
Interview with Bob (Joseph Wilbert) Desjarlais

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Interviewed by Cheryl Troupe and Calvin Racette

Tape One: Side A

00.1 Calvin: I remember riding horses too; everybody always had a couple of horses. Riding horses and stuff like that. And I remember like...

00.3 Bob: Oh yeah, that was the thing at one time, all those young boys, like Uncle Bill and Uncle John and Peter? Freddy Poitras, oh boy they had nice horses. Riding...

00.6 Calvin: Racing?

00.6 Bob: Oh yeah, they would go to church. They would come to church with their horses, you know and show off their horses you know and oh yeah there was lots of that. And when they had weddings, my dad was great for that, he used to make these fancy things they used to put on the horses, they were just like a ball, wool, and he put _____ and he would make those and put them on the horses every year. That horse's head would have all these little different coloured ribbons on there and they used to decorate the hoses like that when they have a wedding, instead of like now, they decorate a car. They used to decorate the horses and then everybody used to oh that's not _____ driver, we'll get him the _____. Me, then they would take part in the wedding ceremony.

Laughter

01.9 Bob: Anyway, my Uncle Renny used to have a good team, my dad used to have a pretty good team too, *ha ha*, my dad participated in a lot of them, but how my dad used to participate, he was the guardian, he used to get them to make these ornaments for them. My dad was good at making those and then when they would get to a place, they always fired the shotgun two or three times, that was just tradition. When my sister got married that time in Abernethy, right in town, when they pulled up in front of the hall, my brother drove us to the back of the hall and he fired two shots with the shotgun, *ha ha*, the old tradition hey and you should have seen my dad, my dad's eyes were about that size. *Ha, ha*. Who in the heck is that, I bet you it's John. Where is John? Right away, he knew who it was and there was John standing around just like nothing happened hey. By this time he

wanted to get the shotgun. But that was tradition and I remember years ago, Uncle Bill at Eddy Poitras' wedding, Uncle Bill was standing on the hill there and the horse disguise the horse when it was coming, and before they get to close, they don't want to shoot, because they don't want to scare the horses hey. So I guess Uncle Bill, it was in the winter time, Uncle Bill got a little bit of snow in his shotgun, he shot, oh, *ha ha*, that picture showing funny there with his shotgun blowing up the ends. That's what happened. *Ha, ha*. I remembered that so well, and there are lots of little things that happened. Before they would eat the wedding dinner they always get somebody to come sing in French. So my dad knew four songs that they sang at wedding tables and this is the only time they sing these songs.

04.7 Calvin: In French?

04.7 Bob: Yes, in French.

04.7 Calvin: Not Cree?

04.7 Bob: No, not Cree, in French.

04.7 Calvin: Huh, interesting.

04.8 Bob: Yes, and they would sing these songs and Frank _____ was another guy that used to sing at wedding tables. My dad sang lots of them, he sang Malcom _____ wedding table.

05.1 Calvin: What were some of the things you guys used to do? Some of the get togethers and things, horseshoes was always a big thing, horseshoe tournaments, lots of playing, and lots of cards.

05.4 Bob: Oh yes, lots of cards and there was all kinds, every Sunday, they used to all go down to Grandpa Joe Cardinal's there and they'd both play cards there and then...

05.7 Calvin: What would they play? Not poker hey?

05.7 Bob: Well yeah, they'd play poker, but you know this was all fun and I think the women was tense, it was kind of an entertainment for themselves and then the younger guys, the guys like George Poitras and Walter Amyotte, _____, those guys are all older, they'd be playing horse shoes over there and then a bunch of kids over here, they'd have racing for peanuts and they'd have ah, the kids go and hide these darn things and they'd have to go look for them hey, ah just keep the kids occupied. Then we used to have a ball

diamond there, just on this side of uncle Renny's, they used to play ball there. At _____ district there, they used to come down with a team and Uncle Renny and them, they had a ball team old Fred Fight and they used to play them boys there. I remember when I was just a kid and grandpa _____ Amyotte, he used to live here too.

07.2 Calvin: Well Fred, he had a ball team himself. Didn't he have what 22 kids?

07.3 Bob: Oh yeah, 21. They lost two, so there were 19 and so far I think they have lost about four. There is Doug and Morris, _____. I guess there were three.

07.6 Calvin: All the rest are still hanging in there?

07.7 Bob: Yeah, still 16 of them.

07.7 Calvin: Still 16 of them? Boy! I know I run into...

07.8 Bob: Oh, Ed, so there is 15 of them.

07.9 Calvin: I ran into Kenny at noon today. You know it also made me think of another story. About the fiddles, and _____ is it _____?

07.9 Bob: Yes.

08.0 Calvin: Erma was telling me about Clifford.

08.1 Bob: You see, what they did tell her is they started their parties New Year's night. Then they'd have a party the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and the 6th, every night. They'd dance someplace, then that was it, everything was put away until after _____.

08.5 Calvin: Is that right hey?

08.5 Bob: Yes.

08.6 Calvin: You know I heard stories that they used to say "Oh you know the priests used to go around and confiscate all the fiddles at Lent"

08.6 Bob: Oh no, no.

08.7 Calvin: That wasn't...

08.7 Bob: No, not in my time anyway, maybe before my time, but not in my time. In my time the people they disciplined themselves. They partied that whole week, from New Years to the 6th and then after that, everything is put away and no more parties till after Lent.

09.1 Cheryl: What about at Christmas? What did you do at Christmas?

09.2 Bob: Christmas wasn't a very big thing for us down there. New Year's was our celebration time, no Christmas wasn't that much at that time, years ago.

09.4 Calvin: I can remember when I was a kid with grandmas, just small and at Christmas time you got a pair of socks on your supper table and that was it, you know?

09.6 Bob: Yeah, yeah. *Ha, ha.*

09.6 Calvin: Yeah, you're right about the New Year's party, I remember the people used to come celebrate.

09.7 Bob: Yeah, they'd celebrate New Year's and they would celebrate that for six days.

09.8 Calvin: And the midnight mass was a big thing.

09.8 Bob: Oh yeah, midnight mass, everybody was there.

09.9 Calvin: Everybody with a dog and their dog.

09.9 Bob: Yeah, the church would be packed right full.

10.0 Calvin: I also remember Ernie Skinner. I think it was Ernie Skinner, I'm not sure, he used to have what we called, like a big bombardier, he would drive around and check on families in the winter to make sure they were looked after.

10.1 Bob: Yeah.

10.2 Calvin: You know, I often remember that on Saturdays, he would come and pick you up and take you to town and stuff like that, I was just small, but I can remember riding in his, I was scared of it hey, it

was a big tractor, like a ski-do hey, a big tank with tracks on it. I can remember in that thing, I was terrified of it, that was he hey?

10.6 Bob: Yeah, old Ernie Skinner, down in the valley there, if you seen a car, you know darn well who it was, it was Ernie Skinner because that was the only guy who had a car down there in the valley. Nobody else had a vehicle. If you seen a car, oh there is Ernie Skinner, going to town. But he used to go around, before Christmas and check how many kids you had and he used to give presents to them. He would send presents over with Uncle Edward or somebody, or he would tell Uncle Edward "Tell Phil to come down here I want to see him" and my dad would go down there and holy he would bring back lots of stuff and every Christmas he used to give a nice little Christmas cake or a box of chocolates to the ladies, all the ladies. He was, a lot of these guys that said they didn't like him, you know and a lot of those guys I don't think they really cared that much about work anyways, they'd start off that way.

12.0 Calvin: Lots of sour grapes.

12.0 Bob: Yes, yes, you know " I don't want to go work for that old cheapskate, he only gave me ten dollars" but little did he know he got fifty dollars worth of groceries or one hundred dollars worth of clothing. You know, they forget about things like that, but he had his own little ways and he, mind you there weren't many of them around that way, but he has quite a system, quite a system. And he made sure, Calvin can vouch for that, none of them that worked for him ever went hungry.

12.7 Calvin: No way, and never spoke evil of him either.

12.8 Bob: No.

12.9 Calvin: I used to question that because I used to look at things cynically, when I was in university saying he used my family as cheap labour, they worked their guts out for him and he paid them poor and worked them hard, and he made a million bucks on the backs of my family. That's the way I tried to look at it but nobody talked about it.

13.2 Bob: Yeah, yes.

13.3 Calvin: What about the Indian community? How did the Métis community fit in with, I know the Indians were forced and confined to the reserves and all that, but _____ was a treaty woman.

13.5 Bob: That was one thing, that went by the people just smoothly, because my mother was raised in _____ reserve, you see she was only seven years old when my grandma died, so she was raised by the _____. Not young John, but old John Valguard, you see young John's dad, Old Jasper, that was his dad, Jasper and what is the other Valguard's name?

14.2 Calvin: Lori?

14.2 Bob: No, Lori, that's Grandma Racette's daughter, but they were cousins hey. So there were lots of them, my Uncle told me he was raised in the reserve too, and my mother went to school in the Indian school.

14.7 Calvin: So all that stuff on how they say they are divided, that is not really true?

14.8 Bob: No, no. Not in my time, maybe before my time.

14.9 Calvin: It's just the politics now, hey?

14.9 Bob: Yes, yes. That's the biggest thing, the politics. It's not because one is treaty and the other guy isn't. You see the whole thing is if you went to any of these reserves around here, you couldn't find a true Indian in any of these reserves, they are all half-breeds.

15.4 Calvin: That's true.

15.5 Bob: Sure. These Poitras in the reserve here, Pasqua's, they're all half-breeds.

15.6 Calvin: The _____ all half-breeds.

15.6 Bob: Yeah, they're not Indians but they were at the right place at the right time; they got it for nothing. That is the only difference between them and myself and Calvin. That's the only difference between them.

15.9 Calvin: Auntie Maryanne has Grandma's diary and in there Grandma used to keep track of everybody's births and things like that and write them down and stuff like that. And all she would say was so and so was born on File Hills, File Hills, File Hills or born at Lake Contemple. If they were born on File Hills, they were born on reserve; if they were born at Contemple Lake that was a midwife hey. Cause I know she would do that and this day in 1913 or 1923 or whatever.

- 16.5 Bob:** You see, there are a lot of times that Kokum Marice used to go and would _____ the other woman's _____.
- 16.7 Calvin:** _____.
- 16.8 Bob:** Yeah, _____.
- 16.8 Calvin:** _____, what would that stand for? That's obviously a nickname.
- 16.9 Bob:** Yes, well that's some other side of her name.
- 17.2 Calvin:** So it would be a spin off of a Christian name or something like that?
- 17.3 Bob:** Yes, a Christian name. Yeah, anyway, Kokum Florin and Kokum _____, that was the ones and there was lots of things that went on down in the valley there amongst all those Michif people that I would sure like to see brought back into this, like the _____ party. We lost all that, this is the first time Calvin ever come into my house and yet we are related and uh, this is just too bad that things like this go. But everything is going so fast nowadays, everything is kind of left behind.
- 18.3 Calvin:** The things that matter, we forget about.
- 18.3 Bob:** Yes, things that really matter are all gone. Like those people down in the valley there, they used to go to church on Sundays especially in the summer time, they sit there and they would laugh and laugh. You could hear them a quarter of a mile down the valley, you know laughing and talking, all having a really good time and now that's gone. You see your relatives once a year, once a year if you're lucky. But I got cousins in Regina on my dad's side that I have not seen for three or four years some of them, some of them, more than that. It's terrible, and yet they grew up down there too. Uncle Pete used to live just a little ways from us and then Uncle Sam used to live there, there was three houses there in a row. Yes three houses there, but all that is all lost and...
- 19.7 Calvin:** You make me think of something. I think about, when I was born in 1952, when I was a little kid I can remember all the uncles, everybody worked the elevators and I sort of looked at it when I get a little bit older, everybody the whole entire, every elevator in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan were built or painted by a crew from the valley. That's the way it was.

20.2 Bob: We all came from down there.

20.3 Calvin: Archie _____, for example, the contractor from Winnipeg made a lot of money, lots of money.

20.4 Bob: Oh boy, we made him rich.

20.5 Calvin: Made him very rich. But I think of, you know, I try to analyze that and why did that come about? My interpretation was I said you know in during the war, there was a lot of guys that went and fought in the war and then after the war, they came home and there was nothing and I know there was a lot of industry, tractors, combines and all that stuff, just boom. And the threshing crew and all that stuff was gone and so these people had to find something to do and the _____ and this was something they could do and so that became the source of our way of life for thirty, forty years.

21.3 Bob: The thing was at that time, the farmers didn't pay anything too much, you're lucky to get five dollars a day and hell, we went and worked in the elevators for three bucks an hour, four bucks an hour hey, shit that was good money, that was a lot better than being on the farm hey. So that is where, that's why a lot of us went that route.

21.8 Calvin: I remember Lionel, I was 14, he was 16 and lying to the Compensation Board or whatever, so I could get signed up to go to work, but then I get there and Jerry was my boss and he wouldn't let me go up on the scaffold; he made me paint the outhouse and all the buildings and scrape the walls. I would be the gofer and run and go get the pop or the water, pour paint in this pail and tie it on a rope, that sort of stuff. But it was a ground where I could rub shoulders with the men at work, learn how to work hard, learn to respect stuff; they give and they take you know, stuff like that.

22.5 Bob: That was the thing, years ago I remember when I was working, god we used to work hard, but when we played, we played hard too. *Ha ha.* We played hard and we worked hard.

22.8 Calvin: I remember those summers when I was a kid out there 15, 16, 17, like about three or four summers, we would go out there and on the weekend when you said the families would get together, we would have this pre-arranged _____ set up, we got paid every Thursday, so Thursday we cleaned out the fridges for groceries and lots of beer Thursday night and we used to work half a day Friday, but no one would go to work hardly, but I know Jerry used to get mad at us because we would be too hung over. So he would do things that he could do like repairing ropes, checking ropes, and cleaning the

sprayers, things like that. But we would all get together on the weekend, we would all head for a certain place like the Bow River, three or four or five different crews would come and we would hang out there for the weekend and party and visit and socialize.

23.8 Bob: That's what we used to do and that with the others, like when we were up north hey, Norris and I and a couple of other crews there, we would "Oh, next Sunday we are going to have a wiener roast down by the lake" and wholly we would go down there and there would be 25 or 30 of us down there and oh that was a good time, that wiener roast, have a couple of drinks, go back to work Monday morning. Work like slaves all week and then go and have a wiener roast or something on the weekend.

24.4 Calvin: Why would people always have nicknames? I grew up all my life I called Bernice *goose*, I didn't know. To this day everybody had a nickname, that's just the way it was. Then you start to look at their Christian name, their real names and most of them were named after some saint.

25.1 Bob: Oh yeah, like me, I'm Joseph.

25.1 Calvin: Joseph, well then how did you get Bob?

25.2 Bob: Well, Bob is just a nickname, that's a nickname. Wilbert is my real name, yeah Joseph Wilbert. But I am known better as Bob. My uncle called me that when I was a kid, Uncle Pete, and it stuck to me like I don't know what and there's lots of them they don't even know my right name. One time _____ was looking for me down there and he was looking for Wilbert Desjarlais and nobody knew. *Ha ha*. This one guy said, "You know," he said, "he could be looking for Bob." So this guy kind of gave him a description of me and he said, "Yeah that's the guy. You're not looking for Wilbert, you're looking for Bob." So the guy comes here. "I'm Bob," I said. "Hey I didn't know your name was Bob," he said. I said, "Yeah." "I had a heck of a time finding you," he said.

26.4 Calvin: Why would that be that way?

26.4 Bob: I don't know, it was something, somebody called you something and that was it, they pinned it on you and it stayed with you.

26.6 Calvin: Sometimes it wasn't very kind, like goose. Why would they call her goose?

26.7 Bob: I don't know why they did.

26.8 Cheryl: Did everybody in your family have nicknames?

26.8 Bob: Well, most of them.

26.9 Calvin: I think of Uncle John, his name was John and everyone called him Thomas.

27.0 Bob: See that is the Christian side; Thomas is the Christian side.

27.1 Calvin: Edward, everyone called him *Edouard*.

27.2 Bob: Yeah, that is the Christian part, the name too eh, my brother Tommy too, they used to call him Tom-tom.

27.4 Calvin: Tom-tom, yeah I remember that.

27.4 Bob: And that is the Christian side, and my brother John, they used to call him Sonny. There were lots of those, Sonny.

27.6 Calvin: Well, my Grandma you know, Grandma's name was Everence, and everybody called her Marice, Grandma Marice.

27.8 Bob: You know the same with me, I didn't know whom Kokum Marice's real name for thirty years. I used to go down there and visit, me and the wife and she would sing these Cree songs for us and I can just kick myself yet, that I didn't get her to teach me. Because it is not that hard, it looks hard but once somebody reads that to you, it doesn't take long and you could read that, that Cree. Because up north there in The Pas, I went to a few funerals there and the funerals there, they sing for four hours straight and that is all in Cree.

28.8 Calvin: Swampy Cree there too hey.

28.8 Bob: Yes, there is Swampy Cree, and this guy, I was there, I was kind of lost, so this guy that was sitting next to me, guy by the name of Albert Ballentine, he said "Do you know how to read that?" I said "No, good god." "Okay, when they start singing the next one, I'll show you." So he just started singing the next song. They just open the front page and they start there, they don't go through and when they finish that, they just turn it over and sing all these songs hey, they go through the book that way. When he finished that song, so they started singing the next one, he followed with his finger, and all those

words, they are right there, but they are in Cree. He, there is lots of, you can pick them out after, it is really something, but I never did get Grandma to teach me and what I should have done at that time, I should have got her to teach me that song they used to sing, her and Auntie Maria, at Christmas time.

30.6 Calvin: I remember, everybody used to, she must have been a wild woman at one point cause I know that everybody used to, Maria that was, my dad used to talk about it all the time. Maria, that crazy woman, was she kind of a _____ woman?

30.9 Bob: Well, I don't know, uh what I remember of her, she was pretty old already. I was just one of those youngsters.

31.1 Calvin: Liked to laugh and have fun.

31.1 Bob: Yes, and there was lots of that, like years ago they say laughing is one of the best medicines you can get in the world. So I could see years ago there, all those guys were pretty healthy, ah hell you can hear those guys laughing.

31.4 Calvin: One of the most laughing person I can remember was Sarah _____, oh God she was a laughing person.

31.6 Bob: Yeah, my old mother-in-law.

31.6 Calvin: Yeah, you could always tell when she was around, loved to laugh. I have one more thing that is kind of, my grandfather, I talked to Jerry not long ago and Jerry just tells me how I find out that Charlie Racette was, he could make anything, he was a stone mason, he was a carpenter, he was all these skills hey, very talented. One of the things that I am really curious about is that I was talking with my cousin Lillian, last summer, two summers ago, maybe three anyway, she passed away last year. But she was down with the family and stuff, family history and we were talking about Grandpa Charlie and she said that he had a coat, a buckskin coat that he made himself and he had these big dubs or something on the back and she said that Auntie Emma had taken this coat and cut it up and made mitts, but this envelope, this beadwork pattern, she cut it off the coat and Lillian said that she had had it and I asked Jerry and I asked _____ and they said oh yeah, I remember that coat, do you remember?

33.0 Bob: Yes.

33.0 Calvin: You do, what can you..

33.5 Bob: As a matter of fact, somewhere, someplace, we'll have to dig it out. We got a picture of him standing with that jacket on and Uncle Pete, Uncle Edward, I guess all the boys, Uncle John, Uncle Bill, they are standing there with him. He had that buckskin jacket and you see that buckskin jacket, he tanned that hide himself. That was deer hide.

34.3 Calvin: Because Uncle John had said he come from the States and others said he might have come from up the valley and I think what I'm really looking is that is also a pattern that dubs and all that, it is a pattern that is common. It is an old, old pattern that is very common to the Métis community and I know I heard that Lillian had, she said she had this, and of course you know, she passed away and so I'm going to have to look up her husband and I'd like to put it on a table and take a picture of it hey.

35.3 Bob: What I've been really thinking Calvin, maybe you can take it along with you or throw it out on your way home, or whatever you want to do, is I've been thinking that someplace, somewhere we should get a place where we can have our own archive. I was seriously thinking we should buy a little chunk of land where the church is there and Freddy Browns, the _____ school was given to me last year. I can just go and pick that up anytime I want; it was given to me. Why couldn't we move that down into the valley there and put it there and make an archive on it and put all this stuff in there. Did you know that this Palliser that went across...

35.4 Calvin: The Palliser expedition, oh yes, I've heard of it.

35.5 Bob: You've heard of it, did you know that the head...

35.5 Calvin: Scout was Peter _____ was it?

35.5 Bob: No, no Charlie Racette.

35.5 Calvin: Charlie Racette, is that right hey?

35.6 Bob: Yes, you see, my grandfather was Louis, his dad was Louis and his grandfather was Louis and then there is Charlie. That is the fourth generation back, that is the guy that bought the _____.

36.0 Calvin: He showed them white guys how to come out west and find the steel pot. We'll have to blame it on him hey?

36.1 Bob: And he was the guy that, well if it wasn't for him, them white guys would have never survived. They would have died before they

even got out of Manitoba, they would have starved to death. They didn't know how to hunt, they didn't have a clue.

36.4 Calvin: One other thing that I have been meaning to ask you, what are the things, as long as I've been in the institute, Sashes, Métis people, we have the order of the Sash and Métis people are prouder than heck and you know we trace it back and we look at history and the Frenchmen have been claiming it all along and that they invented it and made this and that. It is very very hard to find actual information on the sash itself and how the Métis people used and how they still, of course that was our toolbox and that was this and that was that and you know kept our ears warm and tied our coats together because there was no buttons and nobody had pockets, so we tied our pouches on them and things like that. It was our toolbox and it was a towrope; it was like binder twine to a farmer and all that sort of stuff and there was a little caption recently that I ran across and it said back a hundred years ago that the Métis girls used to make them for their sweethearts, that was the reference point.

37.8 Bob: Well, that makes good sense, they probably did. It is a compliment; probably some young guy called her sweetheart and she didn't really know how to answer back to him, so she answered with a sash.

38.2 Calvin: How come our people were so religious too Bob?

38.3 Bob: It was terrible actually, to think about it because did you know that Ernie Skinner went with our great great aunt for two years?

38.6 Calvin: Oh, I didn't know that.

38.6 Bob: Yes, and religion broke them apart. When the nuns found out at Lebret here that the girl was going with Ernie Skinner, they picked her up and her sister and they took them down to Winnipeg.

38.9 Calvin: Is that right and put her in a convent hey?

38.9 Bob: Yes, they didn't want nothing to do with that Protestant. Ernie Skinner would have probably married her because they were going together. But that is how religion was at one time and like you say, years ago, boy oh boy, if you missed mass, it was a terrible sin, oh god, Satan was waiting for you at the door you know, going to grab you and take you away if you didn't go to church. That is how the people respected their religion. But the thing was, I think the

_____ probably had a lot to do with the priests; they really really brainwashed the people hey.

40.3 Calvin: Over the years we've been listening to stories and stuff, and our people were a good source of cheap labour to the church; they were a built in flock. They didn't have to go anywhere else, our people had...

40.5 Bob: Well _____ built that church in Le Bret there, all cheap labour.

40.6 Calvin: Yeah, volunteer labour.

40.6 Bob: That's all volunteer labour there. They hauled rocks there and you know who split all those rocks? Leo Poitras' dad, old _____.

40.9 Calvin: Is that right hey?

40.9 Bob: Yes, and old Joe Desjarlais hauled all those rocks up with a _____ and a horse, yes, Joe Desjarlais told me that himself. He said that old guy used to split the rocks and I would put them on this thing and I would pull them up. The guy that was setting them up, up there, the guys would pull them off and set them up. Finally that horse was so smart, he said I would just tell him _____ then the horse would go whoa and he would back up, he said. So he would back up and he said and he went as far as _____ and then I would say whoa and then he would stop, then I would give him a little _____ and then away he would go. He would go to work there all day with me. He said, "Didn't have to drive him at all, worked like a man," he said, "just like another man." But it was really. I have to go back and say that the people years ago, those old people they were a long cry from mean; old people were smart, they were smart with their own ways. But you know, old Grandma there, she used to go out and they used to make my mom, my mom used to make clothes all the time. I didn't buy any clothes until I was about 15 years old; my mother made all my clothes and mother used to make clothes and Grandpa one time, he said "You know, we should get some dye and dye some of these shirts for your sisters, so that they look different, instead of all being the same." And they went out and put these flowers in a little pot and she boiled it and I asked her "What colour is that Kokum?" "Oh blue or yellow or green or whatever." Sure as hell that was what it was. I said what, well he said the different flowers are mixed together, he said and they make that colour.

43.7 Cheryl: Do you ever remember them making rugs or anything?

43.7 Bob: Oh yeah, my mother, years ago that used to be a source of income for Métis people, a lot of it, but the white people would take them to town and the white people would buy them for three or four dollars and at that time five dollars was enough to buy groceries to last a family of four all week. But at that time, most of the family down in the valley, that I knew didn't buy very much of anything from the stores; they bought it all from Ernie Skinner, or that money they had, they kind of kept it for other things.

44.6 Cheryl: What kinds of things would they make then?

44.6 Bob: Oh, they made all kinds of different patterns hey, they made round, and square ones, and small ones, big ones, and they made all different kinds.

44.9 Cheryl: Were they often braided rugs or did they make hook rugs?

44.9 Bob: Hook rugs and braided rugs. The round ones were pretty well all braided rugs, but they also hooked those too. My mother used to be great for that, she used to draw flowers and make these flowers and then grandma would come over and they would make dye, all these clothes a different color, then they would use that to make rugs.

45.4 Cheryl: Did the women ever do beadwork and silk embroidery and that type of thing?

45.5 Bob: Embroidery, they did a lot, my mother did a lot of that, but beadwork, not too much, there wasn't too much at all.

Tape One: Side B

00.1 Cheryl: So what types of things would they embroider?

00.2 Bob: Oh, pillowcases and dresser scarves, tablecloths and stuff, they made all their own, they never bought it.

00.3 Cheryl: Did they sell those as well?

00.4 Bob: Oh yes, somebody comes along and says "Oh is that ever nice," and they say "I'll give you two bucks for it," and they take it and it's gone and then they make another one. Old Kokum Marice and mom they used to run back and forth there exchanging what they used to call gineas, that's stuff they used for hooking rugs, I think that's what they called it.

01.1 Cheryl: What about stories about Métis history, like about Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, did you ever hear those when you were growing up?

01.2 Bob: Uh yeah, when the Cardinals lived on that house where my grandfather lived, on top of the hill there. I was told by that lady that just passed away there, Mrs. Henry Poitras, she was a Cardinal, she told me that Gabriel Dumont stopped there and stayed there over night one time when he was on his way to Batoche. And my uncle used to talk about that too, he met him, he met Gabriel Dumont, but they never met, nobody talked about Louis Riel just as much as they did about Gabriel, because Gabriel did stop and visit them here and probably picked up some troops here, probably that is one of the reasons why he stopped, I would imagine. Because one of my dad's uncles is buried in Batoche, yeah they didn't really talk that much about Louis, but they did I've heard mentioned about Gabriel Dumont. Maybe I could take things a little bit further for you. Charlie Racette that took that Palliser Expedition, that lady that came down here from Connecticut, she is tied in that tree, she comes from that family tree of Charlie Racette. They told us that Louis Riel's mother come from that tree. You see, she was married to this old Charlie Racette's son I think had ten or twelve kids and his daughter married a _____ here and then was her daughter that married Louis Riel. I can get all that information for you. My cousin Toby's got it all.

04.9 Calvin: You know, something else, you grew up in the era that never gets written about, the road allowance era, and how our people were excommunicated from the society and marginalized and there is lots of stories that the _____ people refer to as _____ or little Chicago and things like that, those are Métis communities that people lived on a road allowance hey, in little _____ paper shacks. Where was little Chicago?

05.5 Bob: Oh,

05.5 Calvin: _____ was around Yorkton.

05.6 Bob: Yes, yes.

05.6 Calvin: One was around Lestock too?

05.6 Bob: Yes, there was one around Lestock, there was lots of Métis there at one time, that's where they took all those Métis from there and they loaded them up in a train and they took them up north and the minute they left with the train, the guys went around and burnt all their houses so they wouldn't come back.

05.9 Cheryl: To Green lake?

06.0 Bob: Yes, to Green Lake.

06.0 Calvin: I heard it was _____ who organized that, helped the government.

06.1 Bob: He could have.

06.2 Calvin: Help the government, it was a Liberal government and he helped them organize the people to relocate, that is why I think a lot of people do not want to talk about it because, you can feel the hard feelings. I heard also that _____ were into that to, yes there are a lot of hard feelings.

06.7 Bob: Yes, there is lots of that stuff that nobody wants to talk about.

06.8 Calvin: No one wants to scratch hey.

06.8 Bob: No, nobody wants to scratch.

06.8 Calvin: Yeah, that's our way.

06.9 Bob: It just kind of gets swept under the rug and walked away. So many of those things have happened through the years, like the guys talk about things are hard and one guy one time asked me, "Well, how is it for you guys Bob?" he said. "Do you find it hard?" Well I said "We've been in it all our lives, I don't know when it started or when it's going to end."

07.6 Calvin: Yeah, it's always the same hey.

07.6 Bob: It's always the same bloody thing I said, for us. It's never changed, we've been up hill all our bloody lives, we've never been down hill, and we've never gone down hill. Always up hill, all our lives and I said we are still going up hill, today yet I said and the thing was, you think back of all the things the Métis did for these white people years ago and then they turned around and _____ their _____. That's what really, really bugs me, you know, to think somebody, somewhere, someplace, is got to be really ashamed of that, because how in the hell can you live your life knowing that you did so wrong this is as far as to kill a _____. But years ago they said, I don't know you probably read something about it through your reading there Calvin, and when they were in the Red River, they didn't dare

stray away by themselves or they never came back. Those guys got them.

09.1 Calvin: The soldiers?

09.1 Bob: Yes, because I didn't really realize until not that long ago that there were 30,000 Métis people in Red River at one time.

09.3 Calvin: Yes, there were a lot.

09.4 Bob: That is why those British got really scared because they outnumbered them

09.5 Calvin: 20 to 1.

09.5 Bob: 20 to 1, yes, yes, and this was the reason why they started _____ them, and that is the reason why you find all those Métis people that moved out of the Red River settlement, they came out of there in groups, that was the reason why because they didn't dare come out by themselves because they knew damn well what was going to happen. And that is why you found Métis people in groups. I find it today when I am thinking about it, you know I think well I guess there is a reason why they traveled all together because if somebody was after me out there, I would not want to be alone and I guess all the families, the cousins, the uncles, and the aunts, and the grandmothers and the grandfathers, they all traveled together in a group. Some of them came, see they chased them all out of Red River Settlement, they were all chased out of there. That is the reason why they left and it isn't because they left on their own, it was because they were chased out of there. Some of them went into the States and then came back this way, the Blondeaus were the same thing, see the Blondeaus went to the States to Turtle Mountain and came down and some of them stayed right there. See the lady that did our family tree for us, for my family tree, I got my family tree done, the Desjarlais family tree. Mine goes back to the sixteen hundreds and she was saying that about 70% of her family is, her husband's family lives in Turtle Mountain.

12.0 Calvin: I remember when I was a kid, well my cousin Ritchie is famous for saying "Watch out, the Rugaroo is going to get you!" Those stories that were made for kids, I imagine you went through that too hey.

12.3 Bob: Oh yes.

12.4 Calvin: That was the werewolf.

12.4 Bob: Yes, we went through, everybody went through that Rugaroo stuff yes that was the thing that kept all the kids in the house at night. Oh god, so and so would go outside and "Oh the Rugaroo is going to get you!"

12.8 Calvin: People say they see them things.

12.8 Bob: Yes, they used to say they did and they said there were certain guys that would turn into different things hey, like that tape I got from these guys from Turtle Mountain. The guy he was saying there that one time there was this guy come and visit him. He didn't know the guy at all, this guy was playing a fiddle and this guy come right out of nowhere and he asked this guy if he could play his fiddle. He said sure and handed him the fiddle and the guy played the fiddle for a little while and he said I got to go, so he went away. When he got a little ways from the house he had a set of horns. So I don't know, you here stories you know, but it sure and the hell worked for the kids; we didn't dare go anywhere at night, unless there was three or four or five of us and then we didn't waste any time getting to where we were going I'll tell you that, if it was a foot race or whatever.

14.3 Calvin: God I remember when mom used to say "Be home by dark or the Rugaroo will get you!" Then when we were kids and we used to go play out on the farm, then we would come home and all the Cardinal boys and that, we'd go right through the fairgrounds. Then this one time there was this big piece of plastic caught in the fence and it was dark out, so we couldn't see, but we could see something moving and we thought oh god it's the rugaroo, so we were all in that bleachers, in that grandstand bleachers, we were all _____ cause we used to go there in _____ all the time hey, and we all hid in there for hours because we were all so scared and we _____ so we all snuck out backwards and went way around the _____ course and went way around hey to go home. God I got a lickin when I got home from that. So the next day we go there and it was a piece of plastic, but you know those were the things.

15.3 Bob: Yes, those were the things, everybody had their way in doing them, that was the way they kept the kids at home at night, they didn't wander around at all, they scared the bjesus out of them, made sure they came home before dark. But you know, it was nice years ago, _____ like I say, you used to visit, that was the thing. At least every once a week and then in the wintertime, it was evening visiting, there was lots of it. I remember years ago there, we used to

go down to uncle _____ and dad and mother and them, they would play cards and we would go sliding.

16.2 Calvin: That would be half a mile maybe, the whole family would just walk down there.

16.3 Bob: Yes, yes we would just walk down there and dad and mom would just go play cards with Auntie Emma and Uncle Renny. Well see Uncle Renny and dad were first cousins hey, so then we would go sliding, sliding and play until about eight or nine o'clock at night. We'd go there right after supper hey, and we'd come home and boy we'd be just played right out. The thing was, we used to slide when we were kids down there. I remember we go sliding there, it was heck 25 to 30 below zero and we'd be sliding up and down them hills and that was when we had a big group. We used to take one of the _____ slide down the hill with the _____, the only time we'd come down the hill with the _____, we'd just be flying by Uncle Renny's house there and he came out and he look at us and he said to dad, uh oh, there goes my car full of kids.

17.6 Cheryl: May 15, 2002 at the home of Bob Desjarlais in Fort Qu'Appelle. Present is myself, Cheryl Troupe on behalf of Gabriel Dumont Institute and Calvin Racette. Where were you born and where were you raised?

17.9 Bob: I was born and raised down in the valley. I was brought into this world by a midwife, Grandpa Norbert Racette's wife. She brought in a whole bunch of us down there, she was very sweet old lady and very nice. She was our doctor, our family doctor for years down in the valley there for not only for ourselves, but also for everybody, that old lady used to go around visiting people in the wintertime and in the summer time. She didn't really come to visit the people but she was there to inspect on the kids, to see how the kids were doing. Honest, this is true, she used to come in the home there and if one of us sniffled or made any noise or coughed or anything, one of us had to go home with her to get some medicine, to take to, and in a matter of a day or two it was gone. She knew every medicine there was in the countryside and she was the one that I never forget this, I told this story so many times to different people it's not even funny anymore for me. But it is something that people could think about and they talk about years ago people weren't really that bright or whatever, it's not true, it's definitely not true. Because Grandma Flora Racette, one time she came at home and she said to my mother, she said have you got and chickens clucking Florence, and my mother said yes. And he said I'll trade you some eggs, because she wanted to change her flock of chickens a little bit too hey, change the bloodline. So anyway, when we were leaving she wanted me to go home with her

to bring these eggs back and when we were leaving she said to mother she said Florence how many roosters do you want and it just stopped me on my tracks. After that mom said I want three and after that I sat and I watched that chicken hatch and those little chicks and I watched those chicks and there was three roosters there. So that's, the people years ago, they weren't stupid, they were very, very smart in their own way. She knew the shape of the eggs, she knew which were roosters and which were hens, and it was just unreal.

21.5 Calvin: How long have you been here Bob?

21.5 Bob: I've been here at the fort since, I came down here in '49 and I left here in '52 or '53. I went and worked in the elevators with Walter Amyotte, my cousin. And then I came back here, this was kind of home to me after that, I used to come back here in the wintertime; I stayed with my uncle and aunt in town. My Uncle Sam Klyne and Auntie Sarah and this is where my wife and I met and we got married in 1956, the 1st of December and we moved away from here. I was working the elevators, so I took my wife along with me. I bought a trailer and then after awhile I bought a bigger trailer and took my wife along with me and we had two kids. After we came back here to Abernethy and then we moved to Regina for four years and I worked _ School. Then after that in 1973, we bought this house off of my father-in-law and we've been here ever since.

23.2 Cheryl: What are the names of your mother and father?

23.2 Bob: My dad's name was Bill Desjarlais and my mother was Florence Racette.

23.4 Cheryl: Where were they born?

23.5 Bob: My dad was born in 1904 and my mother was born in 1913.

23.7 Cheryl: What do you remember most about them?

23.8 Bob: Well, I guess their kindness is something that I'll never forget. Yes, they were very kind to us and we needed a little straightening out well dad did that, my mother never, never laid a hand on us, but if we needed straightening out and there was three boys, then holy smoke, there was three of us and if we needed straightening out, my dad did that, and I'm glad he did.

24.4 Cheryl: And have they always lived here?

24.5 Bob: Uh, no, no, we lived way down in the valley for years and years. I moved out of the valley there, I was probably 17 years old, so I lived down there till then.

24.8 Cheryl: What about your extended family, your aunts and uncles and grandparents, were they always around when you were growing up?

24.9 Bob: Yes, this is where I learned how to talk my Cree, my grandmother couldn't talk English, my dad's mom. I never knew my mother's mother, my grandmother, my dad and my grandfather passed away before I was born. I remember my, then my grandfather on my dad's side, he passed away when he was only 34 years old and he is buried south of Ituna at that settlement, they had a half-breed settlement there years ago. They call it St. Delphine. There was a church there and a school. There was quite a few Métis people living there. There was a lake there, a fair size lake and this is where _____ all the half-breeds...

25.9 Cheryl: So whereabouts in the valley did you live?

26.0 Bob: Down in Katepwa, straight south of _____. Down in the valley, in the valley, that is where I lived. Grandpa Charlie Racette and Grandma Marice used to live across the bridge from us, we lived on the north side of the valley and they lived on the south side of the valley. Grandpa Norbert, they lived a little bit further down and his family, they were all pretty well born there. But Grandpa Charlie Racette and them, there's a few of them older ones like probably right down to John I guess, they were born in the reserve.

27.1 Cheryl: So what was your home like? What kind of house did you live in?

27.2 Bob: We lived in a log house, in a log house. Houses made out of logs and mud and it had wood shingled roof. That was what most of the house were like down in the valley. I think we only had about three or four houses that was lumber, the rest was log houses and everybody lived on the road allowance until years later when Ernie Skinner had bought a chunk of land down there for them to live on; everybody that was down in the valley there, they all worked for Ernie Skinner at one point in time.

28.1 Cheryl: What kind of work did they do for him?

28.2 Bob: Farm work.

28.2 Calvin: Bob I heard a story one time about Ernie Skinner and how he was kind of mixed thing like he used to have all the Métis people working for him and living on his land, they were kind of like indentured servants, _____ . I remember Grandma Racette for example, like all the boys used to work for him Uncle Edward, Uncle Bill, Uncle Pete, and Uncle Don and he'd give Grandma 100 dollars a month or 150 dollars a month or something like that and a place to live sort of thing like that and that is sort of how it was. Of course he had a lot of land and a lot of money and he used to set himself up like an elevator, he bought all the wheat from all the farmers around and held on to it for two or three years until the price went up and then he would sell it for pretty good profit. You could say he's smart or he's sharp and all that sort of stuff, but I also heard that another story, I don't even know if it is true, but at one point that the farmers tried to bring White people from the old country to be farm workers, but because they were white people they had to send their kids to school and it cost money and all that stuff, so they figured it would be better rather than doing that, they just got the Métis people who bought their scrip land right out from under them and put the _____ on and used them as farm workers. Had you ever heard anything like that?

29.8 Bob: Uh, I heard little wee bit about it Calvin, but not enough for me to elaborate on it. The thing is, I'll tell you my version of it, what I remember of it, of Ernie Skinner. As far as I know, I never did find out or no one ever told me just how much he did pay these people but I know he used to give them some money because I know Uncle Joe and dad and them, they used to have some money, but for one thing like he had his own little way of running the whole situation. Like the land, he had all these guys working for him and he fed them all and he had everything, he had sugar and he had lots of syrup, he used to buy syrup in gallon pails and he'd have them and you could go and get a gallon of syrup off of him at any time. Then he had clothes, he owned, I heard anyway I don't know for sure, but I heard he owned 60% of the army and navy store in Winnipeg. Given by a Jew hey, and this Jew owned 40% of the store and he owned 60 % of the store. He used to go to Winnipeg twice a year. He would go in the spring and he would go and get all the summer clothes for his workers, like big overalls, work boots, socks and stuff like that hey. Then in the fall, he would go back to Winnipeg and he would go and get all this winter stuff for the boys, he would get felt socks and warm wools, and all this stuff. But the thing is with old Ernie Skinner, I found out is that my Uncle Joe Racette and them, out on the farm there, they had 31 head of cattle, when they moved out the farm there, they had 31 head of cattle and my uncle fed his cattle Ernie Skinner's grain and all his feed.

32.6 Calvin: Ernie would do that hey, simply didn't care.

32.6 Bob: Oh yeah, he wanted us to encourage these guys to do that, like these chickens hey, and he'd come, I remember this so well, he'd come to Uncle Joe's there and he'd wander around the place all over the place you know, you'd swear to God that he was a spy or something, but he went around and checking everything and he'd tell Uncle Joe after, he said give me some more feed for those chickens Joe, and you should come down and grind some grain and feed those chickens, he didn't mind that at all. And then yet, like I say, he used to give these guys not that much money but they did have a very, very good living. Even with the ladies in the summer time, he'd get them to pick Saskatoons and he'd give them 50 cents or a dollar for a gallon of Saskatoons and he'd dry those and keep them for the people in the winter time. If somebody had a bunch of kids, he'd say, "Oh take these dry Saskatoons home and cook them for your kids." He used to have lots of rhubarb, I remember he had sticks of rhubarb like you wouldn't believe and he'd cut that rhubarb up and he would dry it, then these people would mix that with the Saskatoons, and it would make awful good fruit, taste a lot better than a snowball in the wintertime. And like I say he didn't overly pay the boys in cash, but the opportunity was there and they could go ahead and do whatever they wanted, which was something different than some of the other people hey.

34.7 Calvin: I remember Uncle Edward when I was a kid, Uncle Edward was so loyal to him, he would never say a bad word, all those older guys in the valley, like all my uncles, Uncle Edward, Uncle Bill, Uncle Pete, they would never say anything bad about him you know, it was just the Skinner's walked on water and you know when I was younger, I never knew the stuff that they would give. All I heard was the old cheap skate all the time, from the younger guys and all that stuff and how they wouldn't work for that old cheap skate. I just heard those sides of the stories hey.

35.3 Bob: Well I remember one time Morris and I were working there, putting up hay and he paid us two bucks a day.

35.5 Calvin: Wow, was that good or bad?

35.5 Bob: Well, we took it anyway and the late thirties or early forties, at that time, a dollar was a dollar and he'd never come and hand you the money, he always put your money in an envelope, that was his way, he'd come around and say " Eh put this in your pocket" and so if you don't put it in your pocket, it kind of hurts him hey, so I would just take it and fold it up and put it in my pocket and away you go hey. You're not allowed to open it there in front of him. But he had two-dollar bills, he must have gathered them for years and years because he'd always pay in two dollars bills. One week we made hay for about

four days I think, Morris was working there that time too, as a kid hey, we were both just young and he gave us this envelope and pulled up beside each other and opened our end up to check who got the most money, but no way, we were both paid exactly the same amount and in two dollar bills. In a way it's kind of hard to really explain how he was, he was nice in a way and then in a way, to some of them he was an old so and so. To a lot of the people like all them guys that work for him, like Uncle Joe and Uncle Henry and Uncle Edward and those guys, you couldn't say boo about Ernie, oh boy oh boy they would climb your frame right now.

37.8 Calvin: Grandma was the same too. I remember when he used to butcher, he would always send meat home and stuff like and I can remember when I was a kid, I lived there for awhile and I know a lot of other people in the community certainly down in the valley, they didn't eat as well as we did, I didn't notice it as much, but I know there were a lot of families who had a hard times and we always seemed to have more, but I always thought that Jerry was such a good hunter hey, we always had lots of deer meat and lots of rabbit.

38.2 Bob: That is one thing we had to lots of... deer meat at home, because my dad was a very, very good hunter, I used to laugh at old _____ Skinner there, first thing in the spring my dad would go out and the first flock of ducks come in, well we had to have a feed in duck on the first day in the spring hey. So Sunday morning was the best time for my dad, he'd go out there first thing in the morning and boom, _____ Skinner used to tell his wife apparently, we heard later, oh Bill Desjarlais going to be eating duck for dinner, he knew who it was. Yes, old Desjarlais is going to be eating duck for dinner, he says, just shocked. But years ago those guys all hunted. I sat on that committee there that tried to get our hunting rights a few years ago and they talked about the Métis people slaughtering animals, heck my dad didn't, all them people that lived down in the valley there, they all hunted year round, none of them ever had a license and those deer were always there, they knew which ones to kill. If there was a doe out there with no little ones, well he had to go cause he was eating up stuff that one doe should be eating. So they would butcher it, and all those guys would watch, especially uncle, the real hunters down there was Uncle Harry Poitras and Uncle Renny and my dad.

40.2 Calvin: Uncle Renny, he was a storyteller.

40.3 Bob: Uncle Renny, he used to love hunting, I used to go out with them hunting, lots of times, we'd get out there and soon as I get, I chased the animals to them and him and dad and Uncle Harry would shoot them. By the time I get there, they got it all pretty well skinned. They'd get four or five of them hey, then what we'd do after

is we'd give it away. We only kept maybe a hind leg for ourselves, the rest all went out and as soon as we run out, Uncle Harry would come along or Uncle Renny and say, "Well boys, come along. We've got to go hunting today." Then the game warden really shocked me one time. He came down there and his name was Joe LaRocque, he came out _____.

41.1 Calvin: Ducette, is that the same guy?

41.2 Bob: Yes, he was a game warden down there and he came down there one time and he stopped at dad's there and he went visiting everybody and he stopped at dad's and he told dad Bill, but he told it in Cree hey, he said "Bill you're going to go out hungry, you need meat, go and get meat. And if anybody is coming this way any of the cops, I'll let you know."

41.8 Calvin: So he looked out for the community?

41.8 Bob: Yes, he was a half-breed himself and he looked after the community and in the fall he would come and tell dad, "You better go and get some more ducks there Bill, because them old people they need some ducks" and he looked after everybody and it was really great for dad because the warden helped him out. But even though the game warden told dad to go ahead and hunt, we never got more than we needed, never and these people are so scared that the Métis people are going to slaughter the animals, no way, they've been hunting all their lives those people and you can't tell me that they're going to do something different now, if they were going to slaughter the animals, that would have been done a long time ago.

43.0 Cheryl: What about fishing, did you do any fishing?

43.1 Bob: Yes, we did quite a bit of fishing in the spring. Right by Grandma Racette's there right by Grandpa Charlie Racette's, there was a creek there, oh we used to catch a lot of fish there and we used to dry the fish and grandma, mom, and all my aunts they cast hey, we'd catch lots of fish and dad and them would fix them and the ladies would can them for the summer and then in the winter time, my dad did some fishing in the winter time at the lake and we had a dog by the name of nigger, a black lab and that's the guy that used to bring my dad to the lake and my dad would unharness him at the lake and he would come home for the day and at about three o'clock in the afternoon he would whistle and the dog he would go and get my dad. And my dad would let him go close to that little coulee there, close to the corner, that little bridge there, dad would let the dog go and he would come to the corner and he would sit there and wait for us. We'd

run out there and sit on the sleigh and he would take us back and go and meet my dad and then we'd go back. Everyday he'd do this and then this was _____ work for the dog and we'd use him for hauling wood _____ and we used to cut wood and lay _____ down and go over there and call nigger and nigger would bring back the wood.

44.9 Calvin: I remember when I was a kid, we used to fish on that bridge, we used to use pitchforks hey, and catch them by the washtub fulls. Everything, suckers, whitefish, jackfish, everything. We'd wait after a little bit when the creek would quit running and there would be lots of sucker pools and we'd go bush whack them all. That was our fun.

45.3 Bob: Yes, we did that when we were kids.

Tape Two: Side A

00.1 Calvin: What about school Bob?

00.1 Bob: Well, I started school when I was about seven years old. I went to _ School.

00.3 Calvin: Up on top of the hill there?

00.3 Bob: Yes, up on top of the hill, and we had four miles to go to school and it was pretty hard in the wintertime. My dad had, my cousin Stan Klyne used to drive us to school and he used to come and get us in the wintertime. But in the summertime we used to walk and it was, I had a real rough time because when I started school, I didn't know that much English. I was so used to talking my own language and my grandmother was with us and she didn't talk English at all, so we had to talk to her in Cree or talk in Cree. So I didn't know that much English when I started school so it was kind of an uphill battle right from day one, but I managed to go to school until I was in grade eight, then I quit and went to work. I spent, I went to _____ and then we moved down to the Bill Steven farm on top of the hill there and _____ park, we lived there in the middle forties, I think '43 we moved there, we stayed there '43, '44, '45, '46, then we moved back in '46, back down in the valley again. I went to school in Saltone school and then when we moved back down in the valley, I went to _____ school for two years and then I was back to _____ again after because that is where I stopped my education, had to go to work.

02.5 Calvin: The stories and our history books and things that we've learned sort of said that Métis people weren't allowed to go to school legally until 1944; that is when the provincial government assumed

responsibility for education, but I know I talked to brother Jerry and others and my mom said they went to Contempora school and stuff like that and they said it was always the good will of the teacher you know, like they could stay and they could go, so they had a hodge podge of education. I know Uncle Edward went one day they said if they didn't like it, they never ever went back and they'd be hid in the hills for three months. I think it was you that told me that story. He wouldn't go back to school for _____ and they thought he was at school the whole time and he was hiding and stuff and farming.

03.3 Bob: Finally they said to him, "Okay, you got to get to work, so he went to work and he worked right till the end and he worked for one guy, Ernie Skinner, all his life, all his life he worked for Ernie Skinner, Uncle Edward. But oh he was...

03.7 Calvin: I grew up thinking all the time, I can never remember a little church in our valley, but our people were all religious.

03.8 Bob: Oh yes, oh very.

03.8 Calvin: I drive along and I see there is this little white building on Freddy Brown's property and I said somebody told me once that they thought that was an old church at one point.

04.0 Bob: Yes, it was. That was our church.

04.1 Calvin: That was the church hey.

04.1 Bob: Yes, I served mass in there, I went to catechisms there.

04.2 Calvin: That whole building is not any bigger than your living room. That's a _____ church.

04.3 Bob: We used to hold about 20 to 25 people, but it was quite a thing, the men used to sit on one side of the church and the ladies on the other side. I don't know what the idea was, but that is the way it was and what I remember so good is my aunt and Grandma Racette, Kokum Marice, they used to sing a Cree song at midnight mass and that is the only time that the song is sung, they never sing it any other time, it is a special song that they used to sing. And when I took those people down there last summer, to go and show them where all these people lived and I remembered where all the houses were and I drew a little sketch of these houses and told them whether they were log or not and drew the shape of them and all those people, they

never missed mass on Sundays and they all came to that church and then after mass, they used to sit, in the summertime they used to go and sit in the bush there and they'd bring lunch and they would sit there and have a picnic, every Sunday and the men would go and sit in the shade there and they would play cards and the ladies they used to go and sit in the shade there and visit.

06.3 Calvin: That's a long haul to, right from that corner, that crossroads corner there, that would be about three or four miles and ...

06.5 Bob: It is another two miles, another mile for Uncle Renny and them and then it was another mile for George Klyne and them and old Fred and his crew.

06.8 Calvin: _____ the closest hey.

06.8 Bob: Yeah, that's where we lived originally.

06.9 Calvin: That was your house, right on the corner there?

06.9 Bob: Yes.

06.9 Calvin: I can remember walking over there when we were kids because they had kids there my age, I would go over there and hang out.

07.0 Bob: That is where I was born.

07.1 Calvin: Oh my stars, right on the corner. I can remember old Fred telling us stories when we were kids, he used to tell us he was the biggest b-s'er in the whole world, he used to tell us, "Oh I chased a deer up that hill," he'd say "and waited till it got to the top, so far away then I would shoot it," he says, "then it would fall down the hill and roll and it would skin itself on the rocks on the way down so I would never have to skin it." You know, things like that or he would go hunting prairie chickens and he would wait until they were in the trees and stuff and then he would walk around, around, and around and then all of a sudden they would break their own necks watching him. You know things like that hey, we used to believe him, he was so, oh my.

07.8 Bob: Good old wild stories. But it entertained the kids at that time that was our entertainment. I remember years ago too, when I was small, you talk about different things. Uncle Renny's dad, old Isadore Amyotte, and he was, the stories he told us, they weren't tales at all,

you know, they were true stories. He told us he was 14 years old when he left Winnipeg. He was running four oxen on a wagon, pulling a wagon load of flour, coming west.

08.7 Calvin: On that trail there that goes right along the valley?

08.8 Bob: Yeah, Fort Ellice trail. He drove four oxen and brought that flour down here and then he said he didn't go back, he didn't go back, he stayed here, he found some Métis people living down here, so he stayed here. Him and two other boys, his friends, they were 16 years old, they had, there was no horses here, no wild horses around here hey, they were all chased away by the buffalo. On the count of the buffalo here, the horses didn't stay, they left and went way west. Anyway, the way Grandpa Isadore told us, the three of them, they walked into the States; they knew the Indians there had a bunch of horses, so they went down there and they stole a bunch of horses and brought them back. One of his buddies got shot and killed.

10.1 Calvin: While they were stealing horses?

10.1 Bob: Yeah, yeah.

10.1 Calvin: Is that right hey?

10.2 Bob: Yes, he told us that story and he was 16 years old at the time. At the time when he told us that, he had to be 90 years old. So he kind of went back quite a ways. You see, his wife and my grandmother, they were sisters, my dad's mom.

10.6 Calvin: How do you remember who is related to who? You have an amazing memory of that. I know you always know who this person was and who they married and who their mom was; you know that stuff.

10.8 Bob: Well I grew up down there Calvin and I still kind of do that. I still never lost any of my touches finding out who the people are you know. I know all of my neighbours here kind of personally because I made it a point to get to know them. I don't go and stand in the corner of my yard there and hope to god they come over. I don't wait for that. I just walk across the street there or go down in the valley and go visit the people and talk to them and get to know them.

11.5 Cheryl: Do you remember that from when you were younger, all the families getting together and visiting and socializing? What types of things would they do?

- 11.7 Bob:** Well, the things they did were they had a lot of dances. They used to entertain themselves in dancing hey, and they had lots of parties.
- 11.9 Calvin:** Good fiddle players?
- 11.9 Bob:** Oh boy, there were lots, lots of fiddle players and lots of guitar players. Ten guys would walk in the house and out of those guys there would be a fiddle player and a guitar player there for sure. They were that plentiful down in the valley there, like my own family, my mother's family there hey, there was my grandfather, Uncle Henry, Uncle Stan, Uncle Toby, and Uncle Tommy, they all played fiddle, the whole works of them.
- 12.6 Calvin:** Jimmy Peltier, I hear was one of the best.
- 12.6 Bob:** Oh yes, he was good.
- 12.7 Calvin:** He was a good fiddler.
- 12.7 Bob:** Yeah, he was a good fiddler at one time.
- 12.7 Calvin:** He just passed away not long ago.
- 12.8 Bob:** Fred Fine too, was good too. But I talked to a lot of people and my cousin Walter, he was great for going to parties and jigging hey, he was a pretty good jigger. And he told me so many times and every time we'd talk about dancing and what not, he would always talk about my Uncle Henry. He said, that man, he said, can play the fiddle, he says I could step dance to his music, he says and no effort, but with Fred I have a hard time. He makes me sweat he said, to try and keep up to his fiddling but uncle was a different kind of fiddler. Fred Fine was a kind of fiddler that played and didn't really care about the dancers that much, but my uncle, he knew exactly how fast to play that fiddle, that tune. So that you could dance.
- 14.0 Calvin:** I hear that still, people that are in dance groups they say, "Oh that was a hard guy to dance to because he just plays." These other guys feel what the dancers are doing and play to them and he engages them and he matches his fiddle playing to suit their dancing style, things like that.
- 14.3 Bob:** He'll watch that dancer and he knows that that dancer is going to change steps, so he'll changes his tune too and between the two he

said he used to just love dancing with Uncle Henry and his music because he said he knew exactly how to play.

14.7 Cheryl: So what kind of dances would happen then?

14.7 Bob: Oh, they danced all those old dances like Drops of Brandy, the Duck Dance, the Rabbit Dance, the Handkerchief Dance, the Square Dancing, the first change, second change, right down to, there are three different deals in square dancing, they start off with a slow dance which they call the first change and then the second change is a little bit faster, then they call the breakdown well that one is really fast. I used to call square dancing when I was 12 years old, I used to call square dancing, down in the valley there, we used to have dances on Sundays when our folks all went away and the whole works of us would get together in one place there and we would get Uncle Edward and my cousin Stanley Klyne, he would come and play the guitar and we would dance.

15.7 Calvin: I know Uncle Edward used to try and play the fiddle; he wasn't that good was he?

15.7 Bob: Oh, he was good enough. Oh yeah we used to dance to his music.

15.8 Calvin: When I was a little kid he was older. He'd play a little bit, he used to say to me oh boy he'd like to have a drink every now and again, then he said it made me feel kind of funny and he want to sing Oh Canada and make me want to do a little jig; then he'd go and get out his old fiddle and he'd want to play Oh Canada all the time hey.

16.1 Bob: He used to be really great for jigging, he was a good jigger. I remember one time there, New Year's Eve or New Year's night they, after they went around visiting everybody, they had a big party. Grandpa Joe Cardinal's, down in the valley there and Uncle Edward showed up and he was half drunk, *ha ha*, you should have seen him, had his felt socks on and holy Jesus, he was just a kicking them, just givin' er. I never forget old Frank Cardinal, he was Lawrence Cardinal's dad, oh boy that guy, but he was never serious, and he was always fooling around. My dad used to tease him hey, when he was dancing he'd be dancing and other guys would be jigging too and dad would holler at him _____, constantly tell him what he thought in Cree hey, _____ . You know, they're going to beat you hey and oh boy, then he'd let loose hey. Dad always used to talk about that and he used to laugh. Then after they finished, my dad used to compliment him, oh you beat him, and you beat him, _____.

17.9 Calvin: We used to talk about competitions, you know, and I read lots of history stuff and people talk about how there used to be jigging competitions and things like that and right at the drop of a hat sort of thing, someone would get up and do a step and then somebody would get up and match that step. Is this the kind of stuff that would go on all night?

18.3 Bob: Oh yeah.

18.3 Calvin: And then the best, they said it got to the point where there would be a tie, you couldn't choose between two guys, sort of thing and then he would make them do a step with a cup of water on their head, is that true?

18.5 Bob: *Ha, ha.* Well, they used to have some kind of thing like that.

18.6 Calvin: They say they'd put a cup of water on top of their head and whoever spilt the least at the end was the winner. Was that true?

18.7 Bob: Oh yeah, serious. But different dancing, the ones I seen here one time was Auntie Emma and Uncle Louis Cardinal. They were dancing the Drops of Brandy and you should have seen them. Oh it was just oh, that picture I can just see it yet, just like they're just floating around how they danced together so well, god that was nice. And old Grandma, Kokum Marice, oh boy, I tell you, she was great and she knew how to dance those dances.

19.6 Calvin: You know I've never ever seen her dance.

19.6 Bob: Is that right? Oh I seen her, I seen her lots of times. Boy she used to be good, boy she used to just float around, she used to dance with Louis Cardinal sometimes too, because old Louis Cardinal was a hell of a good dancer. Oh he can jig, oh boy he could jig.

20.0 Calvin: You know, I never knew that, I just knew him sort of after, like I used to hang around with all his boys hey and I never knew he always had a bad back.

20.2 Bob: I'll tell you, he was one heck of a step dancer.

20.3 Calvin: Grandma, they say Grandma, I also heard, I don't know if it is true or not but they used to say Grandma was good with plants and stuff like that, is that true? Like Henderson's

- 20.5 Bob:** Yes, she used to, that was her sister-in-law hey, Mrs. Thorimbert.
- 20.7 Calvin:** Grandma was a real plant woman hey?
- 20.8 Bob:** Yes, and I remember years ago when they were living down in the valley there, you would go there and that whole bottom there used to be garden.
- 21.0 Calvin:** I remember that, I'd walk by and _____ had the green house there.
- 21.1 Bob:** Yeah, all that whole bottom there on the north side of the building there, where the barns were on this side of the barns that was all garden. They probably put in the better part of two acres of garden every year and Grandma used to have everything, there wasn't a thing like she used to have cantaloupe and watermelon and all those things hey.
- 21.6 Calvin:** So all the kids liked her hey?
- 21.6 Bob:** Squash and oh lord, they used to have a great big garden and carrots, oh my lord they used to have carrots and they used to have an acre of potatoes in because it was a big family hey. They needed lots of vegetables and turnips, oh god they'd grow turnips.
- 22.2 Calvin:** I guess that is when I was a kid, my mom used to grow a big garden too, and same thing.
- 22.3 Bob:** Yes, and we had a big garden too like there was four, five of us actually and we'd grow a big garden and Uncle Edward he always used to come, at home there, one year there we had the garden along the coulee there and old Ernie Skinner came and he said to dad and Uncle Edward, "Edward," he said, "You worked that corner up there for Florence and Bill," he said, "They'll go and put a garden in there." he said. So Uncle ____ worked it all up and we put in a garden in there. That summer Uncle Edward used to stop in our garden and well everybody kind of helped themselves to the gardens. Didn't steal anything, just took it hey, and we had cucumbers in our garden, they must have been about 16 to 18 inches long and they were about 2 and a half inches in diameter and he always used to tell the story that he picked up a cucumber there one time and he went up to Uncle Joe's for dinner and he gave this cucumber to auntie and "Here," he said "Cut this up for dinner," he said. So they had dinner and there was six

of them there and they said they had a hard time to finish that, that cucumber.

24.0 Calvin: That's how big it was!

24.1 Bob: Yeah, he always used to tell us different things, but with Grandma though, she has a really good touch of flowers and that is where my mother got to grow flowers too.

24.4 Calvin: Well I remember when I was a kid I used to, on Sunday we used to go, people would come from miles around, there would be as many as two hundred people there sometimes in her yard on Sundays

24.6 Bob: Yeah, everybody was out visiting the old people, like on New Year's morning they'd all go to Grandma Racette's there at four o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine somebody, about 60 people walking into your house at four o'clock in the morning to come and have breakfast? Goodnight you know, I'd kick them all out, that was the tradition.

25.2 Calvin: I remember Uncle John used to eat snuff too hey and he would put it up on the counter, up on the shelf. I was a kid and I used to watch him and I remember one time when he wasn't around I figured I give it a try. I thought you swallowed it. Christ I threw up, oh I was sick. He just laughed at me because he knew what I did hey, he just laughed at me.

25.6 Bob: That reminds me of a story. One time we were playing hockey on a Sunday afternoon, there is Uncle Edward there, he digs in his pocket and he takes a bite of that chewing tobacco, oh god that looked pretty good. I said to him, I said, "Gees uncle, can I have a little bit of that?" "Sure," he says, "Take a bite," and I didn't know either and I swallowed some. Oh my lord I just about died. I went home because I couldn't play anymore, I was so sick, I crawled nearly all the way home. I got home, my mother looked at me, I guess I was just green and then she, that was fine I went and laid down and slept for about an hour and I woke, well are you feeling any better now she said and I said yes, he said what did you have a cigarette or chewing tobacco? I said how did you know? He said just the way you look, I knew you had Uncle Edward I said gave me a chew and I must have swallowed some well he said you won't have any more hey, I said no way and I never did have after that. That cured me right away.

27.2 Calvin: You know, I did know Grandma too and I just think of in her house, that little house, along that whole wall she had all them birds. Do you remember them birds?

27.4 Bob: Yes, yeah.

27.4 Calvin: To this day, I don't know, they are little ornaments hey and ___ collected them and I had no idea where they come

27.5 Bob: Everybody gave her...

27.6 Calvin: Yeah, people used to bring them for her.

27.6 Bob: Yes, people used to come down there and bring her these birds that she hang on her wall.

27.7 Calvin: Cause I remember as a kid those were her most precious things, those birds hey.

27.7 Bob: Yeah, those birds were something. But everything was, at that time there was really no sickness, not like today. At that time, there were no such things as heart attacks, no cancer, stuff like that.

28.2 Calvin: I don't remember anything like that either. Well of course my mom died of cancer but that was a rare thing though hey.

28.4 Bob: But the thing was when your mother passed away, all those, all our doctors were all _____ I'm sure if they were around, they probably would have been able to help her. Because them old ladies there and it was kind of it was real fortunate that we had such a person down there hey. We never went to the doctor up town or nowhere, well we had to go all the way to _____ or all the way to Indian Head, heck down the valley there, nine times out of ten you had no way to go. My dad was out working, using the horses, we had no way of travelling. A lot of them had a team of horses but they were using them for work and so Grandma there it was just, the doctor was in our backyard and then everybody helped each other, everybody was, well, they were all related you know, that was the thing. All those Racettes, the whole works of them were all related, they were all cousins.

30.0 Calvin: I was asking one time, I asked Uncle John, "Where did Grandpa Charlie come from?" He said, "He comes from the States," and that is all he said.

30.2 Bob: Well you see, they could have, they could have. I wouldn't say they didn't because there is a lot of them in Turtle Mountain, lots of Métis there in Turtle Mountain and I got a tape here, it is called Medicine Fiddle and it comes from Turtle Mountain and there is a guy

there playing the fiddle and I know god darn well he is a Métis because he is playing the fiddle and hitting the floor at the same time, so he's got to be Métis, there is no doubt in my mind because 99% of them do that, like old John Arcand does that, they all do it. My uncles and the whole works of them, they make their own base with the rhythm of their feet hey, they had no drums or anything, so that was part of the rhythm hey and this guy is playing the fiddle there and he is an Ellery and Grandpa Norbert's wife, she was an Ellery.

31.5 Calvin: Yes, yes I remember that name, I seen it in the family tree, there was an Ellery.

31.5 Bob: Then, her sister was married to my wife's grandfather. That was my father-in-law's mother, sister rather. Grandma Flora, and this one here they used to call her Kokum Whitehead, but that wasn't her name. They were Ellerys and that guy that was playing the fiddle on that tape, he is an Ellery. If I was feeling good enough I wanted to go down there and see those guys, go see if they are. My sister-in-law went down there two years ago, but she can't talk Cree and she is not open like that hey. She wouldn't say, "My name is Bob Desjarlais, I'm from Fort Qu'Appelle, I come to see you half-breeds up here."

Tape Ends at 32.9
