

Road Allowance Interview, Mavis (Whiteford) Taylor, 2014

Conducted by Kori Taylor

Good morning my name is Mavis Taylor, my maiden name is Whiteford. I am a descendent of the Trottier, Ross, and Pritchard families. My father's side of the family came from the Red River, we are of Michif descent, with some Scotch in us. I was born and raised around the Glaslyn area, Midnight lake and Jack Pine Road allowances. And back in the day, my mother's family had a homestead at Head Lake. That is by the Fairholme community pasture.

My parents are Irving Whiteford and Violet Whiteford, her maiden name was Trotchie. Her parents were George and Annie Trotchie. My father's mother's name was Adeline Pritchard, her father was Solomon and he was at the Frog Lake Massacre with his father John Pritchard. I believe if you look back in history, he helped hide the two non-Aboriginal women. Those are some of the stories I heard from my elders.

I was born into a family of 13 children. Four brothers, eight sisters. We grew up very poor. I can go back as far as... well. my mom grew up on a homestead at Head Lake, which was a little Métis community. There were four or five families, that lived there. Dave Trotchie, and Harry and Florence Trotchie. My cousin Harry Trotchie was born there. I have his birth certificate. He was born with an arm deformity. My grandma Adeline helped deliver him and he says that the reason his arm was deformed was because of the way he was delivered.

I always asked my mom why they left Head Lake, and she said it was because her father passed away when she was 15. He died of pneumonia maybe, and they could never get to a doctor. So, her mom was left with all the children, and they had some cattle and chickens but because Grandpa passed away, they had no means of income, couldn't pay the taxes on the land so she took the children and they moved south to Willowfield.

My dad was born at Lizard Lake, in that area; and Grandpa Daniel Whiteford passed away when Mooshom (Irving Whiteford) was two years old, and he was buried on Red Pheasant Reserve. Probably from TB or something like that.

My mother Violet, nicknamed Girly, met my father in the Willowfield area, they got together when she was seventeen and they started having children. They moved to wherever they could get work, wherever Dad could work. We lived on Cadrain's farm, north of Glaslyn in a big house. My dad worked for Gabe Cadrain for about ten years, helped with the crops, haying, bailing, combining. We kids always helped with that too. I was eight years old before I started school because we just didn't go to school. But I can remember before that we would work with dad. Cadrains owned a little store at Midnight Lake, and dad worked on the farm for them, and he would get paid with groceries from the store. That's how he fed us.

I remember we picked a lot of berries in the summertime. Saskatoons, raspberries... there was always a berry patch along Midnight Lake, we would pick blueberries and cranberries then can them for the winter. And after we left Cadrains farm, we would pick rocks when breaking the land, but they modernized so there wasn't any work and we moved to Jack Pine Road Allowance. It goes right to midnight lake. We lived there for many years

with four or five families. My grandma, or koohkum I called her, lived there too. She would get old-age pension and end of every month she would go into Glaslyn, to Dart's Store and get flour and sugar and shared with everyone.

They hunted a lot for us I can remember, in the fall and winter, deer and moose, that is what we lived on. We didn't have a fridge, so we built a hut in the ground to keep the meat frozen. Then in the spring and summer, we would eat lots of ducks. We made duck soup called "rubaboo," eat it with bannock. Then lots of prairie chickens, and I remember at Christmas we didn't have any money for gifts or turkey so Dad would hunt partridge and mom would clean them, save them up till we had about ten and that's what we would eat on Christmas day. If we were lucky enough, they could get to North Battleford for hampers from Salvation Army, but we didn't always get it because I can remember there wasn't always a way to get to North Battleford. I remember we used to hang stockings and get a few peanuts and candy and an orange, that was our gifts on Christmas. Then if they cut a Christmas tree, we would make our own decorations out of paper and strings and stuff. From all the berry picking that we canned, we would make lii grin, that was chokecherries. We would pick them, crush them with a rock, and lay them out to dry in the sun. Then we would put them in leftover cotton sacks and hang them on the wall in the kitchen and they would be dry. Then when you wanted a desert, they would take some down, cook it with lard and flour and add sugar. Then eat it with bannock, which was like a desert. Another thing we did was with Saskatoon berries, put them in the frying pan with lard and water and sugar and it was a desert.

Until we started school and going on the school bus, I don't ever recall going to town. We stayed home. We did our own thing at home. We would make playhouses and do our own thing at home, until we started going on the bus to school. I guess how we got to start school was when Social Services started. Mom and Dad didn't have any money to buy us books and school clothes, then social services came and gave them money to buy us clothes. We would walk a mile to catch the bus when we lived on Cadrain's farm, then on the road allowance it was closer we lived right by the highway.

If you go back to the food part of it, when it was spring and the creek would start to run four or five families would go in their trucks, all the kids would sit in the box and pull up to the Alcott creek. All us kids would roll our pant legs up and stand in the creek and catch fish and throw them to the bank. We would fill tubs with fish and take them home. Then the women would clean them and can them so we could have food for the winter too. Mom would make soup out of bologna if we got bologna or garlic sausage it was a luxury. We lived on wild meat, so when we got anything like that it was a real treat. We were poor but we had lots of love and we were healthy. Sometimes mom would boil potatoes and that would be our potato soup, we always seemed to have flour for bannock too. Everything was boiled. It was seldom things were fried. Maybe you would have deer or moose meat fried, but it was usually boiled because that went a long way. And there was always bannock. The only time there would be any bought bread would be if for our school lunches and that.

Then when we lived on Jack Pine Road, L & M Wood Products started up in Glaslyn, and they hired Dad to cut fence posts. Pickets they called them. And we would go help Dad cut Willow pickets and drag them to the truck and bring them into town, to Darts' Store and we would sell them and buy groceries and fill the truck up with gas, done on a daily basis. Then they would treat poplar pickets, have a treating trough, and put snow in there. Cut these six-foot poplar posts, sharpen them, and treat them, most of the stuff was sold at Darts Store. Unless it was for L&M, then we would go out to bush with Dad and he would saw the trees down and we would haul them out to the road, he would cut a path to the truck. He would limb them and cut them into six-foot length, and we would help. This was usually done on the Turtle Lake Road, north of Jack Pine. Then he would take us home, drop us off and pick up mom and they would bring the load into L&M, get groceries and gas and that is how it was day after day.

Then for years, I do not know how many, I can't remember, we would head down south. The farmers would be breaking land in the south and Dad would go help them there. It was always down by Kindersley, Etonia, Biggar, Brock, Cando, Landis... we go work for farmers and would live in tents on the prairies. We would dig and pick rocks, sometimes we would have to use dynamite. We would get pulled out of school middle of June to do this. We somehow still managed to pass grades though. Then when we were done this, we would go up to Lloydminster and around Kitscoty and Vermillion, Dad and a few other Métis families would help farmers with stoking (hay), and threshing, and we would stay there in tents for months, sometimes till the end of October, even when there was snow on the ground. I remember there was a big stove in the middle of the tent, and there would be beds all around it. We would stay there until done and then come home to our house on the road allowance.

One year, I do not remember what one, our house burnt down on Jack Pine Road. So, when we came home that fall our Uncle Dave Trotchie had built us another house about three miles south on another Road Allowance. We lived there until I was about 13, then we moved to a house in Glaslyn. I was seventeen before Mom and Dad lived in a house with running water, they rented and then bought one through Sask housing. They had that last house until they both died.

Over the years, my grandma Adeline and her partner, never missed the shrine at Duck Lake. We would look forward every summer. They would go to Duck Lake and spend a week with us on the way. They slept in a tent and had a grub box. Back in those days everyone travelled with a grub box, it was full of bread and jam and dishes and all that. I remember one time going to Lloyd, we would stop at the ferry because there was no bridge then. We would buy lunch at the ferry, spread a blanket. Once a year in the summer when we would go visit my grandma. We would do this and go to the fair in Lloyd. In our culture, everybody was welcome in your home, and you always fed them. You would make tea and a little lunch. My grandma always had jam and butter and piles of toast on her table. And she would make

lii pota(?), she would boil potatoes and burger to serve when someone came. No matter what time of day.

We were poor but we were all healthy. We all managed to go to school. When my mom and dad got their house from Sask housing and got their old age pension was probably the best time of their life, because it was the only time they didn't have to worry about how they were gonna pay bills or buy food. That is where they lived till they died. As we all grew up and got older, we left home and raised our own families. Mom and dad loved kids, they had a lot of grandkids and great grandkids.

There was Rosie Lammen and her grandson, Oliver Collette, and Dave and Trotchie and Norma Trotchie. Joe Whiteford lived with us on Jack Pine Road. Going to school was a big change. I liked it so much I didn't miss a day of school in four years. I would wake up and run to the bus to just make it there. Mom would go to town and buy loaves of bread for our lunches. My great koohkum, Rosie Lammen, she walked with a cane. I stayed with her before I went to school and help her. She would make rhubarb pie. Like 20 pies at a time and I would wash the rhubarb and take care of the fire while she made the crust and stuffed the pie. My mooshom worked for a sheep farmer, he would sheer and bring home wool. Koohkum would take this wool, and we would haul water to her, and she would wash them by hand. Then she would trade it for groceries. We would also pick berries and wash them and can all of that stuff so we could have fruit for the winter. Then she would buy me flip flops, runners, and some kind of a blouse for working for her.

When we went to school, we wore good clothes and would take them off the second we got home and re-wear them the next day. We ironed everything because it was all made of cotton, even our bras and panties, pillow cases and sheets. Everything. It was a lot work but it was ironed nice. My mom was a very clean person. Our house was always clean. We didn't have nice floors, only boards, but we took turns once a week scrubbing them with Javex. After school there was lots of chores. There was a chamber pot to clean, the oil lamps to clean and fill, haul water from the snow or slough. We had to do laundry. Until I was 15 we didn't have a washing machine. There were always lots of babies so we would have to wash diapers. I remember being 8 years old scrubbing diapers on a washboard with slough water. Always had one tub to wash them and hang them on a line to dry them.

Auntie Tracy is 15 years younger than me. I remember when she was born on December 1st. We lived on the road allowance, off the highway. In a two room, slab house. There was a big snow storm, four-, five-foot snowbanks. And then mom went into labour. Uncle Joe, walked to Joe Warwick's and started his car. They made a homemade sleigh to get her to the car. It was probably 35 or 40 below. Dad and Uncle pulled her to the car to get her to the hospital. Then when she came home, that little house had a table in the kitchen. The baby had to sleep there close to the fire. The baby was wrapped in so many blankets to keep it warm. Mom would wash the baby first thing in the morning right by the heater and no one was allowed to open the door when that was going on because the baby would freeze. There was a swing above the bed too where she would sleep sometimes.

I ended up getting married in August 1972, when I was 17. I had my son Michael in September. I worked at the Rainbow Café as a waitress. Papa and I got an apartment, and I started work at the Glaslyn Hotel for about five years. Then after that I worked at the store in Glaslyn, then I had your dad in 1979, I took three months off and then Grandma looked after him. I worked at the store for 10 years, then quit and went to Glaslyn Agencies for five years, didn't like that so I went to the Credit Union, quit there and in 1993 I went to work in Meadow Lake for Métis Employment and Training. I worked there for 20 years, had a lot of success, and got good Métis people through school, got them jobs. Then after that in 2004 I entered the political arena of the Métis nation, I was the regional director from 2004-2012. I went into politics and just worked for the region and with the people. Then I was the CEO in January 2016 to 2017, then I took a year off to be with my husband. Now I am employed as the director of youth for the MN-S. A lot of history in those years, a lot of ups and downs but we get through it. I stood strong and stood up for what I believe in. I care about the Nation, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. It is the best thing for the Métis people. They just celebrated 40 years, and I hope they are here for another 40 years plus to come.

In my mind, there are a lot of good people that stick out. A lot of elders who taught me a lot have already passed on. I have made good friends throughout my 35 years being involved with the MN-S. I have a lot of respect for the people who worked hard and stood strong. There are people I am thankful for, like the staff at GDI. I want to mention Geordy McCaffrey. He was one of the first individuals I met when I started work in Meadow Lake. We did a lot of partnering with GDI, he worked for DTI at the time before he was Executive Director. I want to also mention, Brett Vandale, Cory McDougall, Karon Shmon, Lisa Bird-Wilson ... all of them. Most of the staff, the ones who have been there for so many years I've worked with I am thankful for. Also, President Chartier is a very good friend of mine, I appreciate all of his work and dedication—and David Chartrand. Their work, passion, compassion for the Métis people is inexplicable. The people are truly in all their hearts. And a lot of the elders who passed on, that stood strong.

I love the Métis and our music. I could sit and listen to it all day. On my mom's side, Harry Trotchie, Gordon, and Elmer. There wasn't an instrument they couldn't play. Harry would play the fiddle, and they would come out all the time and play. My favourite was the Red River Jig, and Maple Sugar. I always think of Uncle Harry when I hear Maple Sugar. They would go hunt and then come home and we would either play music or tell stories. It's all we had to do. I would sing for them, and they would pay me with a nickel or dime and then I would buy candy. When I was 12, we got monopoly, and we would play cards. We would play war but in our language. It was "labataille." That was after supper stuff. On the weekends we played games. We would never get bored we didn't know what it meant. In the wintertime we would make sleds to go down the hills, and in the summertime, we would make playhouses in the bush. We would use our imaginations with whatever we could find. We made our dolls out of rags. Mom gave us rags and we would stuff the head, buttons for

eyes. We also sewed our own blankets. Grandma Ross would send rags too, and we would make our own doll clothes.

I do love Batoche, although it seems more commercialized compared to how I remember it. I learned to make bannock and lli Boulet after Grandma passed away. We need to do more of this stuff as Métis families. Like the language, I can only really understand it. We lived good lives. There was no stress and even though we were poor. there was no stress like today. We were happy and healthy. For my younger self, I would tell her to get an education. I always wanted to be a teacher. I never had the opportunity. Maybe that is why I work so hard today to make sure the young get their jobs. I have self taught myself through reading and watching, listening to elders and paying attention to life in general. I have no regrets, I have a beautiful family, children and grandchildren. My advice for young people is go to school, get your education and keep our culture alive.