

Transcription
Maurice Blondeau
- Interviewed January 1989 -
by: Don McLean

Don: Well this thing isn't going to bother you hey?

Maurice: No, no nothing like that never bothers me?

Don: Nothing bothers me either, I'm getting to old. Even the women don't bother me too much.

Maurice: You just look old?

Don: No thanks.

Maurice: No.

Don: I don't feel old mind you.

Maurice: No, no.

Don: When I see a woman going by I don't feel old at all.

Maurice: No, no you don't look old like.

Don: I'm getting up there. How old are you now 50 some now?

Maurice: 57.

Don: I'm younger than you are, I'm 56.

Maurice: No I'm 56 I will be 57.

Don: Are you, you just said that cause I said I'm, no.

Maurice: September I'll be 57, 27th.

Don: In September, your, September the 27th.

Maurice: Yes.

Don: That's my birthday.

Maurice: Your kidding, we're twins.

Don: September the 27th, '32.

Maurice: That's right.

Don: I'll be goddamned, I'll tell you that wasn't a good day for christianity.

Maurice: Yes.

Don: I'll be damned hey.

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Well you know there's a twist of fate with you and me.

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Out in the west coast there,

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Canadian Chemicals,

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Gabriel Dumont.

Maurice: Yes

Don: Maybe I'm his blue eyed Indian I don't know.

Maurice: Well you never know.

Don: You never know. I come from Birch River.

Maurice: Yes Birch River yes, you never know.

Don: Up in northern Manitoba.

Maurice: Northern Manitoba yes.

Don: o.k. Well I'll just get a little forward I am talking to Maurice Blondeau, And we just got his age along with mine. Maurice is a Korean Vet, and I just want to ask a few questions about well not just about the war Maurice but about life before the war and life after the war. And I guess we could start off

by asking you about your childhood where did you go to school and all that kind of stuff?

Maurice: O.k. I was born in the village of Lebret, Saskatchewan in 1932. I'm not scared of saying my age. My father lived there in the village just outside the village. In 1938 we moved up to what they called the Lebret Metis Farm and I went to school in the town of Lebret the public school. I got my Grade eight there and at them days it wasn't a bad education it would be the same as Grade Twelve today I suppose.

Don: Not to many people went beyond Grade Nine in them days.

Maurice: No not in them days.

Don: Did they have high school in Lebret?

Maurice: Yes they did have high school at that time it was run by the nuns there. Sister's of Mission and

Don: But it wasn't a boarding school was it?

Maurice: It wasn't a boarding school. No, no the boarding school was separate at that time. I was in a public school. But it made me wonder lots when I was younger in my younger age when I was going to school that I had to fight the white kids at school in which was a French pronominant town. And on my way home I had to fight the white kids. I didn't know where I belonged because they called me a dirty half breed.

Don: It ain't funny I know. It wouldn't be funny to be grown up in that kind.

Maurice: So it made me wonder were I belonged in society. After communicating with my dad I straightened that out.

Don: You knew you were a Metis?

Maurice: I knew where I was and what I was

Don: Who were the white folks were they Ukranian or English

Maurice: No they were mostly French.

Don: Mostly French Canadian folks?

Maurice: Mostly French Canadian folks yes.

Don: Well didn't you guys fight just for the sport of it or were you mad at each other?

Maurice: Well for what they called us and the names they called us and what not

Don: Did they speak English?

Maurice: Oh yes and matter of fact, I suppose as you very well know that the Metis people were living on the road allowance just outside the town of Lebret and what not

Don: Did you folks actually live on the road allowance?

Maurice: Yes they called it little Chicago. My grandfather had purchased 15 acres of land that's where they lived and there was a lot of Metis people living along the road allowance at that time along there. I remember it very clearly.

Don: Did your ancestors come around from the Red River country or do you know that far back?

Maurice: I am not quite sure of that far back but we've got a book right now that we are getting, which is all in French and we're interpreted into English. See the Blondeau's have been in Canada since the 1600's in Quebec and there is one that took off through the States. See my great grandfather comes from the States through Estevan and my grandfather was born in Estevan. So therefore I must be part of that as what we're looking at.

Don: There is a bunch of big Metis communities in the northern States too.

Maurice: That's right, yes anyways, I was saying while we moved up to Lebret Metis Farm 1938 and I continued my schooling in the town of Lebret. I finished school during 1947. I went to Regina and took some more upgrading, grade nine. '49 I went to Winnipeg, Manitoba. I took a mechanics course for a year. I finished that in September 1950 and there wasn't to much work to be done around Regina or where ever I was because I couldn't find that type of work that I wanted in mechanic work, so in January the 7th, 1951 I went into Regina, a friend and I hitchhiked from Fort Qu'Appelle it was 36 below to join the army at 6:00 in the morning.

Don: What made you do it?

Maurice: Well, there was a lot of recruiting going on at that time and I felt well hey I my as well go and try it for three years or try give it a shot.

Don: I mean there was this hype in the air about the Korean war eh?

Maurice: Yes at that time there was quite a bit and I felt well hey lets give it a shot and I thought, we went in mind you my friend didn't make it but I did.

Don: Now you'd be 18 at the time?

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Just 18?

Maurice: Yes, just turned 18 that September, '50.

Don: You went in just as soon as you were old enough?

Maurice: Yes, I went in. I was shipped to Victoria. I done my general training in Fort Point Barracks mind you if I could have swam of that island I would have. Coming from the prairies and the only place I'd been was Manitoba before that

Don: Did you find Victoria snobbish with the troops and that?

Maurice: To me it was kind of snobbish in a way at that time. Especially the navy has been there years I suppose and the army had been in there in the second world war but I suppose raised a little more Cain than the navy guys did, I'm not sure.

Don: They had kind of a mild war going on there between the army and navy at times.

Maurice: That's right, yes.

Don: Snd between some of the _____?

Maurice: That's right.

Don: You must have been there when they had that riot?

Maurice: The riot, I had just got back from Korea. Was it Korea, or just before?

Don: I think that would be about '51 Maurice if I remember correctly. I am not sure it might have just been before.

Maurice: Summer '51.

Don: Yes, that was a big one wasn't it?

Maurice: That was a dandy between the _____, the loggers and the navy and army were together.

Don: The rumours were floating around they were pretty crazy.

Maurice: I remember going out there with full bayonets at one point.

Don: You were suppose to be under attack?

Maurice: Yes, that's right. But in December I was then stationed at Gordon Head. I went over to 129 battery and then

Don: How long were you in Gordon Head?

Maurice: Well we went there in July I believe no in May after our training was done in Work point barracks we went over to Gordon Head where we were the 119 battery and 129 battery. So I was put in 129 B Battery.

Don: What did you think of the housing in Gordon Head?

Maurice: Well it was something they used probably in the second world war which were just slapped together.

Don: They got a little cold in the winter.

Maurice: It did, wet, damp. But this were in December when they had a big parade and they called out for volunteers for they needed 12 volunteers for the first HA, advance group to go over. So there must have been 200 of us stepped out and they come along one, two, and I happen to be one of them and shipped out.

Don: Now you would have been just old enough. You had to be 19 to go on draft so you might have been a little under age hey?

Maurice: A little under age.

Don: Yes, you were.

Maurice: So we went from there we were shipped down the Shilo and got to Shilo.

Don: How many of the guys, I can remember some of them, can you remember some of the guys that went Mauric? I suppose that's a while back now hey, I don't know if I can remember that far back.

Maurice: That's about 38 years ago.

Don: Did you stick together after you got in?

Maurice: No we were all set in different batteries.

Don: Yes

Maurice: Mind you out of the Victoria bunch I was the only one that went over to Korea with the first aid change in April of '53.

Don: Were you with the advance party?

Maurice: Yes, with the first aid change.

Don: What was your impression now when you got on board that ship and you are seeing the old shoreline fading?

Maurice: It was a funny feeling something that I have never experienced before I guess there was some scared feelings. Leary about where I was going and to top it off the band was playing So long, it's been good to know you on the dock. There was 151 Canadians on that ship and 6,000 Americans.

Don: Did you leave from Seattle?

Maurice: We left from Seattle, yes.

Don: Did you stop off at, did you do any training in Seattle or did you just?

Maurice: No straight through.

Don: Straight through and on board ship?

Maurice: Straight through on board ship and it took us 22 days.

Don: Fort Louis, you didn't stay there?

Maurice: No we didn't stay there, we went straight through by General Black from Seattle it took us 22 days to Yokohama.

Don: Listen Maurice what made you decide to volunteer for Korea?

Maurice: Well, I thought of my country I believe which I loved very much today I'll tell you that this is something I gained by it?

Don: You mean you love it more now than before the war?

Maurice: I certainly do, I felt it was I suppose it was a chance for me to go and do my part for my country as a young guy and kind of cocky as I say. I thought it was time to explore something like that and I had the chance to do it and I done it. But when we got over to Japan we got off there for two or three days and then was on from there to Encheng.

Don: What, did you have any time to take a quick look at Japan where you Tokyo or Pury or?

Maurice: In Yokohoma we were off for two days.

Don: Yokohoma, two days.

Maurice: We were let off for 4 hours at a time and then back on ship then we

Don: So you didn't have much of a chance to do it?

Maurice: No not much of a chance.

Don: What were your impressions of Japan when you first got there?

Maurice: Women were great and beautiful. And it was the way their life really was amazing and so many people was amazing.

Don: What about their way of life struck you first impressions when you began to?

Maurice: Well I guess their housing and that is what I looked at they are close together about six inches apart. And the inside of the house was all rice paper, the dividers. That was something that I have never seen in my life before, they could make one big room or make a dozen small rooms.

Don: Just by moving that.

Maurice: The partitions around.

Don: Is that right. How were they treating the Canadians?

Maurice: At that time they were treating us real well. Mind you I will come to that later because I did spend time in Japan after that. We went from there to Encheng.

Don: That's Korea?

Maurice: Korea and that took two days. And about 1:00 o'clock in the morning they told us to get ready we were getting off on landing barges.

Don: On landing barges?

Maurice: And you can hear this bang, bang and.

Don: Your talking about the fire now.

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Oh yes, how did you feel?

Maurice: Scared, wondering what I was doing there, why I done it, why I volunteered but then

Don: Was this enemy fire?

Maurice: It was enemy fire it was a long distance away but I could hear it.

Don: First sound.

Maurice: First sound of the big guns going and I figured oh boy. Then we got on a train and we had a ride on that for about five, six hours and I guess that's where I got my first taste of being shot at.

Don: Can you remember the date you landed Maurice? That's pretty tough hey?

Maurice: I'd have to look back.

Don: '52 wasn't it?

Maurice: '52 yes.

Don: In the fall?

Maurice: April '52

Don: April '52, okay.

Maurice: And we were on that, pulled out of Encheng probably no more that two hours into the, (phone rings).

Don: We left off here you were just talking about Encheng there and you're on the train up to the front.

Maurice: I guess about two hours after we were on that train I guess there had been quite a few trains that had been ambushed going up through that way and we got ambushed. And I suppose you could probably still see my finger marks on the wooden floors.

Don: You got ambushed not by artillery but by infantry troops?

Maurice: Well by a sniper someplace on the side of the mountains you see its all mountains through there.

Don: So they were pecking away at you.

Maurice: They were pecking away at us and I'll guarrantee you if you have ever seen any young people that were scared I was one of them and it really made me wonder why, what I was doing there.

Don: Any near misses?

Maurice: That I didn't even bother look at cause I had my head covered and ducked and you probably still see my finger prints still and my toe prints in that wooden floor yet. But after that subsided we kept the train kept going shot all the windows out and then we got to the end of the line then trucks picked us up and took us to the A Eslon and that's where we stayed for three, four days.

Don: Now what does A Esholon mean?

Maurice: Well, o.k. you have A Esholon, B Esholon and then you got the front line.

Don: That's sort of the

Maurice: Your resting

Don: Getting your formation ready and .

Maurice: That's right and that's where we were all assigned to different batteries.

Don: Now did you have do a little training, you had the 105 Hallitzer over there?

Maurice: Now we had 25 pounders.

Don: You had the 25 pounders?

Maurice: We had the 25 pounders there and that's exactly where they trained us on. We trained on the job on the front.

Don: No kidding and you hadn't had, you were an ack ack gunner and you had to take your training right up on the lines.

Maurice: That's right, after I spent four days there then we were shipped out to your gun positions in different batteries. I was with B battery.

Don: Where you right on the 25 pounder?

Maurice: On the 25 pounder.

Don: What were you doing, were you loading or?

Maurice: I was a loader, yes and after two months of that

Don: Two months in the line?

Maurice: In the line, I got off the guns and I went as a

Don: What was it like up there on the lines, you were loading, was there quite a bit of action?

Maurice: Lots of action at nights. Most of the action was at night o.k. I spent a few times at the OP that's right in front that's even in front of your infantry.

Don: That's where the spotters go out, a handful of men.

Maurice: That's right, there was only five of us and a commanding officer.

Don: You had to boot them up there during the night?

Maurice: That's right, and we spent maybe a week there.

Don: And what you are doing is you are right up ahead of the infantry your spotting the enemy, and you're calling down fire.

Maurice: That's right.

Don: Well that must have been a bit of a thrill.

Maurice: Well it was the first time I was up there it I didn't like it cause you are shooting at human beings.

Don: And you could see them.

Maurice: And you could see them. But the thing is I got to say is that it's funny that a human being changes when you get in this situation such as that it's either him or me, and it's not going to be me. You get that type of a feeling. And yet even back of your mind your saying why am I doing this and many times I have said that, questioned myself why was I doing it, it's because I realized that I volunteered to go over there. You know because the UN was there and my country was there fighting, so I volunteered to do it.

Don: But still when your there.

Maurice: When your there you think about it. And it's something that I guess that a person will forget at least I won't as a young person being over there and seeing such a thing. I could imagine what the first and second world war was all about where it was probably a lot more blood shed than what had happened over there and yet there was enough over there also. A number of our boys got killed over there.

Don: Did you loose any close friends Maurice?

Maurice: I did. We were bombed a few times with the long shells, long guns.

Don: Long range, heavy artillery?

Maurice: Yes.

Don: You couldn't really retaliate because you'd be short range.

Maurice: And you don't know where they are. See they were coming out the side of the mountain they'd shove their noses out and back again you never knew where they were. No, it was scary but like I say I guess it was for my country that I was doing this for and like I say it's something that is an experience I don't think I'd like to go through again. But in July of '52 I went on hauling ammo, ammunition hauled for the 25 pounders. We happened to be at the ammunition dump and started getting shelled and that's when I got some chrapnel in my ankle.

Don: Oh I didn't know you were wounded?

Maurice: I spent, I didn't know myself till somebody pointed it out that I had blood coming out my wound. Then I they shipped me to Seoul to the American hospital and the American hospital said they couldn't do nothing so they shipped me over to Cury to the Australian hospital. Then there I was sewed up and it tore some of my ligements out my ankle and I was in the hospital there for two months.

Don: Did they get all the chrapnel out of it?

Maurice: Yes.

Don: Does it still bother you?

Maurice: I can tell you when the weather is going to change. I do get a small pension for it, but I certainly, then it was after I was finished my bit in the hospital they put me off _____ there in Cury, Japan for a month with the United Kingdom physiotherapy that they had there.

Don: There would be a mixture of UN troops at that hospital would there?

Maurice: Oh yes, everyone was in there it was UN.

Don: Turks and Brits.

Maurice: Brits everything.

Don: Yes, how did they all get along?

Maurice: Very well, we got along very well and I'll tell you the Australian nurses and doctors we had were all very nice and treated us very well. Mind you we had our own people come to visit us because, and then after I was finished there I was stationed in Ural, Japan I was stationed with 25CRG.

Don: What's CRG now?

Maurice: Canadian

Don: Something group, Oh it doesn't matter if I use that in the book I

Maurice: It's the group that you go in rotating group.

Don: O.k.

Maurice: Canadian Rotating Camp.

Don: Sure.

Maurice: I was put in the QM Stores there because at that time after I got out of the hospital they gave me an L4 on my leg. And I spent til April '53 in there in Japan.

Don: So you had a chance then to get around.

Maurice: I had a chance to get around Japan and I enjoyed it.

Don: So the war was just over against the Japanese that's why I kept asking you how those folks treated you.

Maurice: O.k. I was just going to come to that. The Canadians were well treated in Japan, because at that time the Americans and the Australians were off patient troops there and they had treated the Japanese very roughly to what I gathered. And when you were a Canadian you were greeted with open arms. Then I had travelled quite a bit in Japan on my seven days R & R, mind you go up and down that whole country in one day on their trains and I went to Colby, Japan where all the Canadian Japanese were sent back from the west coast. And I was treated like a king there. They were so glad to see Canadians. Matter of fact while I was there there was Japanese boys were joined in the army and they were taking their training at 25 CRG.

Don: In Korea?

Maurice: No they wouldn't send them to Korea. They were only let into the army to be able to come back to Canada to bring their families back to Canada.

Don: I see these were the Canadian ex-patriots?

Maurice: Yes, that's right, and there was over 600 of them when I was there.

Don: This was there way back to Canada.

Maurice: There way back to Canada and bring their family back.

Don: What about the country itself was Japan, was it pretty well rebuilt from the war?

Maurice: I was only about 25 miles from Hiroshima.

Don: Did you go through it?

Maurice: Yes I did go through Hiroshima at that time in '52 I went through it was already rebuilt.

Don: It was hey.

Maurice: There was only one building that was left there as a monument was a cement wall with an inprint of a body burnt right into it that's the only part they had there. But you look from on top of the hill it was kind of mountainous there too and you looked down it was like a big bowl where that bomb had.

Don: You could still see the crater?

Maurice: Crater yes.

Don: How deep would that be, any idea?

Maurice: Oh I couldn't tell you.

Don: That must have been a shock now when you saw?

Maurice: See the people that were marked up with it yes.

Don: You saw them too?

Maurice: Oh you see thousands of them.

Don: All over the place. What did they look like?

Maurice: Some of them were, a lot of them were dismembered their legs, their arms some of them with just legs and no arms some of them with one leg. A lot of them were discoloured a purple, some of them all their face and some of them half their faces different spots where the radiation had got them. But it was, you see they used to have, once a year they had every anniversary they had a big do in Hiroshima and we went to it and it was something to see. That's where you seen all these people come out that were badly scarred by that war. I also saw Nagasaki which was already built up when I went there. But as far as Japan was concerned it was, to me it was a civilized country very nice country and we were treated very well as Canadian people especially even being Indian they or Native.

Don: Did they differentiate between the Native, give you a little more friendliness than the others?

Maurice: I think so.

Don: Yes.

Maurice: You know why cause I don't know what it is but they really

Don: Give you a little special kindness eh?

Maurice: Kindness and it was great.

Don: I am glad I had this interview with you about Japan because I talked to another guy who had been a prisoner of the Japanese in Hong Kong. And they had been quite ruthless. They starved and tortured and murdered the prisoners.

Maurice: I went over to Korea

Don: There was no sign of that when you were there?

Maurice: No but I went over to Korea with a Vermette from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I don't know if the man is alive today or not, he was a prisoner of war right in Japan at Yokohama. When we were about two days away from Yokohama he told me Maurice, he was a Native he said I spent five years building ships and eating rice and fish heads right in these dock yards. But when we arrived there on the dock they locked

them up and they wouldn't let them out because they knew where it happened.

Don: He was still angry?

Maurice: Oh yes very angry he was with the PPCLI at that time. After we got over to Korea I don't know whatever happened to him but I heard that they sent them back, because he went bezerk when he got there.

Don: He sure had a lot of gutts joining up again after coming out of?

Maurice: He was also a second world war veterian and Korean veterian, so he had to have a lot of guts. I think it might have been for revenge that he went back.

Don: It could have been you know because some of the boys were pretty angry.

Maurice: The way I look at it is I sat down and talked to him lots and him and I communicated very well and I could sort of pick this out.

Don: Where was he from?

Maurice: Prince Albert, I am not sure what his first name was but he was a Vermette.

Don: He was Princess Pats eh?

Maurice: Yes, he was a Native boy but he sure had some hard feelings about the Japanese people.

Don: Well there you see you get a balance it just shows you what war can do to people and make them do?

Maurice: Yes, make them change. The happiest day I ever was when I landed back in Vancouver.

Don: What day was that, can you remember, be '53?

Maurice: Yes March, I think about March 17th, '53.

Don: And you hit Vancouver, what were your feelings, can you remember?

Maurice: I got down and I kissed the ground. We got off the ship we come back on ship again. It took us 10 days this time General Gathy we took the train, they had buses down in Seattle. There was only 35 Canadians on that ship. They had a bus down there that picked us up into Vancouver to the CPR training station that's where we had our medical and our pay and everything.

Don: Right in the station?

Maurice: Right in the station.

Don: Is that right, and then on board?

Maurice: Then on board and on our way home but when I got to Vancouver I kissed the ground. I didn't think that I would ever feel that way about Canada but there is nothing that will ever force me to out of Canada again, because I am proud of being a Canadian and I am proud to be a Native person and I am proud that I did go out to fight for my country which I feel is our country. And like I say there is a lot of good feelings about Japan and being away but there is also a lot of bad feelings but to be back in Canada a person doesn't know how good things have been as I felt.

Don: And today Maurice your director of the?

Maurice: Yes today I am Executive Director of the Sask Indian and Native Friendship Centre. I am a grandfather know of eleven grandchildren and a great grandfather of three children.

Don: And how many children of your own?

Maurice: I've got six.

Don: And what is your wife's name?

Maurice: Leona.

Don: Do you have any feelings Maurice about what's happening to Native people today and how has the war changed that, that's a tough question I know. Here you have been wounded for your country and the Natives aren't getting enough best deal in the world yet

Maurice: No I certainly agree there I think that we do have native organizations and I know I belong to the Metis

organization in this province for the last 30 years ever since they've started back again in the '60's. They've often talked about helping the veterians but nothing has ever taken (side one ends)

Don: O.k so you were just talking about the Native Vets Maurice and your saying that not too much is happening.

Maurice: That's right nothing ever taken place I think every general meeting they have every had was the subject come up, well what are we going to do for our Native veterians. As I realized today by talking to different and older Native veterians that what they are getting today and what they should be getting is two different stories. The reason with Native people they sit back a bit and they don't quite understand the beurocratic system that they got to go through when you go to veterians affairs.

Don: And it has cost them hasn't it?

Maurice: It's cost them and there is probably a lot of widows out there and widowers that could be getting a pension because they are veterians they are entitled to get that and I think it's time and place that these organizations start such a thing. Indian Veterians Associations in play but I really don't know what's happening there because I worked for a Saskatoon Tribal District Tribal Council and to me the Indian Veterians wasn't doing that much because I knew a lot of veterians that weren't getting the treatment that they should be getting.

Don: I wonder if anybody could put pressure on to the department and just make sure that things happen automatically. You don't have to know the ropes and apply for it, that would even things out a bit.

Maurice: I really think that the Department of Veterans was called Veterians Affairs now not Department of Veterans Affairs should have a more Metis veterians in there that have a bit of knowledge on what's going on as field workers so that they go and do some field, work instead of sitting on their fat fannies in an office. I think that the department has got to sent people out to look for these veterians and have the proper treatment.

Don: To see if they know their rights.

Maurice: That's my feeling and like I say a lot of our veterans haven't got back what they should be really getting.

Don: O.k. Maurice, I know you are busy, I'm cutting into your day here so. Well what about your own family know have they had to face much racism and persecution in this city. What's it like for them a lot better for them as it was for you when you were young fellow?

Maurice: Oh certainly I think that is something that we talked about even after I come back from Korea and I stayed in the army for six and half years and I could see the change in my home town where I was brought up with. I'm the oldest of ten kids, I could see my younger brothers and sisters I can see their residential school in there twinning with the non-natives in the town of Lebret and the Metis kids all hey that was healthy I liked that.

Don: They were getting along.

Maurice: Yes getting along because they took the big fences off the residential schools and let these kids come free and the non-natives start more or less mingling with the native kids.

Don: So in the old days they had actually had barriers up. We're talking fences here?

Maurice: That's right.

Don: They took the fences down.

Maurice: Let the kids have civilization.

Don: Yes, isn't that interesting that the races were literally divided by fences in them days.

Maurice: Yes except between the Metis and the non-natives because we as Metis people

Don: Well you were on the road allowance.

Maurice: We were forgotten people you know and a lot of times

Don: You didn't have any space.

Maurice: No we didn't have any space we had road allowances. And I remember those very clearly when I use to travel with my grandfather. We use to go dig _____ roots and go down the

road allowance you'd see the odd little shack up there Metis people my grandfather would stop and have tea with them and talk to them you know. Today is a different story.

Don: People were pretty close in them days weren't they, I mean among the Metis?

Maurice: Very, very close to

Don: Are they as close today?

Maurice: I don't think so I was grown up there and what they called there was two streets they use to call in Lebret was Chicago street and Jackrabbit street o.k.

Don: Yes.

Maurice: There was sort of a divided line there but you

Don: Chicago street that was the Metis folks?

Maurice: Yes

Don: And what was Jackrabbit?

Maurice: Jackrabbit was a little closer to town and yet you had people who lived out on the south side of the valley on top of the hill. There was a number of Metis people lived up in there. And then there was another that lived up east of Katepwa Beach which they use to call dog town because I don't know the expression why they because every time they came into town they wanted to get into a fight. So they called them the dogs. So you know it's something that really it changes.

Don: Maurice your a good guy to ask about life now for Native people in the city. Urbanizations had a hell of an impact on the Metis community. I mean you know in the old days people who were close were poor as could be but they were close and they had their own support system pretty well. And then you know the kids moved in the '60's and they moved into the city and the old support system and the elders and stuff were all at home cut the roots...

Maurice: It's I guess even when I went to join the army when I left I have never been, like I'd been in Winnipeg I was in Regina before that, to me going to a big city was something that was a real experience. So many people, so different many cars the old street cars at them days and then coming from the place

the town of Lebret and Fort Qu'Appelle I knew that valley that part of the country very well cause I'd been in all the small towns going to town in a wagon and team. But all of a sudden you go to the city and here's a street car you get on it and for a nickel you went for a ride.

Don: And you didn't know anybody there?

Maurice: I had relatives there that have lived there all their lives I suppose.

Don: But the thing is when you are in a small town you know everybody.

Maurice: You know everybody but

Don: Every human being that you know is a person with a personality but when you hit the city and here's all these faces.

Maurice: You don't know anybody. It's a shock and I suppose in the '60's the late '50's and '60's when the Native people were moving into the Metis people in general moving into to cities, urban centres that the poor housing they were getting yet, it was probably better from what they lived in the '40's and '30's, but the housings, discrimination was bad because all these people were starting to come into the cities. And I believed that I had worked with the Metis Society myself in the '60's and '70's early '70's it was something that I always stressed was I think we have two major groups in this Native groups in this province is the Federated of Saskatchewan Indians and at that time it was Metis Society of Saskatchewan which is now back again. I believe these are the people that should have been in the communities teaching these people before they move into urban centres such as Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert or where ever. Hey there's how you should be doing it explain to those people that you don't grab your family and your belongings and move into the cities cause bright lights no. I always felt that before the man should have been the person to move into the city find a job then get a house and then move his family instead of all. I think there is a new responsibility to the Native organizations to do that in which they never done.

Don: They were pretty new themselves and probably didn't know the ropes to well about urbanization themselves in the early '60's.

Maurice: Well I think there was enough people that stressed different things like this. See when I got involved in the friendship centres in the early '60's a matter of fact they weren't even a Friendship Centre it was in a person's home in Regina that the first Friendship Centre started, which was in Elenor Brass's and Hector Brass's place in Regina in there basement.

Don: Now you were working in the potash when you were in Regina, weren't you?

Maurice: No, I was a ironworker.

Don: Oh you were an ironworker.

Maurice: That's right I worked after I got out of the army I become in '57 I become an ironworker. That's high rigging.

Don: Not bad money?

Maurice: No it was good money and I enjoyed it.

Don: And you married when?

Maurice: In 1960, I married a widow she had three children their names were Poitras. As a matter of fact on of the boys are is an artist his name is Edward, he is a step-son, Valerie Giles is my step-daughter who is the President in the Native Woman today and Peirre Poitras he was the baby when I got married to my wife she was a widow when I married her. And since then we have had Brenda is my oldest she's 27 then Lori

Don: What's Brenda doing, is she married?

Maurice: Brenda is going to school universal college here. My youngest daughter is married in Montreal and two kids. Her husband is a chemical worker out there. They moved there three years ago then I got a my youngest who is Curtis who lives in Balcarres and unemployed at this time, was working in the hotel business there.

Don: Yes, so they are all, I wonder Maurice have you hadn't gone in the army and had all the experiences if your family life would have been different, it's hard to tell, you'd have had a different attitude and maybe...

Maurice: I think I guess something that I could say is that I could thank the army for the training that they had given me and the respect. It was hard training at that time and I believe, I am a strong believer today that these young kids that are dropping out of school between the age 16 and 25 they should be put in the army for two years the same old training we got when we went in. When you spoke to a Lance Corporal at that time or Lance Bombedeer you had to stand to attention. And I believe it teaches you responsibility and respect for other people and I believe I had respect for other people by the education my father had given me. Something that my father had given me as a Maurice always feel as good as the person you are standing next to but never ever feel any better than that person if you do then you've lost it. But always feel as equal. So I have always played that game that I've always felt and I've never tried to feel any better than anybody else. I get along with people very well and people is my life. Especially Native people they need a lot of help today yet and we in Friendship Centres are trying to give them that help. I get along with anybody I don't care colour, creed, or what they are we are all human beings and I hope the rest of the world would think the same way may be we would get a long a hell of a lot better.

Don: That's a good spot to quite the interview, every word of it is going into that book.