

Jacque Richards—Parks Canada Interview, January 23, 2012

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Darren Prefontaine (DP: It's January 23rd and this is Darren Prefontaine interviewing Jacquie Richards for the Fort Walsh, Grasslands National Park and Fort Battleford, Parks Canada partnership. Hi Jacquie, how are you?

Jacquie Richards (JR): I'm fine thank you.

DP: Could you please tell me your name and your home community?

JR: My name is Jacquie, Jacqueline Richards and my home community, like now?

DP: Where you're from.

JR: Val Marie.

DP: And what's your maiden name Jacquie?

JR: Moine

DP: Moine.

JR: M-O-I-N-E.

DP: Who were your parents and grandparents and where they from originally?

JR: My parents first of all, my dad was from France. My mother was born at Saskatchewan Landing. Which I think is Swift Current or then North West Territories, around Swift Current now. And her parents were from Manitoba and Quebec, Trois-Rivières, I think.

DP: And what were, what was your mother's name? And your grandparents' name? Your maternal grandparents.

JR: Maternal was Tilly Marie Whiteford.

DP: Okay.

JR: And my grandfather was Patrice Trottier.

DP: Okay. And he was a French Canadian?

JR: Yes.

DP: And the, his wife was Métis?

JR: Yes.

DP: And your mother was Louise?

JR: Yes.

DP: Okay, did anyone or does anyone in your family speak Michif? I know your mother did.

JR: No, just mom.

DP: Just mom, and it pretty much stayed with her generation?

JR: Yes.

DP: Do you think that had to do with a lot of discrimination in the area that they abandoned Michif or didn't pass it on?

JR: Well, I think when she went to residential school they weren't allowed to speak Cree so it was English. Then when she married my dad who was French there was no Cree spoken or Mi ... Michih or whatever you call it. Is that Cree? That's a new language isn't it?

DP: Michif is a mix of French and Cree.

JR: Yes exactly, that's what mom spoke. So, therefore, we weren't exposed to it at all really.

DP: So you, your mom and dad might have spoken French together?

JR: Once in a while yes.

DP: But generally, English was spoken in the home.

JR: Yes.

DP: From what you can remember and what your mother told you, how were the Métis treated in your community, Val Marie? Did your family encounter racism from the larger community?

JR: Yes.

DP: Was it quite systemic? Like occur all the time or?

JR: No, I think because my dad was white, he was really respected you know, being he was from France and he was white. I was only, I think when I was very young, I was called a "Half-Breed," and told I would go to Purgatory and burn in Hell because I wasn't Catholic.

DP: Okay.

JR: But it didn't last. As I grew up, somebody must have addressed it because it quit. You know and I think by the time I was 8 or 9, I never heard any more of that to my face.

DP: Okay.

JR: I heard about things said behind my back, but you know about being a Half-Breed, but not to my face. No taunting.

DP: And were there a lot of Métis families in Val Marie or was it mainly just your family and a few others?

JR: Just my family and my cousins. My mothers' brother and his wife, they had ten children. They were both Métis, so my cousins got it, were treated really badly, always put down, called Half-Breed. Not treated very good at all.

DP: So more so the Trottier extended family than you yourself or your siblings?

JR: Yes.

DP: And you attribute that to your father being non-Aboriginal?

JR: Right.

DP: Okay. How did your mom and dad meet? Did your dad come out west here to farm, to Canada?

JR: He came to Canada because there were already people here from France. His brother-in-law was already here along with an older couple and they were already farming. And so daddy came and he met my mother, about three years after he came, I think, and married her. But, he said while he was in school all he ever did was read comic books on the Indians and the bows and arrows, and the cowboys in Canada. So he was attracted to the Indian culture, the Indian life. It was rather ironic that he should come and marry a Métis woman. But, that was his life.

DP: And he was, of course, he was very tolerant and had already had an appreciation before he came here of Aboriginal people.

JR: Definitely.

DP: Other than the Trotters and their extended family were there other Métis people in the vicinity or just basically your own extended family?

JR: That's all, my own extended family. I can't think of anyone else who had Indian blood.

DP: Okay. Do you know or remember any traditional Métis stories or songs? Such as, I don't know Wiisakaychak stories or anything like that or is that something your mom didn't really tell that much?

JR: No, no. They told a lot of Boogey[man] stories about carrying the Wandering Jew across the river. A lot of, I don't know where they got these stories from, but they'd scare us with them.

DP: Did they tell them a lot during Lent and that sort of thing or?

JR: No.

DP: Just whenever. What sort of resources did your family harvest? By that I mean did your family live off the land, did your mom and dad hunt or did they trap?

JR: Dad was a trapper.

DP: Trapped.

JR: And he farmed for a while and he worked for the PFRA and for the Department of Highways.

DP: And your mom, did she harvest resources like berries and all that stuff?

JR: Oh yes.

DP: Tan hides? All that sort of thing?

JR: Daddy did all that. Tanned the hides, and mom just loved picking berries, making jellies and jams, and she also took in ironing for the people at the hotel. I remember she ironed white shirts.

DP: What sort of traditional medicines were used in your community or family? Did your mom use any traditional medicines to make people feel better?

JR: Well same old cod liver oil. Oh and what else was it? We had a woman from Belgium, Mrs. Carlier who was a nurse she had made powders that were good for the flu. And I think most of the people in Val Marie used her medication, the stuff she made and it was good.

DP: Okay so mainly Old World as opposed to Native spirit, Native healing.

JR: Right.

DP: Okay. Did anybody in your family make beaded or embroidered moccasins or other items? Like you know with the beads, did anyone embroider? Did your mom do any of that?

JR: She embroidered, but she learned all that at the residential school. How to embroider, how to darn, how to sew, how to do all those things, handiwork.

DP: So she made all that for the family? No? Okay so you generally wore more Euro-Canadian type clothing.

JR: Yes.

DP: Okay. How did your family celebrate special occasions and holidays such as Christmas, Easter and New Years? Now you said you weren't Catholic, your mom and dad didn't, they weren't Catholics formally or?

JR: They were both Catholic. Daddy really was agnostic ... Momma had left the church when the, well there was an episode when her sister died, the priest wouldn't bury her.

DP: Oh yes, I remember the story.

JR: I think it was then that she lost faith in the Catholic Church, and started going to the United Church. So Christmases were usually quiet, in a French tradition, I think more than the, I don't know. We had goose instead of turkey. And New Years eve, Christmas was a little more quiet.

DP: New Years was the big gathering?

JR: Yes. Just with that couple from France and my uncle and my mother, but not with the Trotters.

DP: So that was more New Years when your mother got together with her family?

JR: No, it was more through the years she was with her family quite a bit. Christmas and New Years it was with Verreaults, it was daddy's French ... My dad was not a very sociable person. He did not like visiting, going out for dinners, and having people over and, he was a very, he was a loner.

DP: Okay.

JR: He was like an Indian really. More so than ...

DP: The Métis who liked big parties and that sort of thing.

JR: Huh?

DP: Not like the Métis who liked big parties.

JR: Oh, he didn't like any of that.

DP: Because I imagine the Trotters would have had a lively Christmas party and New Years.

JR: Yes exactly.

DP: Okay. Was your mom involved in the Métis society or you or any of your siblings?

JR: I think my mother was.

DP: She was? So when they were founding it in the '30s or '40s or more after, like say the '50s or '60s?

JR: Probably more after, the '60s. You see I got married, I left home when I was 17, so a lot of things went on that I wasn't aware of. So I know mom was very active in everything, I guess. Well and she was always off to Batoche and to all these Indian, or whenever, or Fort Qu'Appelle, wherever there was a gathering of Métis or anything like that. Mom was always involved. And my dad would go with her.

DP: And he would go. Was he supportive of your mom's culture?

JR: Very.

DP: Very supportive ... Now let's see, how, well this kind of relates to Grasslands, but it could basically say around Val Marie. How, how were the people connected to the land? People mainly, Métis people in particular, people just ranched or were ranch hands and then just hunted and trapped and that sort of thing or did they farm at all?

JR: With the Trotters it was ranch, they had cattle, they had horses. Well actually part of their property, the Grasslands bought their ranch. They owned that part of it there.

DP: Was your mom a good horse person, very good on a horse?

JR: Yes, when she was younger.

DP: So that's something that she passed down or just kind of stayed with her?

JR: No just stayed with her, I couldn't ride a horse.

DP: Okay, okay. She definitely rode a horse as long as she was able to.

JR: Yes.

DP: Okay. Are there any historically and culturally significant sites around Val Marie that you think are important to you as a Métis person? Or, were important to your mom as a Métis person? Like I hear all the time the 70 Mile Butte, are there other places or 70 Mile Butte that were important to your mom that you could remember that she talked about?

JR: No. I heard that all the time but was never really sure what it was. To be honest and I didn't understand, you explain the difference between hills and a butte.

DP: Well from what I can see from the landscape around Val Marie it's all buttes. They look like hills but they have flat tops. Whereas where I'm from in Rockglen it's hills. There's some buttes, but not so many.

JR: I find that really interesting.

DP: But it's all almost identical landscape other than that so maybe it's just how the glaciers carved the land around Val Marie a little differently.

JR: And then we had the highest point in Val Marie, I forget where. Called it the high point, we used to hike there a lot. There were bullsnakes and rattlesnakes And we'd go right past rattlesnake caves or whatever you call it and never, you know as long as you didn't bother them they never bothered you. You could walk past where they were and you never got bitten. And the boys would often put the bullsnakes around their neck, under their shirt and go to the restaurant and have bullsnakes on their neck.

DP: How many children did your mom and father have?

JR: Three.

DP: All girls or?

JR: No, I have a brother. He died three years ago, gee look at me, two years. And you know it's funny I never asked him if he ever encountered any racism.

DP: Okay.

JR: Never talked about it.

DP: Just something, no one in your family talked about racism or Métis identity. It's just ...

JR: No.

DP: You only really brought it up in the context of your mom sort of thing?

JR: Yes, we were really ... that's funny isn't it? It wasn't the topic of conversation for some reason. Although I remember you know, when I was called that name and I think mom had a few run-ins sometimes because I remember her putting her coat on and her hat and saying, "We'll see about this." And all I could hear between her and daddy was that somebody must have made a remark about her, or me or the kids. I'm not sure what happened. But she took care of it, my mother was very outspoken.

DP: And she stood up to people.

JR: Yes, she did.

DP: Do you think that garnered her respect in the community?

JR: Not in the beginning.

DP: But over time?

JR: But over time, I think they learned that you have a right to say what you think. And you know, even though it was very political, it didn't make her very popular. But, she said what she thought and that's respect, but she was a smart woman. You know it took me a long time to realize. My mother had a backbone and she was aggressive, she would go after what she wanted and what she believed in. And what she believed in was the way she lived.

DP: And for her time, being a woman, she actually had a pretty good education compared to—

JR: She did.

DP: Compared to other women, non-Métis women that lived around her, she was probably much better educated.

JR: Well that's true because grade 9, she didn't quite finish grade 9 but that was a lot.

DP: For a woman of her generation.

JR: Yes, it was.

DP: Is that something she took pride in?

JR: Hmm?

DP: Is that something she took pride in that she had a ...

JR: No. She never said too much about that. Momma never bragged about anything. Ever.

DP: Very humble.

JR: Yes, and never lied. She could tell you a joke ten times and not a thing would change.

DP: Always consistent.

JR: Yes. That was exactly the way, for sure.

DP: What do you think made her want to chronicle her life and the life of Métis people? Do you think she thought the story wasn't being told? Or, was it just something she thought she had to do?

JR: That's a good question Darren. I think it's just something she felt she had to do. Went ahead and did it, you know? It started with that book, *My Life in Residential School*. I think it was just the way things were going with the Métis you know? Just weren't going good. Everybody was against them and you know, if you were a Métis, gosh, jeez, you didn't want to tell anybody. And I think it got her, I think she thought something should be said. Like the school, for her, she learned a lot there. You know she said there was the odd time where

a boy was kicked and he died a couple days later. The priest was mad and punished him by kicking him and they all saw it. And he died in a couple days of pneumonia or something.

DP: When it was an injury from the kick?

JR: Everybody knew why he died because he was kicked so badly.

DP: Yes.

JR: And other instances, but she doesn't mention that in her book. I remember her telling us. But on the whole it was the priests that were the meaner, the meanest, not the nuns. There were one or two that were mean, but anyway. She learned a lot from there, and I think, like I heard on the radio, there was some good come out of it. Of course, there was. You know, it wasn't all bad. Although for some, of course, it is. We have to get past that and move on.

DP: Did your mom, she travelled a lot in the US. Did you have a lot of relatives in the States? Mainly Montana?

JR: Yes.

DP: All Trottiers?

JR: Yes.

DP: And they all, which communities, like Harlem and that sort of thing?

JR: Harlem, Malta. I think that was just in Malta, her sister, she visited her sister a lot.

DP: Okay, but she definitely visited and travelled a lot down there.

JR: Yes.

DP: Were any of your family members from the Trottiers in World War One or World War Two that you could recall?

JR: Yes my cousin was. Lloyd was in World War Two and so was his dad, World War One, I think, John.

DP: Okay. Now Lloyd that would be Kathy Grant's father?

JR: No, her uncle.

DP: Her uncle okay. Do you think they were treated well at the end of the war or just like anybody else you can remember? The reason I ask is some Métis veterans were treated poorly at the end of the war.

JR: I don't think Lloyd was treated the way he should have been. I think John was okay, I never heard any complaints from him, but I did from my cousin Ruthie, Lloyd's sister, did mention something about Lloyd not getting a pension or something he was entitled to but never got. But I'm not sure.

DP: Okay, okay. Was any of your family involved in the 1885 Resistance or I guess Rebellion that you could, that you remember or they just stayed away from that?

JR: No, never heard of.

DP: Okay. Did your mother ever share how the Métis interacted with the North West Mounted Police? Like say ...

JR: No she never did.

DP: Never commented on that relationship, okay. Other than maybe the Trotters serving as guides and that sort of thing for the Mounted Police that pretty much would have been it.

JR: Yep probably, that's what her, her grand, my grandfather did, wasn't it? A guide yes. Yes because otherwise no, she never ...

DP: Never talked about it.

JR: No.

DP: Did your mother or grandparents did they receive Métis Scrip? I don't know if you're familiar with Métis Scrip but if you were Métis you were given a certificate that either gave you money or land.

JR: My grandfather did, but he sold it.

DP: Okay.

JR: That way he lost his rights to, to be a full-blooded Indian right?

DP: Okay.

JR: Something went along with that because Gloria, my sister was looking into that. He did have a scrip apparently but sold it.

DP: Okay. I'm going to ask you just a couple more questions Jacquie, these relate to Parks Canada and if you can't answer them please don't feel you're obligated. How, as a Métis person, how do you think Parks Canada could improve the interpretation of Métis history and culture at Grasslands National Park? Do you have any ideas or?

JR: Gosh, not off the top of my head. Wish they had powwows. You know, that's the only thing that would attract them. They have that powwow at Fort Qu'Appelle. It really attracts

a lot of people. You get them from the States, across the border there. Some special day or, I don't know.

DP: Okay, so you think just having more Métis cultural programming in general? Working with community people, that sort of thing would really be beneficial?

JR: I think so. Heaven knows we need to do something that's beneficial.

DP: Parks Canada has a cultural resource values statement for Grasslands National Park. The Parks identified a number of potential cultural values which may be important to the history of the park. I'm just curious to see whether you think any of these as a Métis person would be important to you or maybe to the memory of your mother or her family in general. The points of interest are, relate to trading posts, relationship with bison, ranching, farming, great depression, governance and administration, creation of the national park, paleontological and geological features, early exploration, surveys, historic use of the area.

JR: The trading post I think would be good. You went so fast, there was another one.

DP: Relationship with the bison?

JR: Maybe that and there should be tour guides. Do they have them now?

DP: Yes, yes.

JR: Because when my cousin was here from France we went, we had Lise Perrault, but normally there isn't anyone to take you through.

DP: Okay, so more guides.

JR: Yes, I think so because you don't know where to go or what you're looking for, you miss all the things that you should see.

DP: And bison, relationship with bison from what I understand your great-grandfather, your grandfather, I forget.

JR: My grandfather.

DP: Was the last person to hunt a bison down there.

JR: Yes. It was 17—

DP: So acknowledging that, having a plaque or having a caring might be good too.

JR: Yes, it would, it really would.

DP: Farming, ranching, your family mainly farmed right?

JR: They ranched.

DP: They ranched.

JR: You see where my grandfather had, I think he had ten cows, two milk cows, it was on a paper that comes from Ottawa. We were looking up our genealogy. I forget how many horses but he had a nice little ranch. Horses and cows and—

DP: From what you remember almost everybody in Val Marie ranched. Very few farmers. Okay. Anything else about the park or the historic exploration or use of the area? Like your ancestors, the Trotters, your great-grandfather and his sons, being guides and all that, do you think that would be good for interpretation for people to know that? That if it wasn't say for your ancestors, the Mounties would have had a lot harder time coming out west and making their way in your part of the world?

JR: Mhmm.

DP: So stuff like that would be important?

JR: Well, yes. Of course. Some people aren't aware of that are they.

DP: No, no.

JR: They should be.

DP: Okay.

JR: They should be given more due.

DP: Is there anything about your mother that you would like to share relating to this project? Regarding her passion for Métis history and culture? Or just her, her I guess the strength of her spirit? Would, if some of the commemoration could involve some of her legacy do you think that would be a good thing?

JR: Yes, I do because she really was dedicated to the Métis, to the Grasslands, she was so happy with that.

DP: She was happy with the creation of the park.

JR: Yes.

DP: So she was a big supporter?

JR: Oh yes. And she was just, I don't know Darren how I could put it in words.

DP: But you would, you, that's something your family might be receptive to if Parks Canada was able to acknowledge the role of your mother in promoting and preserving Métis history and culture in the area?

JR: Oh definitely. Right.

DP: Okay, okay. Is there anything else you would like to add Jacquie?

JR: I can't think of anything, I probably will when I hang up the phone Darren but— ...