

Harry Morin

Summary

I was born in 1914 in Ile a la Crosse, SK. There was no hospital in Ile a la Crosse in 1914. An old midwife delivered me. I am eighty-six years old. I'll be turning eighty-seven in November. We've been married for sixty-four years now. My dad's name is Felix Morin and mom's name was Margaret Daigneault. Her dad's name was Vincent Daigneault. Ambrose was my oldest brother. My dad married in 1903. The second child was a girl, but she died when she was fifteen years old. The third child was named Zepherain (Jeffrey), Marie Jean and then me. There was nine or ten of us. A few died, but I don't rightly remember when. They died from some sort of sickness. I don't know where they're buried. There was Victor who drowned in Sandy Point, but at that time, I was in Beauval when I received a telegram about his death. I couldn't come because it was in fall and freeze up and there were no roads at that time. The road was built in 1957 from the forks to Ile a la Crosse. In 1956, the road was built to Buffalo Narrows. I started to work for road construction in 1955 and 1956. We were five miles from the forks. We had to quit at the forks, because we ran out of money and it was late in the fall, freeze up. We then moved to do the Hansen Lake Road. We stayed in bunkhouses. We also had cooks and everything. My dad died in 1954 and is buried in Buffalo Narrows. My mom died in May, 1929 and is buried in Buffalo Narrows also. In those days, my dad trapped. He would trap all winter to survive. In the summer time, we would fish. We would hunt ducks anytime. There was no law (conservation) to prevent you from hunting. There was plenty of duck and moose. We used to paddle everywhere we went. We did not have motors. It used to take two days to paddle to Beauval; now it takes half an hour. There was two stores, trading posts, in Ile a la Crosse: The Bay and Revillon. Revillon was run by Alec Ahenakew. The Bay bought Revillon and Alec Ahenakew moved his family to La Loche by canoe. There were no roads in those days. After that he moved to Patuanak. Revillon was a French company. It was the first company to set up a business around here. They used to call it the Northwest Company. When you tell people this information, they don't believe you. They think the Bay was the first outfit. They thought the Bay did everything, but that wasn't so. It was Revillon that opened the North country. I worked for the Bay for four years at an outpost in Beauval in 1945. After that, I stayed at Sandy Point for a couple of years. From there, I moved to Canoe Lake to work at an outpost there for four years. (mumbles quite a bit, it's hard to make out what he's saying at times.) We went by canoe to Canoe Lake to work at the outpost. I did not have much of an education, but I was able to do it. My wife (Victorine) would do the written work. Although there wasn't much writing in those days. There was no credit. It was straight cash. I used to buy fur. Question was, how much did you pay? Pay for what? That depends on the list the company gave you on what you're supposed to pay. The owners have to follow the lowest price. What it's worth in Winnipeg.

You have to follow the lowest price. The beaver pelt was about six, seven dollars in 1945. That was a lot of money back then. I started working in 1955 and I got ninety-three cents an hour driving a cat all summer. It was a little over one hundred every time I got paid which was twice a month. That was a lot of money back then. I had four kids to look after, but the old lady worked at the hospital part time. We did okay. I worked for fourteen years. After fourteen years, I was making \$2.10 an hour. I'd spend about three, four months at a time at the Hansen Lake road. I couldn't come home. The only way we made it home was when it rained three, four days. Construction would shut down for ten days. You had to go home because they wouldn't feed you. I got married in Beauval, on October 17, 1937. I lived at home till I lost my mom. We had to find our own living arrangements. When my mother was still alive, Alex Ahenakew's brother came to visit him. Lance was from Sandy Lake reserve just outside of Debden. He came to visit at Christmas and he brought his son along who was about my age. His name was Lance. He wants me to go to Sandy Lake with them. I went and stayed for a year with them. My dad came to Big River for groceries for the winter. He brought a couple of scouts with them. My uncle used to do this. He was working for the company. My uncle's name was Louis Morin. Louis and my dad hitched a ride on horse team to Debden to come and get me. He told me my mom wanted me home, because I was treated so damn good. Lance's dad was well off. He had four, five hundred cattle, bunch of horses. This was in 1927, I think. In all the reserve in Sandy Lake, he was the richest man. There was no one else had anything. He owned the whole reserve pretty near. He was a big farmer. He had a lot of men working for him. Lance and I didn't do anything. We just played around. We went home. Apparently, they had moved to Buffalo Narrows. We went to Buffalo Narrows, because my uncle, Louis had a store at Clear Lake village across from Churchill Lake. My mom was still alive, but she died that spring, six months after I got home. After that, we had to fend for ourselves. There was no welfare in those days. Not like today. We had to do some work. My Uncle Louis's wife had a big garden in Buffalo. I used to work for her and she would give me food. You had to bum to eat, because there were no stores in Buffalo. Nobody had money to feed you. We went through a pretty tough life for a couple of years. My brother, your moshum, was already married and had two children, Christine and Jean. His name was Ambrose, your grandpa. There was no work, just fishing in the wintertime. It wasn't easy. It was very hard. Sometimes my brother Jeffrey and I would get fish from the nets and have them for breakfast. We then would work in the garden and she would bake bread and bannock and she would give us some with tea and sugar. We had a couple teams of horses and some cows in Buffalo. There used to be a lot of fish in winter time. My dad, Felix would go to Big River with a couple of teams of horses. They followed other teams going to Big River. They used to have freight in wintertime. He would come home with a load of groceries, but after my mom died, I don't know what happened to everything. They only had one team of horses and a cow left for Ambrose and that was when Ambrose moved to Sandy Point. My mom died in the Spring. In a couple of months, we didn't have anything left in the

house. When my mom got sick, we had a house full of groceries. There was a bunch of people, ten, fifteen people looked after my mom. A different family everyday. They did not come from Buffalo but the surrounding area, fishermen and trappers. There was nothing much in Buffalo at that time, just a few shacks. Where the church is located, the Keazie family had a house there. The rest were where the Bay was. We used to follow the lake to get to the Keazie's house. There was not even a trail. In the winter time you had to build a trail through the bush. Who was the first people to live in Sandy Point? Your Kohkom (Marie Jean), Ambrose's wife's family. (mom and dad) Yeah, the Larivieres. Your moshum (Ambrose) and George Gardiner married the Lariviere sisters. That's why the Gardiner's are there. I learned to work hard on my own. When I was in Beauval, I fished all winter for commercial fishing. We would quit about February 15. We then went to the bush to cut logs by hand. No power saws. After that we brought all the logs to Beauval and dumped them in the river and had the sawmill going all summer. I worked in the sawmill all summer. Ten hours a day. I was twenty-three years old. Well, everybody traveled by foot and dog team. The trappers, when they leave, they don't come home for Christmas. They leave in open water and don't return until spring. The women stayed home. The store keepers would look after the families. The men would return with a bunch of furs. We just lived on our own. I was working for my aunt everyday. She looked after me. She gave me clothes to wear, because my Uncle Louis was a big shot for the company. They were well off. He started with Revillon, but after the company sold out, he worked for the Bay. 1934 or 32 was when the Bay bought out Revillon. My grandfather's name was Antoine Morin. It is written someplace. Greatgrandfather? He worked for the Northwest Company from France. My dad's grandfather, he eventually married a woman. They stayed together and had three, four children until a priest arrived there and he married them. There were no priests in this country in those days. My grandfather was born there and they eventually moved to Green Lake. He got transferred there. My grandfather Antoine is buried in Green Lake, Saskatchewan. My mom was born in 1886. In 1886 in Ile a la Crosse. We had to stay on our own all summer, and we started doing a bit of work in winter, fishing for small wages, but we survived. I got married. My uncle told me, if you don't get married, you'll never have anything. Find yourself a wife and get married and I did. He was right too. I made a good living after that. I didn't run around every night. I stayed home. There were dances every night. I was playing the fiddle pretty near every night. We'd find a house. We didn't have a hall every Friday night. We had to work Saturday in those days. We worked six days a week. We only had Sunday off. There was no liquor. You never see any liquor when I was young. That's why I never drank in my life. That's one thing I did not do. Question: Did you celebrate Christmas and New Year's? Not very much. When I got married, my grandpa come to play fiddle for me. We were dancing for three nights. There was nobody drinking. Everybody was happy. Well, I always watched my brother, Ambrose, play the fiddle. He was quite a bit older (brother). I was born in 1914 and he was born in 1905. When he was away, I'd steal his fiddle. He didn't like that, but I'd do it anyway. (self-

taught) I don't know where they came from (fiddles); there were very few around. No guitars around then. The record players which you just crank and wind them. They were mostly square dance, a few waltzes. There had to be a caller at all times. I knew lots of callers. Not like today. They don't call anymore. Q: What kind of food did you eat in the old days? Mostly wild (fish, meat). There was no meat in the stores, just a few cans of meats, not like today. Everything was cheap. You could buy tobacco for ten cents a package. Same for butter, ten cents a pound. Now nobody can afford to eat butter. My dad would haul trees with horses from the bush and then build a house. It didn't take long with just logs. They did not have roofing paper. They used to cut birch trees down and peel the bark which they used for roofing. They would put dirt on top. The mission always had enough lumber; that's where they go, for windows. They always found something, maybe just small windows. Your moshum and Jeffrey helped build the house. The oldest boys. It didn't take long. Jeffrey was strong. He grabbed a big log. Like nothing at all. No. I never heard about land claims scrip for a long time. My dad and his wife and your grandpa, Ambrose. I think Ambrose was quite young when he received the scrip. It was a nice outfit. The mission, they raised many children when they had no place else to go. Lost their mom or their dad. In Ile a la Crosse, we speak half Cree and half French, for example, table, la table, that's not Cree, that's French. Chairs, les chaises, French for chair. Everything, la porte (door), dishes, knife, cup, etc. Here in Ile a la Crosse, we're half French. We had a bunch of sisters (nuns), up to twenty of them and half of them were teachers. They spoke mostly French. They teach French half a day and English half a day. That was when Sister Arcand attended or stayed in the convents. She was raised in Ile a la Crosse and she became a sister (nun). She died a few years ago. There used to be quite a few medicine men. Women in our young days. There were no doctors. I moved to Canoe Lake in 1946. I remember I had trouble with throat swelling up. This was just about fall and the lake was freezing up and couldn't come to Ile a la Crosse, see a doctor. There was an old man whom my old lady went to ask to see if he could help me. He was a good medicine man. He cut a little slit and drew blood out and using a little horn in which he put hot water and every time he put it there, he would suck and dump it in a dish. After he finished, I fell asleep and he (the medicine man) slept on the floor beside me. He gave me some medicine that he boiled. I had to drink nine pails. These were five gallon lard pails. He said, if you follow my (this) instruction, you'll live to be an old man. Before he treated me, I used to have frequent problems with my throat. After that, I never had anymore throat troubles.