

Gayle Legault—Parks Canada Interview, February 7, 2012

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Darren Prefontaine (DP): We're good to go. I'll start it right now. It's February 7th, this is Darren Prefontaine interviewing Gayle Legault for the Grasslands National Park project. Hi Gayle, how are you?

Gayle Legault (GL): I'm doing very fine Darren, and I'm privileged to be doing an interview from you and Karon Shmon, and we had, we met I guess officially in Val Marie.

DP: Yes.

GL: About two months ago or whatever. And we had Métis stories to talk about, and I was very honoured to that and, I guess I'll start out by introducing myself. Gayle Legault, I'm from Val Marie. I was born in St. Albert, Alberta.

DP: Okay.

GL: My folks, in the dirty '30s and '40s, they went and tried to carve out a living farming up there, but they found out it was just the opposite from our Frenchman River Valley, where I live, where we live and where they lived in those days.

DP: Okay.

GL: It's dry, but it was too wet up there and, fortunately my father didn't sell his ranch, he rented it out. And, he came back to it. So basically that's in a nutshell, like we survived off the land with our Native culture. My father taught me how to skin an antelope and a mule deer, beaver, muskrats, and then prairie chickens, pheasants. I started hunting, Darren, I don't know, about eight or nine-years old. But everything we harvested with a gun or a trap. My father told me, "You got to clean it and eat."

DP: Okay.

GL: Like what you harvested you know what I'm saying?

DP: Yes.

GL: And we did, and we lived; basically times were tough. We lived off wildlife and very proud of it. And my mother was Diane Legault, and she was a natural herbalist, okay? And she knew the roots, asparagus roots. She would make some kind of a broth out of asparagus roots and mix that up with alfalfa tea.

DP: Okay.

GL: She'd pull the leaves off. It had to be second-cut alfalfa. And we, us kids were sick, and she had some kind of goulash there, boy I tell you, it'd either kill you or cure you.

DP: Okay.

GL: And also the turkey weed. I don't know if you've ever heard of turkey weed. She made tea out of that, it's like a big brush and tumble weed, you know? It's got white flowers on the end. And she would harvest the leaves, or the seeds out of there.

DP: Oh okay.

GL: Yeah and that was for anxiety.

DP: Oh really.

GL: Yes, but turkey weed is a sly name for it. I talked to a guy one time at the Grasslands Park that is and he's looking it up because it doesn't show turkey weed. It must have been called something else.

DP: Okay.

GL: But mother knew all the roots. Like cactus was another thing, cactus berries.

DP: Okay.

GL: Like, I don't know if you ever ate them, we used to pick them when we were kids. They were not the cactus, like we grow on the prairies here. It's, that's sort of a flat cactus with the picks sticking out, you know?

DP: Okay.

GL: Like toothpicks. But these cactus grew in little mounds like they had the cactus berry on them, okay? And we used to eat them, they were fairly sour, but and mom made lots of healing remedies with that plus, of course, the aloe vera plant.

DP: Okay.

GL: That stuff is magic. I mean uh, cut my hand wide open butchering a beef one time. My cousin DeeDee [Orphil Legault], we were butchering two beef when I was living with my ex-wife at the ranch I used to operate. I was a community vet-type thing. And a doctor used to give me, my novocaine freezing and cat gut. They used to hunt at our place. And she wouldn't sew me up so my cousin sewed me up on the welding table, could you imagine? In the shop and then we kept butchering, but boy that night it started to pound and just hammer away like a toothache, and of course I didn't say nothing to my wife. And the next morning I went into town and my mother wrapped me up with aloe vera plant and you know that took away the infection I guess, number one. And the hammering, the pain went

away within an hour. And you know those things all relate to me like the chokecherries, the blueberries, the saskatoons and the buffalo berries? Mom used to make such good. Now what's the word here, not salads, dessert with that stuff.

DP: Okay.

GL: And yeah, where they learned all this from, I don't know but it must have been from their ancestors. And we were always happy in those days. We didn't have nothing for money, but you know we were happy just to be alive and healthy. And, of course, you didn't dare mention that you had Native in your blood. At school you were picked on big time.

DP: Yes, yes.

GL: So we're proud of our heritage, but yet you, nowadays it's wide open but back then you just kept quiet you know.

DP: Could you tell me who your parents were? You mentioned your mother, who was your father? And who were your mother's people, please and maybe could you name your grandparents and where they're from?

GL: Well, I'll have to get that out of my office here, yeah. My father's name was Rhéal Legault. And his father was Daniel Legault.

DP: Okay.

GL: And, then my grandfather which is Daniel, his father was grandpa Scatland. They were of Iroquois descent. And they immigrated out of Escanaba, Michigan.

DP: Okay.

GL: And then my mother, and I didn't look, I never went through the family tree on her part of the archives and a lot of that stuff I lost ...

DP: Yes.

GL: ... And Karon [Shmon] asked me to look up if we had any descendants that came out of Manitoba.

DP: Yes.

GL: And sure enough, I came home and I looked up on my mothers ... I got to drop the phone here because I need two hands to open this bag here, just hang on a minute ... Yeah you see all this information on my dad's side, the dates, like it goes back to the 1500s, but the dates ain't on there. That's, no wait a minute here. Okay, on my mother's side it goes back to 1778.

DP: Okay.

GL: Margaret Dufrense.

DP: Okay.

GL: And when I looked up mom's stuff, and when we used to go fishing with the family at Canoe Lake, Saskatchewan she used to ask to stop at the cemetery at Meota. You know where Meota is?

DP: Sort of.

GL: It's close to Jack Fish Lake on the way to Canoe Lake. And because that's where her grandmother, her mother, was buried there. We used to walk in the weeds in the cemetery but we couldn't, you know all the crosses were rotten and falling over and blah, blah, blah. But, anyway I did look it up and my mother was born in Ste. Anne, Manitoba.

DP: Okay.

GL: And they came across there with the Red River carts, and that's where they landed. They, when her folks homesteaded they went, they were at Meota.

DP: Okay.

GL: And let me see here ... Yeah, Ste. Anne, Manitoba. And then her folks moved and her name was Apolline Dufrense.

DP: Dufrense?

GL: And then she married my grandfather Baptiste Bleau, and then she became Diane Legault. And her birthday is the 24th of February, 1918. She will be ninety-five on February the 24th. She's in a nursing home in Mankota, Saskatchewan. And she knows all, like, she's got Parkinson's, she can't remember today, but they remember what happened fifty years ago you know?

DP: Okay.

GL: That's normal with elders.

DP: Yes.

GL: They remember the good old days. But ...

DP: So getting back to your mom and dad, did they speak Michif or was it French and English?

GL: It was my grandparents that spoke Michif. Very fluently in front of us grandchildren. And like a fool or whatever, I really regret not asking them, you know, kids will be kids and to pick up on that language.

DP: Yes.

GL: I wish to hell I would have. That would be so important to me today. But we spoke English and French. Matter of fact, straight French. We lived in a country community between Mankota and Val Marie, and then when the country school closed it was time for my brother Ed who was four years older than me, had to go to school then dad moved the old shack into Val Marie. Then I virtually lost my French, sad but true. Everybody talked English in school you know?

DP: Yeah.

GL: That's yeah, in a nutshell. That's what it's all about. Yes, I really regret not having the courage or the knowledge to ask my grandparents to teach me Michif. And so there you go, it's gone now.

DP: You mentioned the Métis were mistreated in the area, do you have specific examples and could you name some of the families you remember?

GL: Our family, we were not, but the Trottier family they were mistreated something awful you know? They still came into town, even in the '50s with a team of horses you know? Either on wagon wheels or a sleigh. And children are very mean, especially at school. They threw rocks at them. And they would be, they weren't proud, like they were scared to admit, and they'd hold their heads down and it was awful, the things that went on. Of course, Bryan Trottier the NHL superstar who won eight Stanley cups, he was, when I played senior hockey with the Val Marie Mustangs he was on the high school line up, fourth line up you know? And the talent those people had, Darren.

DP: Phenomenal athletes.

GL: They could draw, they were musicians. Like right from Buzz Trottier, was Bryan's father, then Pat [Patrice] Trottier would be his great-grandfather. And when they came they settled in Lac Pelletier to start with before they homesteaded in Val Marie. And my mother used to work, she was great friends with, oh boy what was her first name now, Bryan Trottier's grandmother ... Well we called her "Granny" anyway, but mom used to go out there and help her make flour and stuff and they would do a lot of sewing and what have you. And you know got to be very close friends. And like I was telling you before, my father went twice to *Back to Batoche* days years ago with John Trottier. And on his deathbed, about two weeks before he passed away he was in the Eastend nursing home and he told me and my brother, he says "Some day I want you kids to go to Batoche." And I did go two years ago, it was their 125th anniversary. I only spent three days there, and there was 75 thousand people that went through those gates during the course of the week or ten days it took to run that off anyway. There was a rodeo every night and chuck wagon races, and it was all alcohol free and, there was a little bit of beer down by the rodeo grounds by the campers, but it was quiet you know in that way and in the mornings I'd go help Robert Doucette. The first morning, I was up early at daybreak and I seen this guy all by himself, he was picking garbage up. They have an open arena, I don't know if you've ever been there.

DP: Yep.

GL: At night and singers, like I mean professional music. And of course everybody brings out their lawn chairs but nobody can bring their bag of, ah, their coffee or whatever pockets or chocolate bar wrappers, no, they leave them on the ground. And I walked up and started helping him. I said, hell let's put my truck in here and we'll fill garbage bags. And oh, Robert was happy. And so every morning I'd pull in there with my truck and we'd clean that place up in ten minutes. And then we marched down there to Batoche and I said a little speech there at the church you know. Anyway, I just thoroughly enjoyed it.

DP: Now was it a dream of your father or grandfather that you and your family went to Batoche?

GL: No, my father.

DP: Your father always wanted your family to go there?

GL: Yep. And he went. John Trottier, Trottier was a lot older than my father, but he sort of took him under his wings you know? And they would go to Wood Mountain. There was a pow wow at Wood Mountain.

DP: Yes.

GL: He'd bring my dad with him and they'd call John the "Chief." And anyway, John Trottier fought in both world wars, World War One and World War Two.

DP: Okay.

GL: And this is the part that I, really disagree with the government at that time, Canadian Government. Those Natives were good warriors.

DP: Yes.

GL: They fought hard, but they weren't allowed to vote. Can you imagine?

DP: No.

GL: Yeah, I mean to me that's an awful disgrace. You can fight for your country, but you can't vote. You know, and they used the Cree language so the Germans couldn't understand like when they were, ah, what's the word here ...

DP: Code talking.

GL: When they were talking like for spies.

DP: Yep. Code talkers.

GL: Yes. They used them for code talkers, and yes they were used. And that worked and the Cree language, of course, the Germans couldn't pick up on that or the Japanese or whoever they were battling against. And then, they get home and they can't vote. But now things have

come around full circle. You know, now the Natives are well educated and there's lawyers and doctors and they're sitting on tons of minerals, like gold and silver in the north. Of course, that's where they put the poor people.

DP: Yep.

GL: Because the white man didn't want the bush up north. Well now, they're kicking their ass because I know my brother is a pipeline welder and he knows all about what's going on up there at Fort Mac and the Territories. I worked for my daughter, she's the manager for the air base in Stony Rapids and we used to fly in freight into the territories for these mines you know? And then they were Dene Natives, they weren't Cree. And them kids up there, living in not tipis but they were tents, insulated tents. We used to haul up oil, food and all the parts and cement. Brought everything from soup to nuts on a twin otter and my son-in-law is the captain of a twin otter but anyway, them young Denes would meet the cargo plane on a frozen lake. "Oh Mr. Legault, you don't know, you don't have to help." They were very polite. They were gentlemen so it proves to you Darren that it doesn't matter what denomination you are, a Japanese, a German, a Frenchmen, a Native, we're all born healthy and ambitious. It's all in the bringing up.

DP: Yep.

GL: That's the sad part. And of course, the alcohol and the drugs and stuff. Well that again, goes for every denomination, but it ruined a lot of indulgent adults and children.

DP: Yes, most certainly. You mentioned the Trottier family, were there other Métis families in the area or were they the main family?

GL: They were, yeah, they were the principal Métis family in the community.

DP: Okay. Were there other Métis veterans you remember or mainly just John Trottier?

GL: Well John and his brothers but outside of my father, my father he only made it to Regina. My father was handicapped when he was 24 years-old. He had a terrible case of gout and arthritis.

DP: Oh okay.

GL: And he was flat-footed.

DP: So the Army just wouldn't take him.

GL: If you were flat-footed in those days they turned you back. Anyway, and my brother Ed and I, we had to grow up when we were ten and twelve-years old. You know, helping my father out. I quit school, I'm not very well educated. In grade ten, against my dad's wishes, but like he was going down hill and having problems with his ranch, and I knew where I was going. I was going to be a rancher so I dropped out of high school. And again, that was my choice not my father's. He said, "Gayle you stay in school," but I didn't listen. Anyway, I quit school and I worked for him and in the end I, you know, manager of that ranch.

DP: Yeah.

GL: On our ranch, there's so much history. We've got Sitting Bull's camp, we got a buffalo jump. And my father, there's one area of land that was relatively flat, and I think I told you that story. And I always asked him, how come that, you know, because that there land, the corner section was broke. And we were growing wheat, and we seeded alfalfa and he said, "Don't you ever put a plough. There was about ten acres there." And I said, "why Dad?" He says, "Because there's 27, roughly 27-28 tipi rings there." And he said, "that's when Sitting Bull fled from the US?" Imagine you would know the history on that?

DP: Yes, yes.

GL: The last stand and those were the Sioux. And they first, they ended up in Cypress Hills.

DP: Yes.

GL: And they started to immigrate down the Frenchman River valley. And there's probably lots of spots, but the historians, by the size of the tipi rings and they counted and they said that was definitely Sitting Bulls camp. Then from there he went onto Wood Mountain. And spread his seed around there a little bit with the French-English. And as far as I know, I think the Wood Mountain, correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the only Sioux nation in Saskatchewan.

DP: Uh, no. There's actually one by Saskatoon and one by Prince Albert.

GL: Oh is that right? Okay.

DP: But of Sitting Bull's group, I think that's the only one.

GL: Oh yeah. And it's what's his name, Johnny Goodtrack who is now chief.

DP: Yes.

GL: Is it Johnny, was that his first name? But Goodtrack anyway.

DP: A very prominent family there, yes.

GL: And then being a rancher, they're all ranchers. I used to, well I still, go to cattle sales, and the Wood Mountain stampede, I rode in there many times myself when I was a rodeo contestant, you know?

DP: Now we're getting to the rodeoing and the cowboying. Would you say that a primary—

GL: Karson, my son?

DP: Well Karson but primary, that was a primary lifestyle for Métis and just people in general in the region?

GL: Oh yes. From hitting baseballs to throwing horseshoes. We had all kinds of games. We even played, watching it come alive again on TV here. It how can I explain this, not a ratchet but what was it called? Croquette, no, croquette.

DP: Polo?

GL: Pardon me?

DP: Polo.

GL: No.

DP: With the horses, no?

GL: No. They're on foot and they had a, made out of a tree and there was like a net.

DP: Lacrosse.

GL: Lacrosse. There you go.

DP: You played lacrosse?

GL: Yes. Down at the Wood Mountain stampede there was all kinds of stuff. There's a great museum at Wood Mountain.

DP: Yes, it's pretty good.

GL: There's lots of history in those hills. And, of course the Trotters, we camped there. And my uncle Orphil he'd go, he made homebrew. That was how they got their start in those days. And him and dad would ride horseback with homebrew inside of gunnysacks. They'd fill beer bottles.

DP: Okay.

GL: Twenty-five cents. Now you had twenty-five cents worth of alcohol in there because their homebrew you could light hey?

DP: It'd make you happy.

GL: And, but my father and uncle Orphil never drank the stuff when they were peddling it and never got caught. Can you imagine? The Wood Mountain, the RCMP had Grandpa under surveillance. It was on the divide there. That divide there I think I told you, there's a towering section of land where you could sit on your horse and watch a water, continental divide, to the Hudson Bay, that's to the north. And on the same ridge in the springtime runoff like, you could watch the water go down to the Gulf of Mexico. It went into the Frenchman River, then it went into the Milk river, into the Missouri, into the Mississippi, and pops out at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Yeah, lot of history there boy.

DP: There is. It's just like the Poplar River that flows down south into the Gulf of Mexico; it's the same thing.

GL: Is that right? The RCMP would stay overnight at my father's ranch when patrolling the land between Fort Walsh and Wood Mountain.

DP: That is interesting.

GL: Yeah and anyway yeah well I guess I've been maybe talking a little too much but ...

DP: No, no, no. This is great. This is great.

GL: My father ... I'm very honoured to have you because you know, even people, you know I'm sixty-four years-old and when our age group is gone, we have to tell these stories now. You know, because who is going to pick up the pieces and you know, like my grandmother, great-grandmother being in the residential school? I think she was in Lebret.

...

GL: I'm the only one in the area to catch two wild lynx.

DP: Two lynx.

GL: Yeah, trapping, and I sent them to a man, his name was Mr. Cook, I forget his first name, at the Regina fur marketing. And I sent all my beaver pelts and coyote pelts and he called back and he said, "Where the hell did you get that lynx?" I said, "In Val Marie." "No, no, no, you guys got bobcats." I said, and regret to this day that I didn't get one of them mounted. I got the pictures, I got the pictures to prove it. But we're feeding with a team of horses and the lynx was eating. It killed a porcupine across the river. Frenchman River. And we had no gun, and we had to drive the team two miles back to the ranch yard, pick up a gun, and we're hauling loose hay with pitch forks. Anyway, and breaking in horses, \$25 a head. And they didn't buck very hard because the snow was three feet deep. And anyway, when we came by empty the lynx was gone. Must have went for a little catnap. And then we load the team, the sleigh with loose hay, and I got the gun underneath, can you imagine, a 22 marlin lever action, and but it was at the front of the sleigh. And there's that lynx standing there again on our way back. And so, took out the gun and he was scared. He was only oh, I'd say 100 feet away. And I walked up to the fence post and leaned on there and shot him in the head and skinned him. And the next one I trapped. I trapped him right at the same porcupine kill you know? Yeah, and those were the best times of my life, Darren, and I didn't really realize or appreciate it. You're always thinking oh when I get older I will retire rich and all that, hell, you can have all the money in the world and material possessions and that means nothing.

DP: No.

GL: It's people. Knowing, having good friends is number one in your life and enjoying the hills, the wildlife, you know, what more can you say? All the nice grass in Val Marie you could make a living without a penny if you had to.

DP: A very nice part of the world.

GL: And we used to trap minks. We'd build these traps out of chicken net, wire you know what that looks like?

DP: Yep.

GL: Then we had oval, one end was square like blocked off but you had an oval opening and you'd put bait in there and the mink ... The fish would go in on the beaver dam where we'd set these.

DP: Okay.

GL: Just below a beaver dam in the water and then a mink would swim in, the fish would go in like we had lots of perch and suckers, burbot, and jackfish. And the mink would go in but it could not figure their way back out. Neither could the fish.

DP: Really?

GL: Yeah, it was like a tunnel on the other end there. And it come to about three inches in diameter, maybe two inches but at the opening is wide open. Then they'd swim in there but they couldn't come back out. That was dead centre. They'd swim to the sides. They couldn't get out. Of course, the mink would drown, but the fish would be alive so we had a bountiful of fish to take home and your mink. And that's when short furs, you see the short furs, the beaver, the mink, and the muskrat were worth more money than maybe five years later when the fashions, like your clothing, furs were all sent in to Paris most of them, France. And then, long furs were the style. And the one year, I got them, I got the pictures at home. ... I got a cheque for over ten thousand dollars in coyotes, the beaver and mainly coyotes and fox. And I had so many with my cousin that time we drove all the way to Regina fur marketing. And the next year I was hunting and trapping again. That was in 1976 I believe. And so I made seven thousand dollars and that's how I got my start ranching. And then, the next year we hunted and trapped very hard and the fur market went down. Beavers were like five to seven dollars each. We had blisters on our hands from skinning them. We had them stretched on every granary wall. We were going to get rich him, and, I, but that's just the way things go.

DP: Yeah, unfortunately.

GL: I did a lot of living in my day, I tell ya. Off the land. I couldn't wait to get outside, I didn't like the indoors.

DP: So what do you think of the efforts of Grasslands National Park to restore the prairie and bring back some of the animals like the ferret and the bison?

GL: Well that's okay. I think, they over done it. They don't need that much land. They've got I think it's 300 sections now, all total.

DP: Okay.

GL: And you know, that's gone far enough now. You know, who, like, I don't know why they panic over prairie wolf, who in the hell takes care of it better than the rancher? And we take care of the wildlife and the grass, and there's a problem down there now. They don't have any, they destroyed all the feed lots. So the pheasants, like the, that's what my father said there's more wildlife now, well that's when he was still living, well up till '94. Anyway, than there was when he was a child because they can get in stack yards and survive and they can eat a little bit of grain here and there you know what I'm saying?

DP: Yes.

GL: So yeah, the Park, the Grasslands Park is okay, but that's enough now. They bought the three larges ranches, we neighbour those ranches on our ranch. The Dixon Ranch, the Walker Ranch and Walt Larson's and Perraults. And then they've got another block by Killdeer by Wood Mountain.

DP: Yes.

GL: Smaller. But now I think that's good now. They've got the Old Man on his Back where they got buffalo by Consul, you've heard of that one?

DP: Yes.

GL: And I think, you know that's it. If they take proper care of that, they don't need no more. Put it to you that way, there's young ranchers looking for grass and they got a big chunk out of there now, and yeah they're doing a good job. They've introduced the buffalo back in there. And the ferrets and what have you. Well the rattlesnakes, they're thicker than ever because nobody, years ago the ranchers used to dynamite the snake pits in the winter, you know?

DP: Okay.

GL: To keep them ... When dad first bought his ranch in '64, right close neighbours to Grasslands Park, it wasn't a park then but anyway you might see one a year or none. Now everyday you go out there you see rattlesnakes. They're, they're getting too thick for my concern. We've already had two people get bit.

DP: Oh really?

GL: Where they almost lost their legs. Yeah, little girl from Ponteix here a couple years ago.

DP: Oh, you're kidding?

GL: Yeah they pack a wallop. They're not the eastern diamond backs like you got down in Texas.

DP: No.

GL: These are the prairie rattlesnakes, but yeah, and now they're protected species all across Canada. It's like poaching a deer or an elk or anything, not killing a rattlesnake. You're arrested, like.

DP: Okay. Do you think because winters are more mild generally they have a better chance of living down there?

GL: No that's got no ... You see when they den up the rattlesnakes, the blue racers, the garter snakes and the bull snakes, they go down in what you call a snake pit. They're way below the frost level. And they curl up there, I've never seen it, dad said you could see the steam coming out at the top you know?

DP: Okay.

GL: They undermine the one hillside so bad it slid down. And anyway, the only predator a rattlesnake, a prairie rattlesnake has to my knowledge is the bull snake. Yep, the bullsnake is like a python. Like they will, they're non-venomous but they will wrap you up, know what I'm saying. Like a python?

DP: So eagles and that don't hunt them?

GL: Pardon me.

DP: An eagle wouldn't hunt them?

GL: Oh maybe eagles do. Yeah, and I think you're right, yeah. But, they prey on gophers and prairie dogs. And a rattlesnake only needs one gopher a year to survive.

DP: They must have an incredibly low metabolism.

GL: Yeah, because Fernand Perreault used to milk them for the government, for venom. To make the anti-venom. And he showed me a snake, like he had them in glass cages and the only difference is that one hadn't eaten for one year, the only ... And then from a fresh one he just caught was the colour, the one in the glass cage was more pale okay? Don't forget if you see one rattlesnake there's another one nearby.

DP: Another one near by.

GL: Travel in pairs, yep. On two occasions, I witnessed that myself. yeah.

DP: Okay. Let's shift gears now for a moment or two. We talked, when I talked to you previously about special occasions and holidays, how did your family celebrate Christmas, Easter and New Years? Was there a certain family tradition that you had?

GL: You know when I was really young we'd hitch up the team, that's when we lived on the divide there in Reliance [Saskatchewan], and they used to heat rocks on top the stove and put them in the sleigh, and then they had buffalo robes or cattle hides. And then, there was like six girls in my dad's family and you bundled up and you put that over top those rocks. You're as warm as toast. And they might stay three days.

DP: Oh really?

GL: Yeah. They had, maybe five miles away, go visit another family. Like one year, they would take turns so they would make popcorn and of course they grew their own tobacco. I remember grandpa Scatland, the Iroquois, he used to, I remember him hanging his tobacco. Tobacco grew very well in Saskatchewan. I don't smoke, but with the price of tobacco today I'd be growing it if I smoked. And then you'd dry these big tobacco leaves, he would crush them all up and put them in his pipe or else make roll-your-owns. And they would, you'd come into the room and they'd be playing cards and smoking and drinking a little homebrew and having sing songs. And it was so nice because you could smell the wood fire going. And, the tobacco then was more pure than even the bought tobacco. I never got sore throats. Nowadays if I go to a bar or a dance you wake up the next morning and you got a sore throat. It's the chemicals in tobacco now.

DP: Yep. For sure.

GL: Yep. And they put stuff in there to make it an addiction like. And, unfortunately for teenagers they get hooked on that tobacco today. But yeah, that's how they would celebrate the New Years, Christmas, sing songs. You know they didn't have much, but they made, they had fun.

DP: They had fun. So a lot of extended families get together like say aunts and uncles?

GL: Oh absolutely. You know what they would do Darren?

DP: What's that?

GL: If the houses were small, they'd take the furniture out. The couches, the chairs and put it in a snow bank so they could dance.

DP: And they danced all night?

GL: Yep. And then when the party was finally done, everybody would haul the furniture back in and away you go. Yes, that's what they done back then.

DP: Okay. So that was quite common?

GL: Oh that was very, very common. Even when mom and dad moved to town when we had to go to school at Val Marie, high school here, well grade school. Right here on the street of Val Marie, right across from where I live today. That little house we had, my

brother Ed and I slept in a little roll up bed together until we left home and, but all that stuff would come out, especially in the living room.

DP: Okay.

GL: And, that would be their dance hall but there was no room to dance with the furniture so the tables, the couch and the chairs, out they'd go. And they'd start making popcorn and a little of homemade wine and what have you, and out come the cards and the tobacco and they would sing and dance and play the fiddle. My folks were never musicians, but the Trotters, holy smokes.

DP: They were very musical.

GL: Oh God, they were natural talent.

DP: So they played all the dances then?

GL: They played a lot of them. I'm not saying all of them but, and they were very good artists. They could draw a picture. Like I was telling you that story either at Willow Bunch or at Val Marie, Lloyd Trotter was a real classic saddle bronc rider and that would be John's son. So it would be Bryan's uncle. Anyway, he drew a picture one time of Cliff Olsen who was a rancher here. They used to rodeo together. But he, you know, when you ride the rodeo you got to start your horse, your spurs have to be at the point of the shoulders and he missed his horse out. And, I was in the Val Marie bar, and I think I was even too young to be in there, but I was in there anyway, and listening to these stories, and Lloyd Trotter picked up a piece of scrap paper out of Cliff Olsen's office. Cliff owned the bar, he was a rancher and a bronc rider and he, you know how he started to draw the picture? A pencil sketch. He drew the round of the spur first and then the cowboy and the horse. And it was just, and then the loud speaker with the little vibrations in the air and the rodeo announcer, goose egg, they called it goose egg if you missed our your horse. And then, he just crumbled it up and he threw it in the waste paper basket and like a damn fool I should have went and dug it out of there. But he drew that picture in pencil sketch, didn't take him ten minutes.

DP: Oh really?

GL: That's how talented the Trotter's were. Then when Lloyd fought in the Second World War across the English Channel, and it took months on end to haul by ship, to bring the warriors back to England. The army people.

DP: Yep, yep.

GL: And in the meantime he schemes up a rodeo, now wait a minute, I'm getting my wires crossed here. Yeah they were boating them back to Canada. They were in England. And there had never been a rodeo in England ever.

DP: No, okay.

GL: And the Queen attended that rodeo, and it was Lloyd Trottier from Val Marie and that's where he met his wife Tina in the army. And he invented a circus, like a circus wheel out of a, and he used the hub out of a tank. You know, tanks for in the army?

DP: Yeah.

GL: Tanks, out of the hub. He asked the Canadian stock contractors when they'd go over from England to Canada they would bring a load of broncs on the ship. And then finally, he had a full-scale rodeo going in England. Unheard of.

DP: First one.

GL: That's in the archives if you want to dig it up. It was actually, when I read it, it was in the *Western Producer* magazine.

DP: Oh you're kidding?

GL: I brought it over to Mary Trottier to show her, but she already seen it. That's Bryan Trottier's mother. But old Lloyd masterminded that rodeo. That was a real, it was something when you think back.

DP: Yeah for sure.

GL: And I don't know I guess that would be in the early 40s. The Second World War ended in '44 I believe.

DP: '45.

GL: '45 okay.

DP: Wow.

GL: Yeah, so the Trottier family are the main, the Native family in this community that's for sure.

DP: By the sounds of it, they're the most prominent family. Like in terms of, obviously like having three sons in the NHL and all that talent.

GL: Oh well Bryan, he's autographed the inside of my cowboy hat. The cowboy hat that Karson, he won the Skoal Super Rodeo Tour the year he was, it was more than just winning Canada. There's a Budweiser, he won three bronze trophies. He was Manitoba champion, Alberta, Saskatchewan champion.

DP: Okay.

GL: And then of course he won that Dodge truck and he was sponsored, he couldn't find a sponsor when he'd, CCA he was a champion in 1995 in Lloydminster, and then the next step is pro rodeo. And you got to have a sponsor because you can't afford to drive around too

much because you're going all across Canada, US. And well do you want to listen to this story?

DP: Sure.

GL: Okay, how this all happened, how he got his sponsor. Well I told him, "Sit down Karson and write all your accomplishments since you were in little britches, high school rodeo." There was no high school rodeo at the time in Saskatchewan, there was Alberta, BC. So he joined the Montana. We'd get our mail in Montana as well so he was riding with the Montana high school team. And he made it to the world finals in Oklahoma city.

DP: Okay.

GL: But they didn't have a very good finals, that rodeo team, they got beat. But anyway, the next year he wanted to rodeo with Montana again, but Saskatchewan started a high school rodeo game. And there was only six rodeos and it's all headquartered out of Denver, Colorado so he phoned there and they said, "No, if you're going to high school in Saskatchewan, rightfully so, you have to ride with the Saskatchewan team." Then he made it to the semi-finals down in Nevada someplace at the bottom end of Nevada.

DP: Okay.

GL: But he's competing against guys, they had 60, 70 rodeo teams in the US. Rodeo is a big deal. And he could have had a scholarship to go to Bozeman, Montana, like a free scholarship through his rodeo achievements and, so then he turns pro. And I said, "Well write a letter to John Deere, the Royal Bank, Esso Petroleum, I mean these people make a lot of their wealth, comes from agriculture, and rodeo is agriculture." But they would not sponsor him, they said it's got to be a team sport. Not an individual, like when you're a rodeo rider, you're one on one. And but they all, John Deere my son was a head mechanic there. He's got a shop in town now, my younger son Cody. A head mechanic for John Deere at Mossbank and now they own Regina, Moose Jaw, blah, blah. But anyway, and I knew the manager good, and we had a conference meeting about sponsoring Karson, and they said no and here there was these, what do you call them, the world games there?

DP: Olympics.

GL: Yeah Olympics. And they sponsored, John Deere volley ball in the sand! And I was upset. I got a hold of, I said how many combines and tractors do you, and parts do you sell to these ladies that play volleyball in the sand, but you won't sponsor a cowboy. But, anyway to get to the end of the story, in a nutshell here, the Bear Claw Casino at Carlyle.

DP: Okay.

GL: They owned a bull called Bear Claw and Art Francis is a Native sub-contractor.

DP: Okay.

GL: Anyway, very close friends of us. Karson, that bull was un-ridden and they had a bounty on him. And each time he was un-ridden the bounty would go up by a \$100 or something. And Karson drew that bull at a rodeo at Kennedy, Saskatchewan, and he rode the bull, and got the bounty. I think it was 1,100 dollars. And the chief walks up after the rodeo at Kennedy, I don't know if it was a White Bear Reserve or what and he says we'd like to sponsor you in the team rodeo in Saskatoon. At the time, they tried that for about three years. Team rodeos, where you hire a, you pick a bull rider, a saddle bronc, barrel racer, team roper, calf roper, whatever, and you make up a team and Karson was already spoken for in the bull riding with Dodge trucks. Then there's Brahma Boots tour, well there was Wrangler pants had a team, and I could go on and on here. And so, he come home telling me this story, so I said, "Well there you go, talk to the Natives if you want a sponsor." So by golly, low and behold they met right on 22nd avenue there some, in the Native building, and they had, what can I call it, a meeting, a board room meeting, and of course, yeah a council meeting. And then, all the presidents and whoever on the Native side had to agree on this, and they sponsored that kid and when he won that new Dodge truck in the year 2000 or 1999. Well you guys got the pictures ... and he's got the SIGA sign on the door of his truck. And so they sponsored Karson, and they still, he's going to go rodeoing again this year.

DP: Okay.

GL: Sounds like they're going to sponsor him again. They treated that kid, Darren, like gold. I can't say enough about the Natives. And then, he drew that bull Bear Claw Two, this was at Carlyle at the Bear Claw Casino and they put an area right there. If you fell out of the casino you were in the rodeo grounds. And my father being handicapped, he was with my uncle Irvine. Well you met my auntie there who spoke up and said we were of Iroquois decent there in Val Marie, Jacqueline Carlier. They have a motor home then another uncle lived, he owned the bar at Whitewood, Harry Minovich.

DP: Okay.

GL: And, Bud McArthur is a good old friend of mine. He's a Native cowboy. We used to rodeo together a little bit, and I asked him, how can we get, it was sort of drizzling, I said, "Can we get our vehicle a little closer to the, you know, area?" And he said you come with me. And uncle Irvine had this big motor home, and parked it, you could almost reach out and grab Karson's belt in the rodeo shoot. And there was at the time Eugene Arcand and what was his buddy there, uh, oh boy ... Their wives, they all sat in the motor home and Karson drew, now I don't know if this is put on or not, but now they got Bear Claw Two. The second bull. Karson draws him and rides him and wins of course. And they flew Karson out of Saskatoon, he was working for Parks Canada. He was on a firefighting course and it was a Thursday. They couldn't hold that professional rodeo on a weekend because they had other places to go you know?

DP: Okay.

GL: And they said, you damn well right you'll make it, we'll pick you up. They took the leer jet, SIGA, flew him to Carlyle. There's an airport there and then drove him to the rodeo grounds. And he wins it on top of it. Yes, it was a good one. So much for the Royal Bank, I'll tell you and Esso Petroleum and John Deere, you name it, New Holland. No, they, every

rodeo I don't care Calgary, Regina, I went to I was always invited into the VIP room with those guys you know? And they treated my family and my son like gold.

DP: So it did, really was something that made you even prouder to have Aboriginal heritage.

GL: You're darn rights. They called him Indian Dog.

DP: Okay.

GL: Yeah, like you'd read in the Calgary, I've got clippings here, when they'd interview him. Oh yes, Karson openly and all the cowboys knew and he had the SIGA emblem right on his chaps, on his rodeo vest. Yep. And you can't put anybody's emblem on there that sponsors you like Legault cattle company, you got go, again it's all headquartered out of Denver, Colorado. They've got to give you the approval. The law to just put anybody's say, if you wanted to sponsor me for example you can't do it unless you go through all the rules.

DP: Yes.

GL: But, he drove that truck proudly and that second year, if you can imagine, he loses a truck by 6 dollars. Six dollars! And he traded it off because he was so damn sure he was going to win another one. Well that's what you call counting your chickens before they hatch you know?

DP: Yes.

GL: Young boy from Bengough, Karson's really good friends with him. He was the first guy to shake his hand. Six bucks. But anyway I guess I've been boring you too long here.

DP: No, no, it's all, it's all—

GL: It's half, when I hang up then I'll think of more stories I should have told you but.

DP: Well you know there's, there's lots I learned today. I'm very grateful for it. There's just a couple more questions. I won't keep you much longer, I know you're busy. Now you mentioned some of the landscapes that are important around Val Marie and Grasslands, as a Métis person which places in particular around Grasslands are very important? Like are there any historic—

GL: Well it's, the most is along the river and where the river breaks drop into the Frenchman River, okay? And that seemed to be where all the, most of the tipi rings are Darren.

DP: Okay.

GL: The Natives liked to sit on a high spot because they fought amongst each other, you know? One tribe would fight against another and you would see when it was coming. And, there's two buffalo jumps. The one is in the Val Marie PFRA pasture, west of Val Marie approximately twenty miles. But there's no more, they won't let anyone dig for arrowheads.

A friend of mine from Montana, whose passed way now, he got 101 arrowheads in one day. Norris Berg was his name. And he had all the stuff homemade to sift the sand you know, and there's one at our ranch, but my father told me to keep quiet or they'll come and dig the whole darn place up.

DP: Okay.

GL: And, but it's definitely a buffalo jump and, and now what was I going to say here just before this ... Oh boy, oh I guess I lost my train of thought here.

DP: No worries. But definitely some areas related to First Nations use of the land, you think that's very important?

GL: Well it's all from the Cypress Hills all into Montana, on the, mainly along the Frenchman river, Darren and up in the breaks you know?

DP: Yep, yep, okay. What was the relationship with the Métis that you remember with the Mounted Police? Do you remember generally a good relationship?

GL: You know I'd have to ask my auntie that you met. She's the only remaining, yeah okay, that's the story I didn't finish! You see when there was no RCMP, well Ponteix, Saskatchewan is an older town, there was no Val Marie at one time. Then it slowly come along with the railroad and what have you, but then grandpa Dan, he homesteaded up on that divide. Because the railroad was staked from Val Marie up to Mankota. And I always wondered why the hell he'd want to live up on that hill for, and there was nothing there. He grew an orchard like right from you could name it spruce trees to apple trees, and they had to bring the water a mile up the hill with the team of horses to grow all this stuff. They harvested a thousand pounds of raspberries one year.

DP: Oh, you're kidding?

GL: Yeah. And they would feed, there was like a halfway house from way down to the Rosefield district on the Montana border to the south and they would go to Ponteix to get their coal. They'd bring a load of wheat in on the wagon, sell their wheat then bring a load of coal back. You know, getting ready for winter type of thing? So the RCMP when they enforced the law on horse back, it's called the North West Mounted Police Trail. It runs from Wood Mountain to Fort Walsh. The RCMP would stay at Grandpa's place to sleep and get a supply of food.

DP: Yes.

GL: There's cairns that they put up there, and unfortunately a lot of them were knocked down by cattle, but they went right through, my father, my dad's ranch. And so, they would over night at half way houses from Wood Mountain to Cypress Hills. And they didn't, so there might be a dozen that would pop in, midnight, never knew what time of day. And of course, grandpa and grandma grew a hell of a garden and they would feed these RCMP and maybe they would rest there for two days. Their horses and, they would fill them all up with gunny sacks full of food and send them on their way. And uncle Orphil, he would be out in

the hills making his home brew and my dad, when my grandpa winked at my father that meant go out and tell uncle Orphil not to come home because you could smell the mash on your clothes you know? And uncle never drank, uncle Orphil never drank the stuff. He had these holes in these hillsides and he'd put the wolf willow and the sod right back on top. He had a, like a floor out of wood, then he'd put, and it'd look so natural and that's where yeah, he'd make his homebrew. And they'd go to country dances, school dances and picnics and two bits, like I said two bits a bottle, but you had 25 cents worth of alcohol boy I'll tell ya.

DP: I bet.

GL: They'd fill beer bottles and cap them. Straight home brew and that stuff would light. It was the real stuff.

DP: For sure.

GL: And now, I'm glad that you mentioned it. I'll question auntie, well there's auntie Genevieve in Ponteix and Hector. They were at the Métis days two years ago in Batoche.

DP: Okay.

GL: That's when they saw me, and I didn't know they were there. That's when I, I don't know if I told you but I was, I should never go behind a rodeo shoot because I still think I'm 20-years old. And I was visiting with some cowboys and I told the announcer, "I will challenge anybody in the bull riding, old timers but you got to be 60 years and over." And uncle, auntie Genevieve, sister to the one you met Jacqueline from Ponteix. They heard this. And that night when the music was on they spotted me, "Gayle are you going to ride a bull?" I said, "Well I guess I'm committed now." And uh, thank goodness it would have taken five ambulances maybe to haul me out. But nobody come up to the challenge okay.

DP: Okay, that's good.

GL: But that was a good rodeo, chuck wagon, all time great fun deal. And there was not one argument, no fights. I can't say enough about the staff that put that 125th anniversary on at Batoche, *Back to Batoche* days.

DP: It was quite the event.

GL: It was well organized, boy I'll tell you that.

DP: Sure was. One more question Gayle, as a Métis person how could Grasslands National Park improve it's interpretation of Métis history and culture? Are there any areas that you think they should work more strongly on or do you think they are doing generally good work?

GL: Well I guess the person you should really talk to on that question would be Kathy Trottier, Kathy Grant.

DP: Yes.

GL: She was at that meeting there, you met her in Val Marie. And she's a Trottier, she would probably, being that she, I don't work at the Grasslands Park. I've applied a few times for a tour guide and maybe I'll get the job someday, I don't know, because I know those hills like the back of my hand. I mean on the whole 300 sections. Ask Kathy for that question Darren I would suggest, because she knows what's actually really going on in the park and the surrounding borders of the Park. So she would know and Wes Olson he's in charge of the buffalo, but he retired now about two months ago. But Kathy Grant, do you want me to give you her phone number?

DP: No, no, I'm in touch with Kathy so ...

GL: Okay. Well she'd have me beat on that you know because she works there, she's an employee there.

DP: No, no, we actually work with Kathy on this so I've gotten to know her quite well. Very, very, very kind person and very, very committed to what she's doing.

GL: Oh yeah and there again, talk about a musician.

DP: Very good singer.

GL: Oh, all of, her father Buzz, passed away, was a hell of a musician. And all the kids, like there was three of those, there was Bryan, Monty, and Rocky. They all made the NHL can you imagine? Three brothers.

DP: Quite something.

GL: Rocky and him they weren't as talented as Bryan. Monty played with New Jersey.

DP: But you know just getting there is a major achievement.

GL: Well Bryan Trottier signed the inside of my cowboy hat, eight Stanley Cups and he put down with a black pencil marker every year. Like he won four with the Islanders. In my opinion, Bryan was the greatest player to ever slap on a pair of skates. I put him ahead of Wayne Gretzky and Bobby Orr.

DP: Pittsburgh.

GL: Pittsburgh Penguins.

DP: Yeah.

GL: And then he was assistant coach.

DP: Yeah it's quite something.

GL: And then he won the Stanley Cup, eight in total can you imagine.

DP: It's almost getting close to Jean Béliveau territory.

GL: Oh he holds, there's three of them tied for the record now, but for the fastest goal ever scored in the NHL you can look it up right on your laptop right today?

DP: Yeah.

GL: Five seconds. From the red line and his first NHL game ever he made a hat trick.

DP: Yeah he was a—

GL: He made a hat trick and two assists, five points. But he never got the recognition he should of, I don't know. Canadians were sort of, when he didn't play, represent Canada you know when they have, they just had that here, world hockey thing there.

DP: Yeah, yeah.

GL: He played for the US. Well hell, that's where, those were the people cutting his cheques. You know and they gave him a hard time and he didn't get the recognition like Gretzky or, I think he was cheated there. My God, he was every good a player as Wayne Gretzky ever thought to be. And Wayne Gretzky is a hell of a hockey player.

DP: Yeah, no, Bryan would be in the top ten for sure I would think.

GL: Well not when they had four, five years ago correct me if I'm wrong again, they had the top 50 and they started at number 50 down to number one. Bryan wasn't even in the running, I couldn't believe it.

DP: Yeah that's not fair.

GL: I couldn't believe it. He was most valuable player, he won the Hart Trophy, he won everything you could win in the NHL but I don't know if it was because he was Native but well do you know Fred Sasakamoose?

DP: Yeah, of him yeah.

GL: How do you pronounce it? Saka?

DP: Sasakamoose.

GL: Yeah, I like that program there, what's his name, he's an actor there, Native. He puts chiefs, the score or, the name of the program is *Chiefs and Champions*. I wish *Chiefs and Champions* would so a show on Bryan Trottier.

DP: Yep.

GL: And he had Fred Sasakamoose, he played with the Chicago Blackhawks. And when they honoured him, well Eugene Arcand went down to Chicago with Fred Sasakamoose. Anyway, but they give him his sweater and his number but he refused to put it on. He said no, I'm going to wear my buckskin, you know when they rolled out the red carpet.

DP: Oh good for him.

GL: But then they did hoist his sweater up, you know in the ceiling like they do. But he was no, he was not, he was going to wear his buckskin. It was a real good show.

DP: I'll have to—

GL: What's the name of that narrator? It's Tom Jackson. That's it, that's it. I don't see many of those shows, but for quite a few years there was quite a few of those *Chiefs and Champions*. There was a Native runner, a lady who broke records, and then but they still haven't done one on, and I want, I told Kathy, get a hold of him or I'll call him myself someday, and there should be a profile done and an interview with Bryan Trottier. Talk about *Chiefs and Champions*, there you go.

DP: Yeah.

GL: Hey that's a job for you Darren.

DP: Maybe. Well he certainly, certainly would warrant that. He was one of the best of all time.

GL: Yeah. Get a hold of this Tom Jackson and tell him I sent you! He doesn't know me, but anyway I guess that's it then. I'm running out of stories. I'm going to have to start telling lies here pretty soon.

DP: Well I thank you ever so much Gayle. Thank you for all the sharing.

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