

Road Allowance Interview, Ervin Trotchie, June 11, 2014

Conducted by Scott Duffee

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

Ervin Trotchie (ED): Ervin Trotchie.

SD: What was your home community where did you grow up, Ervin?

ET: North of Fairholme, in the community pasture. That's where I was born and lived until I was about 10 years old. Then we moved closer to the highway, and then when we moved up north where Dad had the sawmill and lived there until '62.

SD: So, where's Fairholme?

ET: It's west, north of Glaslyn on that highway to Turtleford.

SD: Okay, so between here and Turtleford?

ET: Yes.

SD: Was that a road allowance community?

ET: No, that was Mavis [Taylor]'s grandma's homestead.

SD: It was her homestead.

ET: Yes.

SD: So, you just had a house, or your parents had a house on someone else's land

there? ET: Yes, she was my auntie. Mavis' grandmother and my dad were brother and sister.

SD: Oh okay.

ET: Well, we'd only be about five miles west from where the Fahls are, where I was born.

SD: Oh okay.

ET: North and west of there.

SD: And whose land was that again?

ET: My aunt, Mavis' grandmother.

SD: Mavis Taylor's grandmother, and what was that lady's name?

ET: Well, she was a Trotchie, but then later in years she married a Ross.

SD: Did any other people live on her land other than your family?

ET: Well, she did. Her family lived there.

SD: She did.

ET: And Mavis' mom, her brothers, and then I think old grandpa Trotchie lived there, too. He had a little shack there. Then, Uncle Dave, Dad's oldest brother, had a homestead there, too. And then, I don't know if old grandma had a homestead up in that country or not. And everybody moved closer to the highway, and they put all that land into community pasture. All of those people's homesteads, there was a lot of old people who lived back there. They just never got anything for their homesteads.

SD: So, the government bought the homesteads and turned it into a community pasture?

ET: I don't know what they did there. The ones that I know, who I'm related to, they never got anything for their homesteads.

SD: Did they ever have title to those homesteads?

ET: Oh, I'm sure they did.

SD: But they just somehow lost that land, and never got it paid for it?

ET: No. And then on each side of the highway just north of Jack Pine Road, a Native lady told me that the Métis owned all that land in there towards Helena Lake. They just got pushed out.

SD: And it got turned into a community pasture?

ET: No, there's a farmer that owns that land now. The one that got turned into a community pasture is on the west side now.

SD: Did any Métis try to get that land back ever?

ET: I don't know, not that I know of.

SD: Where's Helena Lake?

ET: That's where you went down Jack Pine Road, you go another two miles north then east.

SD: It's a small lake?

ET: About 6 miles long.

SD: So, you lived on your aunt's homestead until you were ten?

ET: No, we moved south. I remember about four miles or something. I don't know if that was old grandma's homestead or not, but it was where we lived until we moved out towards the highway. We lived about a mile off the highway on the south side of Jack Pine Road. A few years at that place, Dad rented a place from a farmer, and that's when we moved to the bush. He built a house up in the bush. We lived there and we had a sawmill up there. I never went to school because they wouldn't put a school bus up there. It was too far to drive everyday.

SD: Where was the sawmill?

ET: You know where the halfway way is?

SD: No.

ET: You've never been up to Meadow Lake?

SD: Yes, I have.

ET: Moose country, the middle is about six miles or eight miles north of there on the east side of the highway. We lived back in there for years.

SD: Your dad bought himself a sawmill? He worked at a sawmill?

ET: We had George Pritchard's sawmill. He never used it. He lent it to Dad. He had that sawmill t for years. I was sawing lumber when I was 12 years old.

SD: There must have been other Métis families living and working at that sawmill?

ET: No, mostly just our family. And then Mavis' dad worked there sometimes, and her grandma's husband and the boys. Yes, there was, but most of the time we just had our own. My sister and I used to table saw. Then I started sawing lumber when I was 12, 13-years-old.

SD: Big job for a 12-year-old.

ET: Yes, I done that until I left there, then everybody moved out. There were a few there then they started moving south. That's when they started living on the road allowances. I started working in the south for a farmer. Then, I ended up in construction. I worked all over the place. I worked at the dam at Outlook for three years. That was quite the experience.

SD: I bet. Was that a tough experience?

ET: No, the way things worked there, I guess. So many machines, I saw men, well I didn't see them get killed, but I was there when nine people got killed. We were working the nightshift, and this young guy was brought to the machine to where he could dump. He was just a young guy from west Rosetown, and in the morning, they couldn't find him. He got buried under the dirt that night. There were 40, 50 buggies hauling dirt in there. Some of those guys were drunk when they drove to work. Sunday night was a bad night to go there. Then I come back and went back to work in the bush, where I worked in the yard. Hauling in the yard here for years, then I went back to the bush cutting posts and hauling posts. Finally, I got fed up with the bush. I worked for Dmytryshyn crushing gravel, and then I worked with Mavis' dad. We hauled scrap iron for quite a few years to North Battleford. Yes, there were a lot of people that lived on the road allowance then.

SD: So, you lived near Fairholme and then you moved near the Jack Pine Road Allowance? Your father rented a house, and you lived there?

ET: Yes, just about a mile off the highway and then on the south side of Jack Pine Road.

SD: Jack Pine Road. Were there any other road allowance communities there or was Jack Pine Road the main one?

ET: Well, there was one further south.

SD: Midnight Lake.

ET: Yes, before you get to Midnight Lake, there's a farm on the east side of the highway. There was a road allowance there. Quite a few people lived there.

SD: What did they call that place? Was there a name for it?

ET: No.

SD: They just lived there.

ET: Yes, they just—

SD: And that's before Midnight Lake?

ET: Yes, it's two miles south on Jack Pine. There's a good road going west where Pattern's farm is. But the one that goes towards the lake, there's an old road allowance there at the edge, where that big house is, but there's nothing there now.

SD: No, old shacks there? It's all...

ET: Nothing. Same thing with Jack Pine, I don't know of any other places where the Métis lived.

SD: Who were your parents and your grandparents?

ET: Rose and Andrew Trottier. They were my, dad's parents. Peter and Agnes McKinnon were my mother's parents.

SD: McKinnon?

ET: Yes, they were from Ireland.

SD: Really?

ET: Yes.

SD: They were both from Ireland?

ET: Yes.

SD: What was Rose's maiden name? Do you know?

ET: I don't know for sure. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was Trottier before she was married, too. I don't know. I think her dad's name was Trottier. I forget his first name.

SD: So, did both sets of your grandparents always live in this area?

ET: Oh no, her and Andrew, my grandpa, they had parted years ago, and she was married to this old Bill Lennon, this old English guy. They lived all over the place. They lived north of Jack Pine. They lived on Jack Pine Road, and they lived up north by Fairholme. Then up north where we had the mill, they lived up there. She was just on the move all the time.

SD: That was your grandmother?

ET: Yes.

SD: Your dad's mom?

ET: Yes, she moved all the way from Montana with horses.

SD: And your dad's dad as well?

ET: Yes.

SD: And then they split?

ET: Yes.

SD: And do you know where your grandpa ended up?

ET: He was up in the mill with us, and he'd stay with Karen. He stayed all over. He was quite the old guy. He never had his own place. He just stayed with family. Then he ended up in Saskatoon with Uncle Joe. That's where he passed away. But he lived with us up at the mill for years. He just loved it up there. Go everyday, take his axe, and he'd go and chop willow pickets. Then when he figured he had a load he'd tell

me, "Get the horses ready and haul my pickets." I'd hook up the team and go haul his pickets there."

SD: That's black diamond willow?

ET: Yes

SD: That's tough wood, isn't it?

ET: It is yes.

SD: Just out of curiosity, what were the axe heads made out of?

ET: Steel.

SD: How about your mom's parents, did they always live in this area?

ET: South of Fairholme, they had a farm.

SD: They moved here from Ireland you said, is that right?

ET: Yes.

SD: So, then your mom grew up south of Fairholme?

ET: Yes, I have two aunties left in that family. One lives in town here and one lives in Meadow Lake. The rest live all over.

SD: So, what Métis families lived along Jack Pine Road and Fairholme and up at the sawmill?

ET: There was Rosses, Whitfords, Trotchies, Carons. I think some Vandales maybe lived down there. Yes, Vandales lived down there a few miles. But most of the people that lived down on the road allowances are dead now. I think Mavis was only about four of her family. There were 13 in her family, but there's only about four left around here. She has one sister and two brothers who live down here. The rest are all gone. They live in Lloydminster, Edmonton, Leoville.

SD: Did any non-Métis people live in those communities?

ET: Not that I can remember.

SD: So, they were all Métis people who lived on your grandma's homestead near Fairholme, then Jack Pine Road and then up at the sawmill?

ET: Yes, and then south of Jack Pine. I even lived there for a while with my old grandma. She had a house there, and I stayed with her because she couldn't get to town. I used to drive her to town.

SD: That was your grandma Trotchie?

ET: Yes.

SD: So, she moved from her homestead then to that?

ET: Yes, she moved. She was all over. She had a place north of where we had the mill along the highway and then she had a house built about a mile north of Jack Pine Road on the west side. Her old man built a house and then he'd no sooner get it finished and settle down, then she had to move again. She was on the move all the time.

SD: Really?

ET: Yes, she just couldn't stay in one place.

SD: So, she had this house built, but then didn't want to stay in it?

ET: Yes.

SD: Wow. I wonder why.

ET: Well, she'd stay for a little while. Then she got the urge to move, and away she went. I have a sister just like that. She lives in Saskatoon right now.

SD: And so that sawmill that your dad operated did you guys give that place a name where you stayed up there?

ET: They used to just call it "Trotchie's Mill."

SD: Trotchie's Mill.

ET: Yes, that's what the bus driver used to call it. If somebody was going north, they'd say, "Where are you getting off?" "At Trottier's Mill."

SD: And that was just right off of that Halfway Point Road?

ET: No, it's up past Moose Country there about six miles, just on the road on the east side of the highway about half a mile.

SD: Just off of the east side of Highway Number 4?

ET: Mhmm.

SD: Is there anything to look at up there anymore?

ET: Nothing there now. I guess they cut all the bush around there. My old car is about half way in there. The first car I had, a '46 Chev. Just the body is left there.

SD: How many miles is that from here?

ET: About 20, 30 miles.

SD: You should go take a picture of that old car. That would be interesting.

ET: I don't know. It's not all there now, but and there was one young guy that used to say with us. He had a '48 DeSoto, but I don't know if they worked in there and they cut all trees, and they pushed stuff around. Man, oh man, these outfits in the bush nowadays just ruin the bush. They can't figure out why all the moose and stuff are going south. Well, they got no place to live in the bush. There's no bush left.

SD: So how did you guys look after the bush when you lived there?

ET: Oh, we had to cut the stumps only so high. We didn't have chainsaws in them days. We used a Swede saw or a buck, or a cross-cut saw. The stump couldn't be over ten inches high. And then when you knocked the trees down, you had to chop all the branches flat to the ground or else you paid a penalty for that.

SD: So, you weren't allowed to leave limbs sticking up?

ET: No. Nowadays, there's the biggest mess you've ever seen in the bush.

SD: And so, you left the bush looking a lot better when you were logging?

ET: Oh, we had no choice. We had to do it because the game wardens walked around the bush and would see where you work, and you had to have a permit.

SD: The permit allowed you to live on that land?

ET: Oh, you paid a ten-dollar lease every year.

SD: That allowed you to live on the land and harvest the trees?

ET: Oh no, you had to buy different permits for the trees.

SD: So, you bought a ten-dollar permit to live there, and then you bought another permit to harvest the trees?

ET: Cut the trees for lumber, fence post, rails, and then pay the different permit for everything.

SD: You must have had to work hard to make money off that because those permits wouldn't have been cheap?

ET: No.

SD: They're not cheap nowadays.

ET: You can't even get a permit now. You can't even cut a tree in the bush. If you get caught cutting a tree in the bush, you pay for it.

SD: Did any of the people in Fairholme, Jack Pine Road, Trotchie Mill own the land that they lived on?

ET: Just the ones that had a homestead there.

SD: But then they lost it?

ET: Yes.

SD: Maybe because they didn't develop the homesteads?

ET: Well, they moved out. There was just nothing to do. They just moved out.

SD: How come they didn't farm that land or ranch?

ET: There are places up in that pasture where you see where some guys tried to farm. There are rock piles, maybe 8-feet wide and maybe four-feet high. They could have used it for a fence.

SD: Pretty tough to farm that land.

ET: Oh man it was just rough.

SD: So how did they end up getting a homestead on that land?

ET: I don't know how that ever happened.

SD: If the land's not good for farming, how could they have ended up with a homestead there?

ET: Yes, there are a lot of people who had homesteads there, but they just all moved out.

SD: Was it all Métis that had homesteads on that land?

ET: No, there were lots of Métis, but there was some other. There was an old Englishman who had a homestead there for years and years, and he finally moved out, too.

SD: Have you ever heard of Métis scrip? No? Okay, some Métis got land. They would get a scrip certificate and get land from that, and I was just wondering if your family had ever talked about that.

ET: No, Dad used to say my grandfather, when my uncle went to Ottawa to try and get land, they never got it. "I'll die and I'll never get it," he told me. He told me, "You'll die and you'll never get it."

SD: Really? So, your dad's grandfather went to Ottawa to try and get it?

ET: Yes, they went for something for the Métis. That's before I was born, but old George Pritchard.

SD: That's interesting that your dad would say that.

ET: Oh, gee he always said that. He said, "They'll never have anything." It's our people, when we had the hunting rights who ruined it.

SD: How?

ET: Well, they were hunting. They were slaughtering the moose and selling them.

SD: You mean recently?

ET: Yes.

SD: Last 30 years.

ET: Yes, this was a few years back. I shot a moose and a deer, and I went to court for I don't know how long. They tried to charge me. I said, "You can't charge me." So anyway, they quit bothering me. But then we lost our hunting rights again. But somebody said the government passed it again.

SD: Yep, they did.

ET: So, can we go hunt a moose or is that—?

SD: Well, if you have your Métis card, it's a lot easier, but if you don't then you could get hassled probably still. But if you proved your genealogy in court you probably would get—

ET: Well, I know my nephew, my youngest brother's son, they charged him for hunting without a licence. They give him a hundred and fifty dollar fine. He said, "I'm not paying that!" And he never did. He just threw it out. All I want to do is hunt moose and deer and set a net for fish. I don't care about land. I'm too old to get land anyway. But that moose I shot, they gave me problems for a long time. But I wasn't scared. We had our rights, but if I would have chickened out, sure I wouldn't have went to court, and paid the fine. But every once in a while, I'd phone somebody about that guy in Meadow Lake, and he'd say, "Don't worry about it. If they're going to take you to court, you phone me and I'll go and talk for you." So, I'd just tell them that, and then they'd leave it off for a while, and then they go again.

SD: Was it like that when you were growing up too?

ET: Oh no, before the moose season opened, we ate moose meat in the bush all the time. Dad killed one all the time, and the DNR used to come. He knew that dad was shooting a moose to eat, but he didn't bother. But he was one in a thousand maybe. But he would come and tell him, "What do you got on for dinner? Roast moose?" Dad just about had a heart attack. He ate lots of moose before the season even opened here. But Dad, I, and Uncle Dave, dad's other brother, we lived up there. They lived about half a mile north of where we did. And they'd go kill a moose, and they'd all be coming back with it on the sleigh, and every once in a while, they'd throw a piece of it on the snow. Nobody knew they had it tied up in a big spruce tree in a

bag. We couldn't afford to be buying all our meat. Buy a pig in the fall. I remember dad would buy a pig. But we ate moose meat and deer meat. I liked moose meat and deer meat better than any other meat anyway. I love moose meat. Yes, and I never got one for a couple years now. I could have shot one 20 feet from my car last fall. I called it. It was north of Fairholme. It went crossing in front of me. I was just driving around, and he went out into the pasture, and I wondered if I could call that moose. I just stopped and did a couple grunts. He turned around and came full run right to the car. He stopped. I could see his eyes blinking. That's how close he was to the car. I didn't know if he was going to charge it or not, a great big bull. I called him twice.

SD: How did your family and other Métis families make a living who lived on the road allowance?

ET: Cutting, posts and rails, Christmas trees, anything.

SD: From the bush then?

ET: Yes, from the bush. Some went and worked for a farmer, but they got two dollars a day and you picked in the sun all day. I did that too. That's quite a thing. We worked hard, hard, hard labour. Go to the bush, 30 below with a team of horses, and you worked all day cutting posts. Your lunch would freeze and you had to thaw it out over one fire. Then you walked all the way home behind the sleigh because you would freeze if you rode on the sleigh after sweating all day. We chopped posts all day long, and then we would have to go home about four miles with the sleigh of posts. We walked behind the sleigh to keep warm.

SD: What kind of resources did your family harvest? You hunted some moose and deer. Did you hunt any other animals?

ET: Dad used to trap beavers, rats, minks, shoot squirrels. He trapped mink a lot of the time.

SD: Then he'd sell the fur?

ET: Yes, there was a fur buyer. Well, the old fur buyer is still living. He lives at Turtle Lake.

SD: What's his name?

ET: Henry Kopp.

SD: So, your dad would have to buy a permit to trap?

ET: A licence.

SD: So, he'd buy a licence, get some furs and sell them. When and where did he collect these furs?

ET: Up north where we lived, in the fall, winter, and the spring.

SD: How about berries, was there much berry picking?

ET: Oh berries, mom used to can piles and piles of wild strawberries. They used to grow like that big along the highway.

SD: Really?

ET: Me and my two sisters, we'd go and pick all day long. Come home with a big pan of good strawberries. Mom canned strawberries, Saskatoons, and blueberries. She'd can a lot of her—

SD: Must have been delicious?

ET: Yes, it was. You go and look for those strawberries, and they're so small now. They used to be bigger along the highway where the gravel was. You know they grew good.

SD: They grew in the gravel?

ET: Yes, right on the shoulder of the highway. They'd just be hanging in that long grass.

SD: What kind of traditional medicines were used?

ET: Oh well, just whatever they bought. But right to this day, my sister uses rat root, sarsaparilla, muskeg tea, badger brush. I got some of it right there in pint sealers.

SD: Where did your sister learn how to use that kind of medicine?

ET: Oh, our old koohkom. She had piles of that all the time. She just lived north of town here, about six miles. She's got that all the time. I've got diabetes, but I take all kinds of junk. She kept her diabetes right down. She hardly ever took her pills. She just took roots and stuff. ... She's got a pasture back in there. There's lots of it, but some people don't know how to do it. My sister has a big, long butchering knife. She just cuts about that deep under the ground, just turn it over. Some people dig it. That's hard. That's the way I did it. It was hard to do, but she can go like crazy. Her husband and her go and get two big garbage bags full every fall. They take it, and they clean it all good. And I don't know if I got that other stuff here. She uses a coffee grinder, and she grinds it up. See how fine it gets?

SD: Oh interesting.

ET: Larry, that's her husband, my brother-in-law. He's an Ouellette. He puts a spoon like that in his coffee every morning. Just puts it. I never knew him to be sick. Yes, it's quite a thing that medicine. Better than any pills. I boil rat root, Seneca root, sarsaparilla, badger brush, and birchbark. I boil that all together and then strain it through a coffee filter.

SD: And that really helps you feel better?

ET: Oh yes. It's good. It keeps you cleaned out inside, flushes your kidneys. Yes, but I harmed my lung before I decided to quit doing it.

SD: Oh.

ET: Yes, I've been on oxygen now for seven years.

SD: Oh wow.

ET: I walk from here to my car, and I'm ready to fall if I don't have it on. No good for anything, can't do anything.

SD: Well, you're doing a lot by telling us—

ET: But I worked hard in my days, though. I worked for one farmer north of town here. That's when I first started to work out. I picked rocks from morning to night with a team of horses and a wagon for three dollars a day. Long days, and then we go in at night and have supper and then you had to go and help milk six cows

SD: That's a lot of working. So, your grandma knew how to collect medicine?

ET: Oh yes.

SD: Do you ever remember her collecting any of that medicine?

ET: Oh yes. I used to go with her lots.

SD: Where would she collect it and when would she collect it?

ET: Oh, in the fall is the best time. That's when my sister goes and gets it. Usually around the end of June is a good time to dig seneca root because they're all blossoming. After that, the blossoms fall and they're harder to find. Like there's a lot of seneca root. I remember digging seneca root. I remember when I was just a kid, they used to load up their tents and wagons and go way up in the bush up north and go dig seneca roots for a couple weeks. We'd come home with bags and sell them. In those days, I think they were only getting about 15 cents a pound. Yes, I used to dig for 75 cents a pound. But now I don't know if I could dig a pound. I have to get back again this year. I only got a little bit left. Yes, that's rat root there. Where there's a lot it, there's a lot. That's what I got left from two years ago when I went. I filled up a grocery bag. Cleaned it all up and dried it.

SD: So, who were the medicine people in your family and community, your grandma and someone else?

ET: Oh, I imagine some of my aunties. My dad used to always dig it. My sister Elaine has been doing that she was a young girl. Yes, too bad she's not home. She'd a brought some other kind of medicine, too.

SD: Did you harvest anything else for berries? You harvested strawberries, how about other kind of berries?

ET: Yes, blueberries, Saskatoons, all of them.

SD: Chokecherries?

ET: Yes, chokecherries. My old grandma used to pick these great big hundred-pound bags. They used to have these canvas bags to pick chokecherries. They didn't have grinders, so they so she'd smash them, break them on the stone. Then dry it in big pieces. That's the way she kept them. She just dried them when she was ready to cook. She'd take some out and cook them. Yes, I remember her smashing them on a rock. Putting them on a cloth, so they'd dry, then she put them in a bag after they've dried. Now my brother-in-law has a power grinder. He grinds a five-gallon pail in about half an hour.

SD: And then they eat them like that?

ET: Oh, we fry them. You ever eat them fried?

SD: No, just the syrup.

ET: My sister fries them in lard and puts water and flour to thicken them and sugar. Man, oh man, I'm telling you that's good. Yes, that's the only time I get to eat them, when I go to her place.

SD: What do they call that?

ET: Just fried chokecherries. My dad used to call them, "White man choke an arsehole." That's because the stones used to be big. Yes, now the stones grind very fine. I could just take a piece of bannock and a big spoonful of that, and I can go all day after I eat that. Yes, there are a lot of things that nobody does anymore, like dry meat and smoke fish. We used to smoke fish all the time.

SD: You ate a lot of fish back then?

ET: Oh yes. I eat a lot of fish yet.

SD: What kind of fish did folks eat back then?

ET: A lot of whitefish. At Turtle Lake, north of here, we catch 20-pound jacks in the wintertime.

SD: Did you have anyone in your family that made like moccasins with beads on them?

ET: No, I don't think old koohkom used to do that in her younger days. She used to make lots of moccasins. I don't know if anybody else, if Auntie Lucy did that. When we had that sawmill up there, we made a pretty good living. But then when L & M started in the bush, they just pushed all the small outfits right out.

SD: L & M was a big outfit?

ET: Yes, they're still up there.

SD: Were there other Métis families that had a saw mill?

ET: Old Moses Descharme had one, and then old Uncle Dave had a sawmill. He had a sawmill when we were still back north of Fairhome. He made it himself. When you were sawing, one guy had to crank those two planks, one on each side of the blade. And there was a pulley at the far end with a cable. And you cranked it through to saw the lumber. That was a hard job, too.

SD: So, it wasn't a gas-powered sawmill then?

ET: No.

SD: It was a hand powered sawmill.

ET: Yes, the saw ran by gas.

SD: By gas.

ET: But you had the table end. You had to crank it.

SD: And he made it. Your uncle made that saw mill?

ET: Yes, he then finally he fixed it. I forget how he fixed it up. Anyway, he put a pulley on it somehow, and it pulled the planks through to saw the lumber. But he couldn't saw big logs or long ones. So then when we got that mill at George Pritchard up there. We sawed logs, lots of big logs.

SD: How did George Pritchard get a hold of this saw mill?

ET: Oh, he bought it. He used to buy everything, but nobody knew how to run it, so it just sat over there at Baljennie. So then one time, he come up there, and he said to dad, "You go to that mill and use it."

SD: Did your dad have to pay rent to him or anything?

ET: Oh, he gave him lumber once in a while. He'd come with some lumber or something.

SD: Where would George Pritchard get the money to buy that kind of stuff?

ET: He always had lots of men working, lot of them. They done sugar beets. They picked rocks. They stacked bales. He always had guys working for him. He used to go up north with a three-ton truck and he'd stop at the mill. It had big racks on the box, right full of fish. He'd go up north and get fish.

SD: So, he knew how to do business?

ET: Oh yes, he was quite the old guy.

SD: Did you guys have any connection to Baljennie other than him?

ET: Yes, we lived up there one time for a while.

SD: Oh, for how long?

ET: Oh, it wasn't that long. I remember we stayed with Uncle Joe and old Grandpa Andrew. Grandpa and Uncle Joe lived together for a long time.

SD: What was their last name?

ET: Trotchie. Dad and his brothers.

SD: You, your dad, and your mom stayed up there?

ET: Yes, and I imagine Elaine. Elaine was born, too. Yes, we stayed there for a while.

SD: What did you do up there?

ET: I don't know. I think most of the time, they used to go along the river and cut birch. And old grandpa used to make sleigh runners, sleigh poles, and wagon poles.

SD: Did he own his land in Baljennie? Or was it a road allowance-type situation?

ET: I don't know. I can't say for sure. I think maybe George Pritchard. I don't know. I think there's still a settlement some of the Pritchards still live there. I think Larry, my brother-in-law, said that Bert still lives there, one of George's boys.

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

ET: We never celebrated Christmas. Once in a while, I remember them going to a New Year's dance or went to somebody's place for supper. We didn't worry about it.

SD: How about weddings or anything like that?

ET: Oh yes, we always went to weddings.

SD: How did they celebrate a wedding?

ET: Oh, just a dance. I imagine some people had booze. But not the way they celebrate it today anyway.

SD: Does anyone in your family speak Michif?

ET: No, I can understand a part of it, but dad never taught us how to talk it.

SD: Yes, well if your mom spoke English, I guess.

ET: But she could talk better Cree than I did.

SD: Your mom, whose parents were from Ireland?

ET: Yes, she learned from Dad.

SD: Wow.

ET: I was always drinking at Thunderchild with the Natives and I learned lots, but I just didn't keep it.

SD: Do you speak Michif?

ET: I was never around anybody who spoke it. Dad always spoke English to us. But then when they all got together, they'd be speaking Cree. Dad could speak six languages.

SD: Which languages?

ET: He spoke Cree, pure Cree and that other Cree. He spoke Ukrainian, French, and what else? You know the Cochin Natives couldn't understand pure Cree. That's from up north. He used to go up there. 54:37

SD: With old who?

ET: With old Mike Purcell who used to own Cochin.

SD: What would your dad go up north with him for?

ET: Oh, they used to fish there with a plane, and he had a mink ranch up there. Dad would go and skin mink for him.

SD: So, he spoke Cree, a Michif kind of a Cree, French, Ukrainian, English and any other languages?

ET: One more I forget what.

SD: Saulteaux maybe?

ET: Maybe it was Saulteaux. Yes, he could. Then we had a house just out of town here, but after mom passed away, nobody wanted to stay around that house. So then my older sister lived in Cando. I never really left this country very long. After I got married, I lived in Biggar for one year, I guess, and then I lived in Cando two years, and I moved back. I didn't like that country. I liked it back in the bush where I could do what I want. But it's, not the way it used to be though. You gotta watch every move you make. It would be nice to get a moose this fall, end of August, that's when they're the best. They're really fat then.

SD: Not allowed to kill them then though, are you?

ET: Well no, but if you got hunting rights. And I'd like to set a net and get enough fish to eat for a month or two.

SD: Do you ever remember your grandma or your grandpa or your dad telling any traditional Métis stories?

ET: Oh yes, they used to tell them I guess, but I haven't heard one in so damn long. Oh, grandma she used to tell us a lot of stories, but now you can't tell any stories because nobody comes to visit you.

SD: Or Wiishakaychaak? Nothing like that?

ET: Oh yes, Auntie Lucy, my dad's sister, used to tell us. And old mooshoom there, old Andrew used to tell us about Wiishakaychaak. He used to tell us quite some stories about that.

SD: Could you tell us one in English here? Do you remember them?

ET: No, I can't remember. It's so long since I heard them.

SD: What about songs? Did they ever sing any old traditional songs?

ET: They probably did, but I can't remember.

George Gingras (GG): Did you play any tricks on your family or friends?

ET: I used to sometimes play some tricks. My sister was bad for that.

GG: Probably came from those Wiishakaychaak stories.

ET: Some people from Paradise Hill would always come here. One woman always has a sore throat, and I give her that. She just can't believe that she said, "I need some more of that root, Ervin." Oh, it's good stuff I'll tell you. It's hot, but with all that stuff mixed, it tastes pretty good.

ET: This one's got about five different kinds of stuff in there. Try it, it won't hurt you.

GG: I believe you.

ET: It will do you good.

SD: Thanks Ervin.

GG: Hey, that's not bad.

ET: No, it doesn't taste bad. I got some.

GG: Not at all.

ET: That's rat root, sarsaparilla, seneca root, badger brush, birchbark.

SD: Is there muskeg tea in there?

ET: Yes, there's muskeg tea.

SD: That's what I'm tasting. Oh, that's nice, thank you.

ET: I didn't get any muskeg tea last fall. You can just drink it like that.

SD: So, do you make a big batch and then you just put it in your jars and drink it?

ET: This one I just put in the jar. I just boil it. I just use my big cooking pot.

SD: That's great stuff. So, do you put about equal parts of each plant?

ET: I just throw a root like that, sarsaparilla root about the same, and a couple seneca roots. My sister dries badger bark in the fall, hangs it over a line and it dries, and she rolls it up. She makes it about that big. Throw one of them in there with some muskeg tea.

SD: That is just delicious.

ET: I know.

SD: You boil it for ten minutes or something?

ET: Sometimes I let it boil for an hour.

SD: Let it simmer, I guess.

ET: I let it boil really hard. I'll drain it out and fill it up and mix another pot. Yes, I've always thought that Indian medicine is the best. If everybody stuck to that, there wouldn't be so many people dying and people who are sick. You know one day, I went to my doctor, and he gave me a prescription. This was only about three months ago, and I went to the drugstore, and my druggist said, "Ervin, you can't take this pill. It will kill you." Because I was taking Warfarin and I don't know. I didn't ask what kind of pill it was. But she said it would have killed me if I took it. So, I told him, "What kind of pill were you going to give me, my prescription? Why?" "Well, the druggist told me it would kill me. If you want to kill me," I said, "just give me a heavy dose of Warfarin instead of trying to give me another pill to pay for." You know doctors. You go in there and they say, "What can I do for you today?" "Well," I said, "I don't know. I come to see what you think you have to do." Then he comes and checks my chest. Everything sounds good. Checks my blood pressure. That's all you know. They don't know if you're going to live another day or not. I think they just try to see how many people they can push through the office in a day.

SD: What are your best memories about living in those communities you lived in?

ET: Oh, me and my two cousins, we used to have lots of fun, hunting. We used to hunt partridges with slingshots. We killed a lot of partridges with slingshots. At that time, tire tubes were real easy to stretch. Not like now, you couldn't even throw a stone from here across the road with that rubber now. At that time, man oh man we used to kill a lot of partridge. The dog would put them up the tree and we just standing there and shooting them. Yes, I remember that when we lived north of Fairholme. Three of us would go, and we'd come back with 10, 15 partridge each time we went out. There were lots at that time. Just a few years ago there were lots. When the season was over, I had 73 in my deepfreeze. Get your limit every day.

SD: What are some other memories that you enjoyed?

ET: Oh, I don't know we just worked, worked, worked, and hunted. I liked hunting. We hunted lots, killed lots of moose, lots of deer, and bear. My cousin used to be quite the guy. He was a little older than me. But me and him we travelled together all the time. When we were hunting one time I hollered at him. I hollered, "I found a bear!" So, he came. "Where?" he said. "Right there," I said. "There's his hole right there." So, he said, "Well, put your gun down. Get a stick and poke it in that air hole, and I'll shoot when he comes out." So, I did. And he shot the bear, but he kind of hit it in the side. Oh, it made a hell of a noise. And run, he's going to get us. Oh man I had no time to grab my gun, I took off. But the bear never come out of the hole, great big brown bear.

SD: So, you just left the bear there?

ET: Oh no, we went back and got it with a truck. Oh yes, we used to eat bear meat, too. Mom wouldn't eat it, but she used to cook it for us.

SD: How come she wouldn't eat it?

ET: I don't know she just didn't like it. I don't think the girls did either. Yes, but it was quite a thing. Anyhow, I never got to town until I was 14, 15 even. I didn't care if we saw town or not. We were happy in the bush. And then when we did go to town, we'd ride on top of a load of willow pickets that we were bringing to town, to go to the store, for groceries. My first two vehicles, I bought with money from cutting fence posts.

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

ET: Oh, not really. Not too bad. Most of the time, I had pretty good memories. Then finally, I took off. I went to work for some gravel outfit in Saskatoon. I worked east, out towards PA and up to PA, and ended up in Flin Flon, working up there for three months, and then my youngest sister was getting married, so I come home. I was just going to go to work. I used to drink on the weekends with a guy. He was a foreman in the copper mine. He told me, "Come and work for me, you won't be sorry." And I never did get there. I came home and I never went back. We were running jackhammers there, just on the Saskatchewan side, on this reserve. There was 123 turns on that road in 11 miles. It was all rock up there. We ran jackhammers 11 hours a day. You were shaking all night. We had to dig holes and then blow up all the rock, to straighten that road. I never did go back there. This guy told me, "You won't be sorry if you come to work for me." We were only getting a dollar .35 an hour, I think with the jackhammers, but that was good money at that time.

SD: How were the Métis treated up in this area?

ET: Some guys were smart against them, but most people got along with them. I know dad always got along with everybody around there. Well, he was an old guy.

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

ET: I don't think so. Not that I know of.

SD: So, when did people start to leave this Jack Pine Road and Trotchie Mill?

ET: We left the mill in '62, I think it was. I think the last one was Ervin Whitford, Mavis' family. They moved to town here in '68. I think they were the last ones. Well Uncle Dave lived up there on this side of Jack Pine Road. He was about the last one to move, I guess.

SD: How come people started to leave Jack Pine Road and Trotchie Mill?

ET: Well, I imagine probably couldn't live on the road allowance anymore. I imagine they wanted to get to a different place or something.

SD: There's a big old truck kind of buried in a garbage heap just across the highway on Jack Pine Road. Do you know if that vehicle belonged to some Métis or did—?

ET: Yes, that's unknown.

SD: Big old grain truck or milk truck or something.

ET: No, I don't know who owned that, but still there are a couple of vehicles pushed in there.

SD: Was that part of the Métis shacks up there?

ET: Oh, I imagine it was some of theirs.

SD: So where were your grandparents originally from? You had one set of grandparents from Ireland.

ET: Old koohkom come from Montana.

SD: Right, and mooshoom too?

ET: Mooshoom, yes.

SD: Both from Montana?

ET: Yes.

SD: And your dad, was he born in this area?

ET: He was born at Sweetgrass, but there's a Sweetgrass, Montana, and there's a Sweetgrass. I don't know. I never did find out, but I imagine I could find out now.

SD: Did your dad ever talk about Montana?

ET: Oh yes, he used to go back there quite a bit.

SD: Do you know how your grandparents made their way up here?

ET: With horses. They had cows and they had chickens and everything.

SD: Do you know why they left Montana?

ET: No, I don't have a clue. I don't know, and then they lived way up at Turtle Lake, too for a while. There was a settlement just before you get to Turtle Lake. You can still see where the settlers lived.

SD: What kind of people lived there?

ET: Well, my old grandma, and all her family, I guess. I think George Pritchard even lived up there at one time. There were a lot of Métis who lived there.

SD: What did they call that place?

ET: I don't know, just Turtle Lake.

SD: Do you know if your family was involved in 1885 at Batoche?

ET: I don't think so.

SD: Did anyone in your family serve in the military?

ET: I don't think so. They were all hiding on that island on Turtle Lake. They were looking for guys to go to the army.

SD: They were hiding?

ET: Oh yes.

SD: They didn't want anything to do with World War Two.

ET: I guess not. I remember them talking about that.

SD: What would they say about that?

ET: They just said they went out to that island so that they wouldn't have to go to the army.

SD: So, this was some island on Turtle Lake somewhere?

ET: Oh yes, there are two or three islands there.

SD: Was anybody in your family involved in Métis politics, like the Métis Nation Saskatchewan?

ET: There are some relatives, but they shouldn't be there. They should kick them out when they go to a meeting.

SD: Do you have anything else you would like to share about where you lived and how you lived when you were growing up?

ET: Well, I lived pretty good when I was growing up. I worked hard, played hard, and drank too much. It nearly killed me.

GG: What would be your words of wisdom?

ET: Not to smoke or drink. I quit smoking in '72. My lungs were really bad, I guess. I never smoked a cigarette after '72. Cigarettes were only .85 cents a package when I quit.

SD: How old were you at that time?

ET: In '72, I was 32 years old. Now I'm 74-years-old, and then I quit drinking, it must be seven years now.

SD: So, you're 74-years-old now?

ET: I will be in August.

SD: You must have been 22 years old in 1972.

ET: No, 32 because I was born in 1940. Well, I remember one time when we lived north of Fairholme. My cousin Sonny Caron had a horse, and we were going to school at South Branch School. I only went to school for six months in my life. We were going to school, and he had an old sorrel mare. Quiet. And seven of us would ride that horse, from the neck right to the tail.

GG: That's a big horse.

ET: Yes, lots of small kids.

SD: And you'd ride that horse to school?

ET: Yes, not all the time, sometimes. Dad yell, "Come on you guys all get on." Dad had a little Model A. He'd take us in that sometimes. Pile a bunch of kids in it. But then we moved closer to the highway, and we went to Jack Pine School for a couple of months, and that's when we moved up to the bush. That was the end of the school. After you leave, I'll think of a lot of things I could have said.

SD: If you do you should give us a call.

ET: I'll of that.

SD: I sure liked that story about how seven kids would ride a horse, one single horse to school. She must have been a very friendly, friendly horse.

ET: Oh yes. We had an old horse like that. All the kids would pile on it. You could do anything with them horses. I used to skin moose out with them for hunters.

SD: Really?

ET: Yes, but if you took them around a bear, man they just went crazy. After supper, I'd go out to the bush and go and take the horse out. Go and hook onto an old bull moose and let the horse go. And he'd come right to the highway and he'd stop. They were just pets, our horses. We never treated them rough.

GG: So, when you called that moose to your car, are you sure it wasn't a mating call that you were doing?

ET: Must have been because he sure turned around and come back. Man did he come. I'm telling you his eyes were just blinking like that.

GG: I've heard elk mating calls before. Maybe that's what you did? Mimic the mating call of a bull?

ET: Yes, I've heard them way up north when we went fishing in the fog. You can hear an elk calling. They've got a real bugle

SD: I'll turn this machine off for now. If you think of any other stories, we can turn it back on and thanks, Ervin.