

**Tape #4
Video Shoot
Mervin Pelletier**

Where are you from?

Saltcoats. I was born in Saltcoats in a tent. Yeah, in a tent. Then we moved to Bredenbury. I grew up there. I was seven years old when we moved to Crescent Lake. I went to school here. I started school then.

Where did your Dad work before you moved here?

We used to work all over. My Dad used to hitch up the horses. I didn't go to school at that time. When I was done, we used to go all over.

You didn't go?

What?

You used to go?

Yeah. We used to go a little, then. We were used to it. The Métis didn't want us. Course we didn't speak good English. Just in Michif. We used to stick together. So we stuck together you know.

Is that why you moved here?

Yeah. That's why. We had a large family.

You were only able to go to school here?

Yes, just here. For sure.

Is that why they built the school here? Just for the Métis?

And just for the Métis. Yes. You're right.

Did Natives go there too?

Some Indians, and white kids too. I think there was four whites going to school, three boys and one girl.

Did you always have horses?

Yes always. Always.

And is that how you moved about?

The only way, yes. We used to live in tents. Sometimes under the wagon. You know there was lots of kids.

There was many of you?

Oh yeah. We were many. You'd fill the wagon. Yes. I have six brothers and six sisters.

Are you the oldest?

No, not me. I had two brothers and a sister before me.

And some young?

Yeah, still some young. Them too. Today they try to speak a little, but they can't. They don't know how, although they would like to know, but they're pretty cranky.

How come they can't?

I don't know. Me, I think they are ashamed and now they have lost their tongue. Not like me; I always speak in Michif. I'd speak to Mom and Dad too. Yeah. I knew how. When I was twelve, I learned how to shoot and how to set traps, but my Dad taught me how to set snares. I used to like it.

Did you ever set snares for deer?

Sometimes I did. I used to use barb wire. I would take the barbs off and chase them. That way I used to be able to get them. If you want, you can. That's right. I use to tell them, when the pheasants were up on the branches.

Did you use snares?

Yeah, not me, though. My Dad used to tell me about that, but I never tried. When I'd go hunting, I wouldn't take a dog along, cause they'd only scare the rabbits away and the deer too. When they run ahead, all over scaring them for nothing, then I don't see them to shoot. My Dad used to tell me to use dogs for partridges. Yeah.

He used to snare them at the road allowance?

Yeah, the road allowance and in the reserve too. If you had a dog, they were easy to snare. Yeah for a long time, we used to go trapping muskrats, beavers. I used to go with my Dad. He showed me how to set traps too.

Where did they do their selling?

In Yorkton and in Saltcoats too. There was Jewish people who used to buy these things, muskrats, beaver and such. Sometime coyote pelts, all they would buy, even rabbit skin too. Prairie rabbits.

They didn't get much, did they?

No, not much, but they sold them. Well, at that time, when you go to town to buy flour, butter, lard, all these things didn't cost much. Ten cents, five cents. Today now, two hundred, three hundred dollars.

When you were little, how did you play?

Oh we always used to play.

What did you play?

My Mom would make us a little ball and my brother made them too. It was called Candy Can and we used to play that too.

Auntie I Over? Remember that one? That too we used to play and Little Knife too?

Yeah, Little Knife. We would have races. We used to have fun and we used to skate on the river too. We used to slide down the hill. Yeah when we used to live in the valley. That's where we moved from when we moved here by horses. That's where I started school.

Do you still have horses?

No. My brother has horses. I think he has four or two.

That the only ones he has?

Yeah, only those now. I think he's only got three now.

Driving those around, eh?

Yeah. Eh ha.

When they used to dance? The Métis? Long ago?

Yeah. When I was little, I don't remember how old I was. When they used to go to dances, I was not allowed to go. I was too young. My Dad used to let me go, but my Mom would say, "No, no, the guys will be drinking." I used to play the violin. My brothers knew and them, they didn't play violin and the guitar too. I used to play, then they would ask for me. "Is that okay for him to come to the dance? He's got to come. He's got to play for us." That's how I got to go to dances, but I did not drink. Me too, I use to like

chasing girls. Yeah. We sure used to have fun. Yeah. Over here. Yeah. In the houses. Yeah. In the houses. Anywhere. Yeah. Every weekend too.

What about New Year's Day?

On New Year's Day all the people would go visiting and eating by going house to house and they have a drink too. Where you went, you get a drink and they'd feed you right away. When they'd cook, they used to make lots of pies and rice too. Meatballs. Bannock. Long ago, it was very nice, then. Now today you don't see that.

Do you still play violin?

Yes a little. A little. A little mouth organ and guitar and I sing a little too. Yeah. That too. For sure.

Who taught you how to play this violin and guitar?

I taught myself. No. Nobody. I taught myself. I used to steal. They would go to town. I would ask Mom if it's okay to play these. She'd say, "Yes, go ahead and play." Ah about two or three days, I think I played. My brothers didn't know, but once they found out about it, they were very happy, then they used to take me along.

After they wouldn't always let you?

Yes, I had to steal. My Mom used to help me, then.

Have you ever heard, what's that, when old people talked about legends?

Yeah, I've heard, but I didn't believe it. I never got scared, me. I used to run all over at night in the dark. I still used to go out. I didn't believe. They used to tell about how they would see werewolves or ghosts. All those things. I never heard. I used to hear them talk, but I didn't believe.

You've never seen anything like that?

No. Not me. Maybe I scare them. Maybe I am too ugly. I don't know. Yeah. We used to have a lot of fun then.

Did you have a hard life in winter?

You mean where we lived? Here? Oh yeah. We had a hard life in the winter here. Even for wood, and we have to shovel snow.

Isn't that the highway, so it's called?

Yeah, but it didn't look very good and the snow plow never came.

They'd be snowed in?

Yeah, we used to get snowed in. All the firewood were under snow. They would haul water from the school for a long time when in bad weather. Yes, times were tough, really tough. Trying to go to town to get flour for us to eat and lard too when we lived here.

Didn't you help each other?

Yeah, we did. We even used to borrow wood and lard and bannock, anything. Just anything. People here used to get a lot of help. I used to like it here then, but today you don't see that now.

Would you still like to build here to live if you could?

I would move here for certain I would. I would move here. Today now, I know. At that time you didn't know. I didn't like school here at that time. Mom had to make my clothes. I didn't like that. That is why I quit school.

Did the school kids laugh?

Yeah, they used to laugh at me with the clothes I wore. She used to make me mitts and my shirt, she'd make. Kids would laugh. I didn't like that and that is why I left school. I uses to go working for farmers, stooking. I used to run the tractor. I did all kinds of work, but they used to pay me. I used to give Mom money. She was glad.

You would help them?

Yes. I was trying to help them too. It sure used to be hard here then. That good enough?

Zabel, tell us about what you were just talking about, the hay, when you had to put this down.

Long ago when we used to go digging roots and we camped in a nice place. We stayed with my aunt, my Dad's sister. "Look out at the straw pile. The pheasants are dancing there," she said. Now we went to the straw pile. She went and picked some twine. She had a little knife. She sharpened some little sticks and we went over the hill where the pheasants were dancing and of course they all flew away. There she bent the sticks into the ground and hung a snare made of twine. There the next morning, the pheasants were laying all over. She killed lots just with the twine and they were fat. They were dancing. There used to be a lot of pheasants. There's none, now. You don't see them dancing now. Auntie, just like my old lady, like a pheasant last night, how much she was dancing. (laugh) She was mocking the

pheasant. Yeah, but the pheasants didn't drink. Boy we sure used to camp here many a time, eh Vitaline? And when we got here this time, just like it was a bright day, just like coming home. I don't like coming here, now. It's too lonely. Yeah. Even on the road here, you know. I was about eleven or twelve years old when we started coming here. Every year, we'd move to spend winter in Crooked Lake. When you are ready to come back, everybody goes digging roots. We'd sell roots trying to make money. Ah, we sure used to have lots of fun. There was a hill there and we sit here in a circle, the old people. "Why don't you play?" they said to Dad. But there used to be about six tents pitched up there. Oh he started playing, deceased Garleau, he was called. You know him? Oh Yeah. They said, "Let's dance." Oh we all started dancing just on green grass. You wouldn't believe. We danced till midnight right on the ground. The next morning. My, my. In a circle form was just like a little road from our dancing. Moving here and there, digging roots. There used to be lots down, Debuc, Grayson, Melville. There's none now. We be all over, camping and come fall, we'd move back to the valley for the winter. The next year again, back camping and digging roots. Little coyotes. All kinds of things. They'd hunt ducks and brush cutting and again, when it starts getting cold, early fall, we'd move back down and back up, sometime with the first snowfall, I remember. Now we have to mud plaster the house and it was so cold out. Yeah. Plastering the house. Yeah. We used to be our own boss. You'd do what you have to do. We were our own people. You didn't pay nothing. We had everything for the tents. Everything is so expensive today. Look, then butter, five cents for a pound of butter. I remember Max Marovich, he was called who tended the store on Betts Avenue, five cents a pound. Butter, not lard, but butter. It's a crying shame how everything is spoiled by the so-called white man. They help each other. It's not us they help and they spoil us too. Now, if you make a little too much money someone's there to bite you. Long ago kids too, used to work, hauling wood, chopping a lot of wood. Haul it in snow for your water. Kids worked a lot, long ago. Not like today. Today, they laugh at you when you ask them to do something, they laugh. They don't believe. They think you're just telling stories you know. They don't believe anything. Yeah. They laugh. They laugh at you and we used to save wood chips too, but we were in good health. People of long ago were strong. Not many got sick. Now, today, there is all kinds of sicknesses. There was no medicine, just Le baume. Yeah. That was our medicine, long ago. Today, we are always taking pills. Just seems for nothing and they make so you have to take them. Yeah corn and (le baume), anyone not feeling well. Yeah pills and needles. Well sis, I don't think I've ever had a needle in my life. I've never had a needle. When you're in the hospital? Yeah. You were given one. The nurse that went around giving needles not to get the flu. She never came to my place. Sure she did go to your place. I must have forgotten. I can't remember the needle. Yes she went. Fred, do you remember? Oh yeah. When was this? Last fall. Yeah. Everybody was given the flu shot. I can't remember, but we still got sick. Those needles didn't help us. Yeah. Now it's the pills. When it used to be corn and (la baume) Yeah. My Mom used to suffer us. She'd cover us with a lot of blankets to sweat. Eh. My

deceased brother, John. Very sneakily he'd pull the blankets off his feet (ha ha) and they used to use mustard plaster too, eh. Yeh. It would burn you, eh. Mustard plaster was good too and we used to have horses and one horse had diarrhea. Old Jacko said stop here. You go and dig. What was it called? I forget now. Some kind of root. Oh my. I forget. Wild turnip? No. Not turnip. We used to eat them. Oh yeah. Anyway, he went and dug this out. "Soak this," he said, "In one of those wine jugs. Now, make it nice and cold." "Get up on the wagon," my old man was told. Now left his horse face up. He was blind. He would just tell us what to do. My uncle, hurry up. He lifted the jug to the horse's mouth.

He drank it?

Yeah oh yeah. That was chokecherry roots that we made. Later this horse walked away and he had gotten him better. Ah I forgot what that damn medicine was call. Anyway, it was like purple. It grows on the hills, this medicine, for diarrhea when the horses get it. So he doctored him good. The horse was out grazing now. Yeah. Your turn.

Where from?

Where from? Oh from the valley. Frances Allary he was called, deceased Freddy's Dad. Oh ho. Those were the first ones to arrive here. Just two families. Eh he. All this area was bare. No one lived here. Nobody had homes here. I can remember the first time we got here. Oh it looked pitiful. You can build anywhere. No permits. No nothing. You just haul the logs and build your house, he he. You get to your bush and you claim this piece. You don't have to ask anybody. Yes. I'll buy. You just take it for yourself. You won everything. Long ago, people used to help out each other a lot in them days. Now, today, they are very jealous of one another. Long ago they would help out each other. Ones they call Métis. If there is bad luck, they would depend on one another. Yeah. Today you can't share your deer meat, if you kill one. They would tell on you. It would have to be someone you trust. You can't very well get from just anyone. People of today are very selfish, not like long ago. Long ago people helped out each other. Yeah. We sure used to have a hard life here long ago. Yeah. We sure lived here for a long time. Yeah. We did live here a long time. There used to be a lot of little log houses all over here. Look now today. There's so much wrong. Killed it all. What was his name? Father Dayuse? He was here already when we moved here. He went to the mine looking for work for our men. From there, they started building little houses. That's where we have to borrow this houses. Then he moved us there. When we moved and left our house, that's where he had our house torn down. Soon, all our houses were torn down and there was no way of moving back here. From then on, you have to look for places to rent or live on the road allowance. A priest that did that to us, a priest, yeah. It was him that ruined Crescent Lake. Oh yeah, they'd still be here. They wouldn't leave this place. They'd leave to go working and digging roots, but they'd come back for the winter, eh. We used

to come home to here. In winter the flies would be frozen (joke) and the bed bugs. (Ha ha funny) Eh he, there were lots, eh. You know Bouchard, they wanted to get rid of bed bugs and fleas, too. They pulled out all the floor boards in the house and in the cellar. He put some hay. He put too much when he lit the fire, the whole house burnt down. For sure he really got rid of them anyway.

Zabel, how did that priest get rid of the houses? Did they burn them or tear them down?

They burnt some and some were torn down. He hired some men to tear them houses down and they sure didn't save much. Ah. No, no, no. The ones that didn't leave, that's the ones that had houses. I don't know why. I guess they just wanted to ruin Crescent Lake. They wanted the Métis to live elsewhere. Yeah. I guess he wanted the Métis to live far apart from one another. From then on, you don't have a permanent place where you can find a place to rent. That's where you go and live. Long ago we didn't rent. We used to make our own houses. We thought we own the... Oh yeah. A long time; we never thought we left for good. We were gonna come back here, but we couldn't come back. The houses were torn down. Yeah. We raised all the kids over there. Yeah. We raised all the kids over there. Yeah. All of them, there. Yeah.

Okay, let's take a break.

It's me that's crushing cherries, not you. Tell him. Oh yeah. That's how I was taught to crush chokecherries like this. We'd dry them and store them and in winter, you'd cook them. Yeah, in grease, yeah. Lard and water, flour and sugar. Oh long ago old ladies wasted no time preparing this stuff. No. No. Same size rock as this. Yeah. They'd cook in a frying pan on the stove. No. The rock were not much bigger. Us, that's how we were taught. My Mom never used machines. Just rocks. Yeah. Just rock. Oh she's getting better and a little faster. It wouldn't take her long to know how. That's a good rock she's using. Eh he. What? These? No. You cook them right away. You put lard. A little water, sugar and flour. When you're gonna keep them for the winter. That's when you dry them. Long ago, they didn't have cellars for canning things you know. What about saskatoons? Yeah, saskatoons were dried. They were like raisins. They used to put in when they made bannock. She already knows how. Already she knows. Already. Yeah. Long ago. Not like today. You don't see this now. Now they use choppers. What? Oh yeah. Yeh. My Mom did lots of this too. Ha ha. He has to speak to her in English. Eh. Ha ha ha. Clean your stove now. You want to be a Half-Breed, you have to understand. Ha ha. Now they can dry or cook them and eat them right away. Yeah. With Lard. Yeah. She is making a quilt. She's good at making quilts. Cut them and sew them together. Vitaline makes lots of quilts. Yeah, but I'm quitting now. Me too, I make quilts. You sew? Oh Yeah. I am always sewing everyday. Long ago by hand. Now, today, they use a machine. I remember my Mom used to

sew till after midnight. They would take a long time, I guess to make a quilt by hand, eh? Yes. By hand. But long ago, everything was made by hand. Nobody knew about machines and at that time, you didn't think you were at it so long. No. You got used to sewing so much. All the old ladies did a lot of sewing, long ago. Yeah. She sure is making a nice quilt, eh? Yeah. She is making a blanket, eh? All different kinds of squares, that's what they are called long ago. Look you too, you make them eh he. All kinds of squares you have too, eh? Yeah, but first you make little squares, eh, before you start sewing eh and then you sew them together. Then you sew them together.

End of Tape #4