

Road Allowance Interview, Eva Pritchett

Conducted by Scott Duffee
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Scott Duffee (SD): Could you please tell me your name and your home community?

Eva Pritchett (EP): My name now is Eva Pritchett. My maiden name is Eva Martel, and my parents were Clifford and Antoinette Martel. My father came from Lac La Biche Alberta, and my grandma came from Manitoba, in the Red River. Her name was Favel, and my dad was born in Jack Fish, his name was Clifford Martel. My mother's name is Antoinette Aubichon. She was born in Green Lake, and they both come from big families. As do I: I come from a family of twelve.

SD: So your dad was from Lac La Biche or your grandfather?

EP: My grandfather I think came from Quebec, but he landed in Lac La Biche, and that's where my dad was born.

Ed Pritchett (EDP): Nazaire

EP: Yes, that's where my grandpa was born. My grandpa was Nazaire Martel, and my grandmother was Alice Favel from Manitoba.

SD: That's on your dad's side?

EP: Yes. And on my mom's side, both grandparents came from Green Lake. My grandmother was a Durocher, and my grandfather was Joe Aubichon.

SD: So, your dad's mom came from Red River?

EP: Yes.

SD: Your dad's dad came from Lac La Biche?

EP: Yes.

SD: Was your dad born in Lac La Biche?

EP: No, my grandpa.

SD: Your grandpa was?

EP: Yes, my dad was born in Jack Fish.

SD: Your dad was born in Jack Fish?

EP: Yes.

SD: And your mom was from Green Lake?

EP: Yes.

SD: Wow

EP: Lots of Métis around there.

SD: Yes, but that's the first I heard of someone from Green Lake coming a little bit south.

EP: Yes.

SD: So, that's pretty interesting.

EP: My uncle, Martin Aubichon was always involved with the Métis because when I went to meetings in Saskatoon, I saw him there lots, and his son was a good curler.

SD: So, what was your home community?

EP: Midnight Lake

SD: Was that a Road allowance community?

EP: Yes, the store is on the Road Allowance and then there were some houses there, but I didn't live there. I lived further north, along Midnight Lake actually. And there was a log house, and my grandparents lived there. Then they moved to North Battleford, and my dad and us all moved to the old house, and my dad used to go picking rocks and whatever in the south by Elrose. One year, we went to pick rocks and we came back, and people were moved into our house, and we had no house.

SD: Oh boy

EP: Then we lived in a car for about a month. Then my dad got a job with one of the farmers, and they had a vacant house in the farmyard, so we moved in there. For our main source of living, Dad worked for the farmers in the summertime and in the winter, we trapped. I was always with my dad. I didn't go to school. No, and I helped him trap, and once in a while we'd knock down a deer to eat. We'd hide it in a bush and haul it in a trunk home at the time, so we don't get caught with it. All the rest of my siblings were born in a hospital except for one. The ones that were born at home were me, my sister Ilene, she was born in Midnight Lake, and my brother was born just north of Midnight Lake. There are three, and—

SD: Your mom was from Green Lake?

EP: Yes.

SD: But was your dad was from Jack Fish?

EP: Yes.

SD: So, when did they end up in Midnight Lake? How did that happen?

EP: Well, my dad was working in the bush north of Green Lake when he met my mom, and she came home with him when he got finished working there in spring, and they live together for five or six years. They got married in 1950 anyway, and I was born in '45.

SD: So, they met and they came home to Jack Fish?

EP: No, Midnight Lake

SD: They moved right to Midnight Lake?

EP: Yes. I don't remember where they lived until I got bigger, and I can remember what was happening. I don't remember where we were before that.

SD: Your dad's parents lived in Midnight Lake like you said?

EP: Yes.

SD: When did they end up in Midnight Lake?

EP: Oh, far as I know they always were.

SD: So, they must have moved from Jack Fish to Midnight Lake?

EP: Must have. I don't know. I don't even know where my aunts and uncles were born, and they're all gone now, so I can't ask them any questions. My dad's whole family are all gone.

SD: But they came from Jack Fish anyways?

EP: Yes.

SD: Would that have been called Cochin or Jack Fish Lake?

EP: It was Jack Fish Lake. It was right along the lake. That store brunt down not long ago, maybe five years ago.

SD: I have relatives who lived there.

EP: Yes, right around there my dad was born, about a mile northeast of there.

SD: And so, they actually lived in a town?

EP: Yes, I guess that would have been their mail and their store anyway.

SD: So, what other Métis families lived in Midnight Lake?

EP: Oh, there were lots. There was the next road allowance to us. My dad's cousin lived there. His name was John Martel, and then north there to the Jack Pine Road there were some Trotchies and Ross. I forget that guy's first name. Who was that old guy?

SD: Fred.

EP: Yes, Fred Ross. That family lived there. There were Descharmes, they were scattered all over the place. Some lived further north and some lived down Jack Pine Road, and actually there was an Albert Ducharme who lived where my grandma and grandpa had their house, in the same yard. And then there was another house beside them, my aunt and her husband, Bill Kennedy lived there.

SD: And they were Métis, the Kennedys?

EP: Yes.

EDP: Then there was koohkom.

EP: She was way further north, that one.

EDP: Oh, I thought she lived right at—

EP: There were the Charettes further north, and then everybody called her koohkom. She was Rose Trotchie. She was the mother of Harry and all the Trotchies. And then down the road from Joe was George Ducharme and his sister was married to a Wapane and then Mrs. Charette was a Nolin. There were lots of houses there then.

SD: So, Mrs. Charette's maiden name was Nolin?

EP: Yes, that's where we used to go for Christmas, the Charettes. We would go there by horse and buggy in the winter. They had big old fiddling parties there.

EDP: Then there was Lavalles.

EP: That was right at Midnight Lake. I

EDP: Edward.

EP: Edward Laliberte. He was from Green Lake, too.

SD: Edward Laliberte?

EP: Yes

SD: And also, there was Lavalles?

EP: Yes.

SD: And Rosettes?

EP: Yes.

SD: And they were Métis?

EP: Yes.

EDP: They were all Métis

SD: Did any non-Métis live in Midnight Lake?

EP: Just the store keeper that I know of, and the farmers. There were Harrises, Bill Cadre.

EDP: Uncle Bill

EP: Because his mom was a Charette.

EDP: Oh yes.

SD: So, the storekeeper was a Cadre?

EP: Yes.

SD: And they would lived there as well?

EP: Yes, and then there was Cadres across the lake. That's where my dad went back and forth. When he got in an argument with one farmer, he moved across the lake to the other farmer. He worked for him until he got in argument over there. Then we move back and forth, all my grown-up life. Those are the two people he worked for.

SD: Did you guys live in any other road allowances?

EP: No, when we left there, we moved to town. My parents moved to town.

SD: To Glaslyn?

EP: Yes.

SD: You said your dad went in worked in Elrose?

EP: During the summer, they'd pick rocks there, used them cork pile rocks and that sort of thing. We all went over there. We lived in a tent all summer long. We picked rocks and then come home in the winter

SD: That's Elrose, Alberta?

EP: No, in Elrose, Saskatchewan. Elrose, wartime, and I forget whatever they call that. There are lots of little places around there

SD: How far away is that from here?

EP: I would say it's probably another 25 miles, south of Rosetown.

SD: That's a long ways away.

EP: Yes.

SD: And so, you'd travel all the way, how many summers did you do that for? Travel all the way down there?

EP: Probably five or six for sure.

SD: Really? How long would you stay down there for?

EP: Well, we'd go there probably in July and come home in September.

SD: How did you travel there?

EP: Oh, dad always had some kind of an old truck. He'd pile all of us in the truck with our tent.

SD: Just go live in there?

EP: Yes.

SD: And you just lived on farmers' lands?

EP: Yes.

SD: Did you live around any other Métis that did the same down there?

EP: No, we never saw any, but I guess there were lots down there because some of the other people from around Midnight Lake were there, but we didn't see them.

SD: So, you just lived alone as a family when you were down there?

EP: Yes.

SD: Did you socialize much with other families?

EP: Well, my uncle, Edward Laliberte and his wife, the ones who lived in Midnight Lake, were there. As was their family and a couple uncles of mine.

SD: They had their own tent?

EP: Yes.

SD: So, there are a couple families?

EP: Yes.

SD: Was it for the same farmer all the time in Elrose?

EP: No, we moved all over the place there. They even dug wells by hand.

SD: Wow, so they were the labour for the farms?

EP: Yes, they did what they had to do. That's what they did.

SD: What was it like living in the tent there in the summer?

EP: Well, it wasn't bad if you're not scared of snakes because there were lots of them around and salamanders. I remember dad digging a trench around the tent. There were tracks around the tent because the salamanders can't. If they go in there, they can't get out. They crawl in the tent.

SD: How big was this tent?

EP: You know them big grey ones, like this? Them kind. Mom made mattresses with hay and canvas. She'd pack it full of hay and those were the mattresses. About every three weeks or so, we'd move the tent from one place to another place because the dirt, the grass would be disturbed. It would be all dead, so we'd move it to a different spot. We'd clean around it, and we'd always have a baby swing in the centre of that pole because there was always a baby every year.

SD: So, you had a centre pole that held up the tent?

EP: Yes, there's a centre pole down the middle, and then they had one on each end that was to the ground. It had posts on four corners, which tied the tent all the way in.

SD: Where did you get a tent?

EP: Well, lots of people made their own, but I think we bought ours from the Hudson's Bay Company.

SD: It was just a thick canvas?

EP: Yes, it could rain all it wanted, it never rained inside there.

SD: Really?

EP: Until they get old. It was a good experience. At least we knew how to work anyway.

SD: Did any of the people in your road allowance community own their property?

EP: No, they just came and moved in there and started building their own houses, if they wanted a house. They weren't much of houses, just shacks, shelters. I remember mud, and I remember my grandpa getting a handful of hay like this, and then he'd cut it on a wood block and throw it in a tub full of mud and be stirring that mud around.

SD: How do you stir the mud?

EP: With our bare feet. We jumped around in the tub and plastered the house with it. In the fall, we had to do that over again because lots of the dirt washes away in the rain in the summer. We'd have to do it again in the fall.

SD: How did your family and other Métis families make a living?

EP: Well, just by gathering and going up to work in the summer and trapping and whatever in the wintertime.

SD: In the bush?

EP: Yes, in the bush. My dad was a logger

SD: Any work for farmers around Midnight Lake as well

EP: Yes.

SD: You mentioned you worked for a couple of different farmers?

EP: Yes, later on, in the beginning, it was just trapping and logging, and he then worked for farmers, and after that, he went back to the bush.

SD: So, you guys quit going to Elrose, and then just worked for farmers in Midnight Lake?

EP: Yes.

SD: What sort of resources did your family harvest? What kind of animals did you trap and hunt?

EP: Oh, everything that you can sell—muskrats, martins, mink, coyotes, foxes, weasels, squirrels, and beavers. Whatever the fur buyers bought.

SD: You hunted the odd deer as well?

EP: Yes, just for our own food.

SD: Did the game warden ever hassle you guys?

EP: Well, he never bothered us, but we knew the game warden good. He probably knew how we lived because I remember him coming to our place, and he asked us what we do with the beaver tail. We said we threw it away. The one meat we didn't eat was beaver. We tried it once, and we didn't like it, so we never ever had it. And he said, "You know that beaver tail is good. You should cook that and eat it." He said, "I eat it all the time, if I can get my hands on it." After he left, we tried for the heck of it and it wasn't good. It was all grizzle and fat, nothing else.

SD: So, your dad probably had to get a trapper's licence when he trapped?

EP: Yes, he went and got that from the RM office. I think

SD: And the game warden never gave fines to people for hunting?

EP: Not that I know of. I never saw him bothering anyone

EDP: Uncle Bill—

EP: Yes, that's who the game warden was that time. That's probably where he got his trapping licence because now a days you can buy them in the store, but at that time, I think you had to go to the DNR to get one. Today, if you want to trap you got to have your own territory, but at that time, you could trap anywhere.

SD: What about plants or berries did you harvest?

EP: Just Saskatoons, cranberries, strawberries, and what do they call them little red berries?

SD: Chokecherries, Gooseberries?

EP: Yes. Loganberry? They were in bushes about this tall, in a bush. Loganberries, I think they're called. They were little red berries like raspberries, but they were close to the ground.

SD: Okay, similar to raspberries?

EP: Yes, blueberries, cranberries, high bush and low bush

SD: Did you collect a lot of that stuff?

EP: Oh yes, enough to last us for the winter.

SD: So how did you preserve them?

EP: We mashed the chokecherries with a rock, dried them, and most of the berries, we dried because we had no place to keep them if we canned them. Yes, so it was mostly dried berries put away in bags. And then I don't remember us having a fridge. I must have left home before a fridge come to our house. I don't ever remember

SD: So, you dried the Saskatoons and that?

EP: Yes, we dried them, the same with blueberries and cranberries.

SD: How would you cook them after you dried them?

EP: Just boil them. Well for the Saskatoons and the chokecherries, they were usually fried. But the cranberries, we just boiled them and use them for jam and made them thick. There was no other fruit. We had lots of rabbits and ducks. We always snared rabbits. For us kids, our chore was to snare rabbits and cut wood. My sister and I did all the wood cutting because we were the oldest. We used to think, "How come we never stockpile like everybody else does, to have a big wood pile for the winter?" Not us, we had to go to the bush and cut the wood every day.

SD: Oh boy

EP: We never ever had a chicken or a pig or anything like that. We had to buy all our stuff like that.

SD: Wild chickens and ducks?

EP: Yes, eggs and stuff like that we had to buy.

SD: Were there certain times a year that you'd harvest rabbits or ducks or any of the other animals or any berries?

EP: Well, we didn't harvest any animal when they had little ones in the spring, and we never touched any ducks. The rest I guess we probably harvested from June until March or so.

SD: What about traditional medicines were used in your community and in your family?

EP: I don't know much about that. All I know, I used to go in the bush with my grandma, and she'd dig up all these roots, but I don't know what she was digging or what it was used for.

Rat root, they still do that all the time. That one you dig out in the river.

SD: So that was your dad's mom?

EP: Yes, my other grandma from Green Lake. I remember my mom was sick once and another lady come and saw her from Green Lake. We were in Green Lake that time so she didn't give her any.

SD: So, did other people in Midnight Lake know how to get medicine from plants?

EP: Yes, old Koohkom Trotchie did. She was a midwife. She delivered babies all around. And Mrs. Ducharme, Madeleine Ducharme, she was a midwife because she delivered my sister who was born at home. My brother was delivered by Mrs. Trotchie. And I don't know who looked after me. Métis people kept things to themselves. They didn't tell the kids anything. So, my mother never ever told us anything. When she was going to have my brother, she gave us notes, and being that I didn't go to school, I couldn't read. She said, "Take this to Koohkom's at 6 o'clock in the morning." So, I took it. I must have been 15 already and my sister, 14. We went there and we sat on a doorstep, and we heard them making noise instead of knocking on the door. We sat on the step, and we heard that old guy making a fire. Then we knocked on the door. Then he said, "Did your mom tell you to hurry up?" "No," she said nothing. So, then Mrs. Trotchie had a bowl of cornflakes, and then we had to walk back because we had nothing to drive and neither did they. So, we walked past, up to Charette's and she got Mr. Charette to give us a ride. He had some kind of old jalopy truck, and he gave us a ride home. When we got home, the baby was born. My dad had to look after it, and we lived in a one-room house. When we got there, all the kids were outside, and this old car he bought was in the yard.

SD: Wow

EP: I don't know what happened there. I was already about 14 or 15-years-old, but I didn't even know my mom was having a baby. Today, the kids know their mom's having a baby at two or three-years-old.

SD: Did you have anyone in your family who made beaded moccasins or embroidered moccasins?

EP: My mother. Yes, she beaded 'till the day she died. She did a lot of beading for a craft store in North Battleford where they'd sell moccasins. They don't even sell anything anymore. So maybe no one's there to do it now. She made jackets and vests, and then she made all our clothes.

SD: Jackets and vests out of hide?

EP: Moose hide, deer hide

SD: Did she tan those herself?

EP: No, she never did that. She had a friend who tanned the deer hide or moose hide for her. That woman was from the Salteaux Reserve.

SD: Do you know what happened to any of the beadwork that she made?

EP: She gave me some of it, and the rest was sold. Whoever she was doing it for must have sold it. I don't know, but I know she made stuff for us kids when we were small.

SD: And you were able to save some of that for yourself?

EP: A little bit, but not much because it always had to be sold for something.

SD: Well, that is nice that some of her bead work is still around. You can look at it.

EP: At least, I have her patterns of how to do beadwork and I can do it.

SD: How did your family celebrate special occasions and holidays like Christmas, Easter, and New Year's Eve?

EP: I just remember celebrating Christmas when we went to Charette's. Other than that, we never ever celebrated anything, except we got Easter candies. That's about it.

SD: So, what was the Christmas celebration like?

EP: Oh, we had a big meal. On Christmas, we just had dinner and then we went back home. On New Year's, after the meal, me and my sister and a couple other kids were put to bed at about 8 o'clock or so at night and we stayed there. Then they played fiddle and drink whatever they were drinking half of the night, and then we come home in the morning. And sometimes, we went to our grandparents, not all the time because we never had a way to get there.

SD: So, the fiddle music on New Year's Eve?

EP: Yes, we used to go on the bus to Green Lake to visit our grandparents. And I remember when they were building the highway from Midnight Lake to Green Lake, the bus got stuck in the mud there. We had a disaster: there were people all over. We tried to haul them to Green Lake because the bus got stuck in a ditch.

SD: So, fiddle music on New Year's Eve. Was there lots of jigging or square dancing?

EP: I don't know what they were doing because we weren't down there. I wasn't very old, so I had to go to bed. I know they played a lot of fiddle music.

EDP: Well, they would be fiddling and singing and dancing that's for sure.

EP: Yes, I know the bigger girls, the Charette girls used to sing.

SD: Does anyone in your family speak Michif?

EP: No, either Cree or French. My grandpa, Joe Aubichon was really French. That's all he spoke, French. Grandma, Cree.

SD: That's your grandma from Green Lake?

EP: Yes, she only spoke Cree. She spoke nothing else.

SD: Do you speak French and Cree?

EP: No, just Cree and English.

SD: Do you know any traditional Métis stories or songs?

EP: No.

SD: What are your best memories about living in Midnight Lake?

EP: Well, I guess when I think about it today, how we were brought up was probably my most memorable thing, and sometimes I wish other kids were brought up the same way. It was a good life, but a hard life. You had to learn to do things on your own at a young age. I remember getting on the bus from over there on the other side of the Charette's to come to Midnight Lake store for groceries. I would get on the bus, me and my sister, and I know the

truck driver who hauled groceries to Meadow Lake. We'd wait for him at that store because he told us what time he'd be coming through there if we ever wanted a ride back. Once we caught a ride with him, we ended up at my mom's second cousin, so then he gave us a ride home. He drove for Lays Transport, and his name was Ian Aubichon. He'd give us a ride home with all our groceries. We were always getting canned milk for babies. Canned milk was a treat. I remember stealing canned milk, too. Now, I don't even like it in my coffee because I had too much can milk.

SD: What part of it do you wish that young people today could learn?

EP: How to provide for themselves, to cook and clean up, and look after themselves without being told all the time.

EDP: Have respect for their parents.

EP: Yes, we never ever spoke one word back when you're talked to. Ask a kid today, "Could you go and do that for me?" It's always, "Wait a minute." Well, there was no minute when we were asked to do something. It was right now. So, I guess that's the main thing: how to provide for yourself. If they're ever in a bind, they have to be alone and learn to look after themselves.

Unknown: Tell them about your sister getting in trouble with themselves.

EDP: Tell them about your sister always getting in trouble.

EP: Oh yes. My sister next to me, she did everything. She started smoking when she was about 10. She was always stealing cigarettes and tobacco from my mom. And then one day we were living at Fortune Cabins, and she said, "Come here, I want to show you something." It was in the evening. So, I said, "Okay." I went with her strutting across the farmyard. Right into the chicken house she went. And I thought, "What?" I stood by the door. I wouldn't go in the chicken house. She climbed straight up the roost, and I'm sure she found the biggest chicken she could find there. She had a lighter and she was singing that chicken. All those chickens went "cluck cluck cluck" all over the place and were running. The farm lady was milking cows in the barn, and she heard all the commotion, and she come running over there. Well, my sister, she's cagey. As soon as she sees her coming, she is standing right by the door. She came running right out the door. She had her feet like this blocking the doorway. But my sister jumped in there and run out. I got caught inside. I don't know what we were going to do because we would get a beating when dad come home from harvesting. They were combining then. So, we decided we were going to hide. It was too late because they were combining way until midnight. We had to go in the house. He came in. He was not a happy camper. But she did everything silly. Her and her doggone tobacco: she'd get red willows and she would shave them and dry them, and then she'd use a little brown paper bag, and she just scrapped that brown paper bag until it was fine like paper. She'd roll up that dried whatever it was and smoke that. She was always into something that one.

SD: Are there any bad memories that you'd like to share?

EP: Oh, a few, I guess. Whenever my mom and dad were drinking, they would get in fights. That's about only bad things that I didn't like. It scared everybody in the house. My dad was mean. I don't remember ever being hungry. A lot of times, we just had potatoes and bannock, but it was still food. We were never hungry that I can remember.

SD: How were the Métis treated?

EP: I never came out of our yard until I was 15, 16-years-old. So, I never saw anybody except when someone came in the yard, and Dad talked to them outside. I never ever saw or heard what they were talking about. Everybody liked my dad, all the farmers around because he was a good worker and was dependable. I guess we were treated good from all our neighbours.

SD: Did your family encounter racism from the larger community?

EP: No, not that I know of. They would have been outcasted from Midnight Lake. There would have been more Métis so—

SD: So, it wasn't an issue?

EP: No, there were no issues in there that I know of.

SD: When did people leave your road allowance community, and why?

EP: Well, they started moving to the cities. The older people and the kids as soon as they were 16 or 17-years-old, they were either getting married or were leaving home. Nobody hung around after that. That's when they all started disappearing. That's when we disappeared into town, too.

SD: What years was that happening?

EP: It would probably be any time after '55 the '60s.

SD: Do you know if your ancestors were involved on the 1885 Resistance?

EP: No, because my grandpa Aubichon, I think, was born in '85, and then earlier than that I don't know.

SD: How about on your mom's side?

EP: On my mom's side, I know less.

SD: Aubichon would be your mom's side?

EP: Yes, my mom's side was Aubichon, and my dad was the Martels.

SD: Do you know if your dad's ancestors were involved in 1885?

EP: No, I don't because they came from a different province, and none of them were around here.

SD: Yes, because you said your grandma was from Red River and your grandpa was from Lac La Biche.

EP: Yes, that's what I found. When I went to look for my genealogy, for my Métis card, I still don't have it because they want so much way back that you don't know anything about it. I give up on it. I went to Lac La Biche, and the only place I could find any information was at the Catholic Church where my grandma was baptised. That's all I could find around there. I don't know anything about them.

SD: Did anyone or does anyone on your family serve in the military?

EP: My grandpa Martel did. My dad went as far as Regina, but he got an appendicitis attack. He had to have surgery, and he was turned back after that. And my dad's cousin John Martel was in the military. I guess the other Martel family had their dad. He was John Martel's dad. His name was Marcel, and he was my grandpa's brother.

SD: And he served in the military?

EP: Oh, Uncle Joe too because he lost his arm in the army. That was dad's brother. He was the only one.

SD: Did he fight in World War Two?

EP: World War Two.

SD: Was your uncle, Joe Martel

EP: Yes, he got killed about 20 years ago. Someone ran into him when they were building the new Territorial Drive in North Battleford. He was walking along the long road there, and he got run over.

SD: Was anyone in your family involved with the Métis Society?

EP: Me, the most, I guess. I've been with them for about 40 years.

SD: Is that the Métis Local in Glaslyn?

EP: Yes, I was president for Midnight Lake Local, and then I was also a board member for the Métis women. I forgot how many years I was with them, about eight, I guess.

SD: Do you have anything else that you'd like to share about your Métis road allowance community?

EP: Not really, but I think people should be still allowed to live where they want to. Now you can't even pitch a tent anywhere, never mind trying to build a little log shack in a road allowance. It was easy to build a little shack and move in, but now you can't do that. You can't even put a tent anywhere around the town. It should be more of a free country instead of fighting over everything, and that's what I think.

SD: Well, anything else you can think of?

EP: No, not really.

SD: Well thanks Eva.

EP: Yes, and if I come up with something that I think should be there, I will let you know.

SD: Absolutely, you can add it on. Thank you.

EP: You're welcome.