about religion, I didn't know too much really. But looking at their lifestyle and what not, I thought boy these people are living what they're sharing the people.

Don: So there was a vast difference in sort of the philosophy and lifestyle of these people and other denominations?

Tommy: Yes.

Don: They were more people oriented or what?

Tommy: I would say.

Don: They were involved in creating decent change in the community, or what were they up too?

Tommy: In the lives of the people anyways, and they were sharing the Gospel of Christ, and in fact my wife and I. I had a United church background and my wife has an Anglican background, and I didn't know too much. It isn't what we got at residential school, and I was always turned off to that, because that was always forced upon us too, and that kind of left a bad taste in my own.

Don: And this was something different, and it impressed you enough that you eventually became part of it.

Tommy: This was something different, right. Well, there lifestyle, there witness, there sharing, I thought boy

Don: Tell me a little bit more about there lifestyle and there sharing? Did they live the same way as the people that they, or what?

Tommy: Well, they had there dwelling there at La Loche, and they lived I guess

Don: A log house like the rest of the people?

Tommy: I think they had gotten, I think part of it might have been log but I know that they had lumber, it was not a very big house.

Don: Not ostentatious or wealthy?

Tommy: No, no, no. It was just an ordinary home like some of the homes that were there too. And I really appreciated the type of lifestyle they had, they mixed in with the people.

Don: Now, were these ministers native ministers or non-native?

Tommy: No, they were white. Mark and Dorothy Wellwood. They're white.

Don: How would you spell that last name?

Tommy: Wellwood. W E L L W O O D. Just the way it sounds.

Don: Are they still living?

Tommy: Mrs. Wellwood is. Mr. Wellwood passed away, \_\_\_\_\_ up in the Yukon a few years ago.

Don: So when did you actually become part of the church?

Tommy: While I was there at La Loche, I also saw the need in my own life, and naturally I was also interested in the welfare of the Metis people. Even though maybe my own life was not quite where it should have been or where it should be, yet there was that interest there, to I guess this is maybe one of the things that got me to be involved with the Department of Natural Resources - working with native people to try and better there how do you say, economic, trapping and fishing and what not. So that interest in education. That interest was there. And I got

in contact with the missionaries there. Of course we were a small village and everybody got to everybody else. So we were invited to there home and invited to there little church service, just an ordinary home style service, and we just appreciated that very much. And I guess through hearing what they were sharing, it seemed to touch I guess

Don: The old heartstrings?

Tommy: Yeah. In my own life. So I guess one day, not too long, maybe a year after, I said yeah, I would like \_\_\_\_\_ to come into that type of a life too.

Don: What year would that be Tom?

Tommy: That was in 1951.

Don: And you've been a minister ever since?

Tommy: Well, not immediately. I think in 53 I resigned from the Department of Natural Resources and went and got trained. And I guess from that time on

Don: Where did you get your training?

Tommy: In Minnesota. I could have gone to different areas, where they had Bible schools, seminars, where I could have gone, but I met a principal who was working with the native people that had a training theological training of native people. This really appealed to me because I didn't want to lose touch with the people. In fact, while I was in La Loche, I don't know how, maybe the spirit of God, you know the way he deals and speaks to people, kind of spoke my own heart I guess. He found (tape gets bad) Having that interest there, and the thought just seem to strike me. In me. The conviction came so strong I just couldn't shake it. It was just such a real thing, it wasn't just religious.

Don: You didn't really have

Tommy: I didn't have that to begin with.

Don: There was the purpose you were looking for all along.

Tommy: It was, I knew there was some \_\_\_\_\_ in my life, I knew that within my own heart (tape ends)

