Road Allowance Interview, Lolita Joanna (Blondeau) Potyondi

Conducted by Scott Duffee
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SD: Joanna, we talked about the Blondeaus and the Gardipys being Métis elites.
JB: Yes, they were rich at one time.
SD: And you said that's because the Gardipys owned land?
JB: Well, I don't know about the Blondeau side, but I know the Gardipy side. The Gardipy side owned lots of land and ranch land and farmed and ranched right up to Lethbridge. They had land all over the place.
SD: So, they owned land and they got that land, how?
JB: I don't know. They must have bought it or got it through scrip or whatever.
SD: And then what happened?
JB: It was gone, I don't know. Rose Fleury knows all about that.
SD: Somehow, they've lost that.
JB: Somehow, they lost it. Through the Resistance or I don't know. But that's worth looking into because she had a lot of that information, Rose.
SD: And Gardipys, that would have been your…?
JB: My grandmother's family, the Pierre Gardipys. This would have been through, where's this man's picture. I had it…
SD: Please tell me your name and your home community?
JB: Okay, my name is Joanna Blondeau, and my home community is Estevan—Roche Percée, in the coal fields.
SD: Do you go by Potyandi now or?
JB: That's my married name, but we're divorced. Potyandi is a Hungarian name.
SD: Sorry, what was the name of that community again?
JB: Estevan—Roche Percée.
SD: Was that a road allowance?
JB: No, it was a mining community, but there were road allowance people living out there.
SD: Okay, who were your parents and grandparents?
JB: My grandfather ran a coal mine down in the Roche Percée area. It was called "Old Taylorton," and there was coal mining there. He ran a coal mine during the '40s, and a lot of Métis worked for him—Klynes, Pelletiers, Gosselins—different families that were down there. They worked there in winter, and in the summer, they'd get other jobs because there was no coal going in the summer. But that's where I grew up along the Souris River. And a lot of Métis lived along the Souris River on the road allowance.
SD: What were the names of your grandparents?

JB: My grandpa was Alfred Blondeau, and his wife was Agnes Gardipy, and mom was Josephine Blondeau and my dad was James Blondeau.
SD: And your grandparents you were telling me about, that was your mom's?
JB: My mom's, yes.
SD: Do you know the names of your dad's?
JB: Yes, Samson and Sarah.
SD: Okay and what was their last name?
JB: Gardipy.
SD: That was your mom's parents, or dad's parents that owned that coal mine?
JB: My grandpa, and my dad went to war. I was born in 1939, just a couple days after the Second World War. So, dad went to war.
SD: So, your grandpa did that?
JB: My grandpa ran a coal mine down there, yes.
SD: Did your parents always live in that community?
JB: No, my grandpa was born in St. Lazare at Fort Ellice. That's in Manitoba before it was a province. It was not that big. It was in the North-West Territories.
SD: Okay, and what about your other set of grandparents?
JB: My other grandpa, I think, my other grandmother's family were the Gardipys, and they came from the Resistance down into Willow Bunch. Have you ever read that Willow Bunch book? A lot of my relatives are in there, my grandmother's relatives. And I don't know if they lived on a road allowance down there, but the Gardipys, where my grandma came from, they had a farm down there. It's now, what's the name of that dam down there where Ralph lives? It's the Rafferty Dam now. It's a power commission there. And that's where my great-grandpa had land, the Gardipys. They ran the re-mounts for the Red Coat Trail. They used to look after their horses after they migrated from Batoche down through here to Willow Bunch, past this area to Roche Percée along the border. And they lived on their own land. They got scrip.
SD: Where was this?
JB: Down by Roche Percée.
SD: Roche Percée, okay.
JB: Roche Percée: do you know how to spell that?
SD: No.
JB: A lot of people have a problem with that. R-O-C-H-E, Percée. P-E-R-C-E-É. Yes, Roche Percée. Like French.
Yes, they lived close to Roche Percée.
SD: How about your parents, did they always live in that area?
JB: Yes, they were born and raised there.
SD: What Métis families lived in that community?
JB: Gosselins, Pelletiers, LaRocques, and Klynes. Oh gosh, can you think of any besides that bunch? There are lots of families in there from Willow Bunch who came

down through there. Some families didn't say they were Métis. Some of them did, some of them didn't. And who else was down there? I didn't see any First Nations people all the time I grew up. There were very, very few. They'd come through and would go down to the States or something and stop and visit somebody. But no, I didn't know any of them.

SD: Did any non-Métis live in the community?

JB: Oh yes, a lot of people lived on the road allowance besides the Métis. Yes, because they came from other countries, and they had nowhere to live. They moved out to wherever there was a place to move to until they got their established houses. Yes, it was a big mining community down there. Scots, Welsh, English, Ukrainians, and Germans, all lived down there. We all lived down there. They lived all over the place, all over the hills, and they moved into little houses, into hacks around there. Like I said, you need to have a picture of it to know where all the people lived.

SD: Did you live in other road allowance communities?

JB: Estevan, and that was the one where I lived. I didn't live in any other ones that I knew of. I didn't know that was a road allowance community when I was growing up.

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

JB: No.

SD: They didn't own anything?

JB: They didn't own anything. They just were there, and nobody used the land, so that's where they lived.

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

JB: Well, my grandpa ran the coal mine. And my dad worked in the coal mines in the winter and did construction work in the summer. And mom worked in the market gardens. There are market gardens down there. So, there was always work, if they wanted to work. There was always work. And one of my uncles worked on the railroad, well probably a couple of them. I didn't know they were related then, but they worked and they lived in another community like Rockglen by Willow Bunch. Some of them came there, but they were French. They spoke French but I don't know, I don't think they were pure French.

SD: What sort of resources did your family harvest?

JB: We had gardens. My grandma had big gardens. And mom worked in the gardens all the time. And in the winter, mother washed dishes in the Chinese cafes. Hunting and trapping was a big thing in our family. Anybody that didn't have jobs, well everybody hunted and trapped years ago. There were deer and beavers and all kinds of stuff down there.

SD: Can you think of what animals were eaten a lot by your family?

JB: Well, my grandfather always got beavers, and we had deer in the fall. Mink, well yes, mink.

Unknown individual: Mink, weasels.

JB: Muskrats. All that. All the trapping we could do. We didn't have moose down there. We had deer and prairie chickens, berries, and rabbits. That's what we lived on. That was Métis fast food.
JB: We always had supper.
SD: What kind of berries?
JB: Saskatoons, chokecherries, wild strawberries, and raspberries.
SD: Were any of those things that you harvested ever done at a specific time of year?
JB: Oh yes, they had to be because that was picking time. And it was picking time for Saskatoons. And whenever the ripening time for the berries happens, we went picking. We didn't have blueberries down there. We had gooseberries, Saskatoons, raspberries, wild raspberries, and wild strawberries.
SD: How about the animals? Were they harvested at a certain time?
JB: Yes, you didn't go shot a doe you know, in winter time. You know, she's carrying a baby. If they shot one, they though it was a buck because you don't shoot the does. There were a lot of deer down there or it seemed like it when I was growing up. It wouldn't take long for them to go get a deer. And for the deer, they took what was needed, because they didn't have fridges in them days. It all had to be canned right away. Oh yes, and then they fished. In the summer, we had fishing.
SD: In the summer time? What kind of fish?
JB: Yes, we had jacks and suckers, and they got canned. Everything had to be canned in them days.
SD: Not dried?
JB: Nope, we never ever had dried stuff. I never saw any dried stuff until I was up in this country. I never heard of neck bones either. Everybody was going crazy around here, neck bones, neck bones. "What the heck are neck bones?" I didn't know. We laughed. Métis in Yorkton loved their neck bones. They'd go and order a whole pile of them and have neck bones. Our First Nations people have them too, like from this area that I know.
Unknown: And prairie chickens, there were lots.
JB: Pheasant.
SD: Pheasant, okay.
JB: Later on, about in the '50s, when the pheasants were there. Now, there are lots around Estevan. Fish, like jackfish and suckers, and I don't know if we had perch.
Unknown: We had a few walleyes.
JB: A few walleye fish.
Unknown: Mostly jackfish. And it was sucker fish. When they're canned, they taste just like salmon.
SD: What sort of traditional medicines were used in your community?
JB: My grandfather did medicines, and he picked and brought them to Lebret. Around Lebret, there are lots of Blondeaus down there. I don't know what he used

them for because I'd just go help pick. I was a kid. I'd go and help, and he'd go once a year with a horse buggy and come up to Estevan would and bring bundles of medicine that he picked because they don't have up here what we have down there, down on the flat prairie out there. And that's an interesting topic. I don't know what they were used for.

SD: Okay, it was your grandfather?

JB: My grandfather did that. When he was older, he did that, after he couldn't work in the mine.

SD: Could you say his name again?

JB: Alfred Blondeau. Chris Blondeau Perry, her dad picked that, too. He knew. They were brothers, and they knew medicines. I haven't talked to her about that. She'd probably remember, but I don't.

SD: Did she grow up in that community?

JB: She grew up down there, yes.

SD: That would be your cousin?

JB: She'd be my mom's first cousin.

SD: Did you have anyone in your family that made beaded or embroidered—

JB: My grandmother embroidered, beaded, and hooked rugs, and she sewed for everybody around in the community. Ennis mines— we were only about two miles from there at most. That was a big community. There would have been about three hundred mine houses, .and people lived there. And they created stuff. They grew really good cabbage. Then they'd get some potatoes from my grandmother, and that's what they'd do. She might get a bag of potatoes for a hooked rug or a bag of cabbage.

SD: So, mostly hooked rugs?

JB: Hooked rugs and making coats.

Unknown: Socks, mitts.

JB: Yes, knitting. He knits.

SD: What about moccasins?

JB: Never. No, I never saw anybody do that.

SD: Okay, so it would have been hooked rugs and—

JB: Embroidering. Yes, embroidery, lots of embroidery.

SD: What items would be embroidered?

JB: Well, they'd embroider table clothes, tea towels, and all that kind of stuff and dresser scarves, they called them.

SD: Okay.

JB: Out of flour sacks, hey?

SD: Do you know what happened to any of those artefacts?

JB: No, I don't know.

SD: How did your family celebrate special occasions like Christmas and Easter?

JB: All together. Everybody came home for Christmas and New Year's. Our house was wall-to-wall. People were sleeping all over the floor. The houses weren't very big in them days. They slept in the kitchen and in the living room. They were sleeping everywhere.

SD: Is there any specific traditions that went along with Christmas?

JB: My grandfather always did a prayer. We always had supper at midnight, and he always did the prayer. That was a thing.

SD: For Christmas?

JB: For Christmas Eve, and then for Christmas day, he did a prayer because finally all the people would get home before we ate, and that would be about five, six o'clock. Yes, I figured how come we're eating in the dark and it would be five o'clock.

SD: How about New Year's?

JB: Same thing, everybody was home. They always came home.

SD: Did or does anyone in your family speak Michif?

JB: They all did but, except me because mom used to get whipped at Roche Percée School for speaking our language. My aunts and her, they'd get whipped. The teachers would put willows right in the water and soak them, and if they heard the kids speak our language, they'd beat them up with that. Their legs would just be welted. You know it wasn't only in the residential schools that things like that happened.

SD: So, you don't speak Michif?

JB: No, I don't. I know a few words. But when I came along, my grandfather said I wasn't going to be having a problem like they did. So that was a thing. We lost our language at my generation. My aunts were fluent, and my mother and all my relatives. The older ones could speak it.

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

JB: Oh, we have all kinds of stories. I know them pretty well, like how the fox would turn into something and rougaroo stories so you wouldn't run around at dark and fall in a hole or something that would scare us.

SD: Would you care to share one?

JB: Ah, well let's see. Well, one of the stories that my aunt told me, they were full of mischief all the time. And they weren't allowed to scare me because I was afraid of the dark. They weren't supposed to tell me scary stories because the bathrooms were outside in them days. So, they weren't allowed and those were the big things that were in our family. And they would say, one of my uncles was going to go to a dance, and it was about 18 miles away, a big barn dance down at North Portal. He was a young man, and he wasn't married yet. He worked on the railroad, and then he came home on Saturday. He was on the road to this dance and he said, "That's okay I'll catch the freight train because it goes right past Portal." And he got ready and he said he talked to this man walking down the road to Roche Percée. And he said, "Are

you going to a dance?" He said, "No, I'm not going to a dance." And this other uncle, he jumped on the freight train going through Roche Percée. And when he got there, that guy was standing there. They always said he was a rougaroo. Those were the kind of stories that we were told. And then my uncle was going to Christmas Eve. He was going to Roche Percée to pick up my relatives off the train in Estevan because they had to be all together for Christmas. He had a fast black team. He always liked a black team and high-stepping horses. He was a good horseman. He was going around this curve, and it was all spill piles where it is. They showed me where. And he was going around there, and it was getting to be Christmas Eve and was kind of cold. And he was driving his horses when they started jumping and snorting and blowing. And right in front of him was a team, a black team, and they had white legs he said because he couldn't see them. So, he said, "You get the hell off the road you old devil!" And he said because the road wasn't wide enough for two so somebody has to get over. And he said something to him, and he said he cracked the whip for his horses. And his horses lunged ahead and there was nothing there. He always said he met the Devil or the rougaroo or something out there. And he said there were no tracks, there was nothing. There was a team of horses standing in front of him when his horses wouldn't go. There were lots of stories like that that they'd tell. So, you always made sure you were in at dark. There are other stories that don't come to mind, but I'll remember them and write them down.

SD: Yes, and if you want to mention them before I go.

JB: Yes, if I think of them.

SD: What are your best memories of living on the Métis road allowance?

JB: Families were all together and they worked together, such as my aunts who went to work in Estevan at the mines, in the boarding houses. I had twin aunts, and they always brought me something special, like Barbara Ann Scott Skates. I was the only kid in the whole country that had them. I was the first born and spoiled. I'll admit that. Yes, I was, and they would always buy me special things at Christmas. Mom worked in town after dad went to war. She went to work. I was born a few days after the Second World War started. It started on the 10th of September 1939 [when Canada declared war]. I was born on the 14th. I'm 74, this year. I'll be 75 this coming year, like September. And I think that there's so much to talk about where I grew up. The Métis people were so much more together. You know they went from house to house to the elders and brought what they had. It wasn't much. They'd bring it to one main thing and they'd eat together. And the kids would never walk in front of an elder. You never said, "I want to eat! I want this, I don't like that!" You would never try that when you were a child. You would never do that. The minute you come into the house you had 'go get wood, go get coat, go get water. You had chores to do. You wanted to be scarce when you had a whole household full of company. We'd go down to one of my aunt's houses where all the kids were and we'd go down there,

and one of my uncles would always be around and he'd do all the cooking for us. And we'd have pancakes and thought that was better than having turkey. Then we'd fry potatoes on the stove. That's the kind of memories that I have. And my grandfather one time, he went to get a tree for me, because this kid had to have a tree. So, he gets on the bus to Estevan. It's 24 miles from where I grew up and lived. He got on the bus. It was a mine bus that went twice a day. It belonged to the mine and was not a bus service. He could go up there and get on the bus. I don't think he even had to pay for it. So, he got on the bus. He went to Estevan, and he got a turkey. That was his job every year. Getting a turkey that was the tradition. Grandpa got the turkey. While anyway, he got on the bus, goes to town, gets a turkey and brings me a tree. He had it in his packsack, and when he came in the house that night, we were waiting for him. It was 10 or 11 by the time the bus got back, by the time he walked across the valleys. It was about a mile and a half where he had to walk up and down the valley and come home with this pack on his back. He gets there and he puts the pack and hung it in the porch. He came in the house with my tree. And my grandmother spoke to him in our language; it must have been funny. She said, "What, a Christmas tree and no meat?" Every time I think of Christmas, that's one that goes through my mind. And she was so disappointed, the way she said it in our language, it was funny, and he laughed. He said, "No, I brought turkey." A Christmas tree and no meat. You know things like that, that would be in the '40s. And Dad came home in '47. He was over there extra time with the peace corps or something. Yes, now that you mention it, it will come to my mind. It would be good to go out there and see these places. I won't go in the spring I'll tell you, too many snakes, garter snakes. Lots of garter snakes in that country. And in the spring, they're coming out. That's the only thing I hate is the snake. I tolerate anything else.

SD: Were there any bad memories that you would like to share?

JB: Bad ones? I don't think I had bad memories. In the summertime, I'd go and try to live in Estevan with mom and dad because my grandparents brought me up. Like mom went to work in Estevan and my grandparents raised me. And then when dad came home from the war, well then, they had another family. Anyway, this one time, I took my Barbara Ann Scott skates. Oh, I was so proud of them, and I went to Estevan so I could skate in the rink because we just had the river at home. It was too hard for my grandpa to go push all the snow off. So, we'd have to wait for an occasion, when the kids came to go clean this snow up. But anyway, I went to Estevan and I went to go skate. I brought my skates. I got on the bus. So, I get there and Friday night is the party. Mom and dad didn't have a very big house. But in the front room, we had a little pot-bellied stove, and all of a sudden in the middle of the night, there was a bang, bang, bang. I woke up. I was sleeping on the couch. My dad got up and he started shooting everything. He shot ornaments off the wall. We had red cardinals, like that owl there. He shot them off the wall. He shot the stove. That was the stove

making a banging noise from the wood. It must have had water in there or something. Bang, he shot them down. So, in the morning, I just took off first thing in the morning. They went back to bed, like holy. And I took off. Right on the bus and home. I was home by noon. And I come walking in the house and my grandpa said, "Hey kid what are you doing home?" And I said, "Well I'm not staying there; dad shot the house up, he shot the cardinals off the wall." "He did?" he said, "Yah". And that was after the war. So, my grandpa got dressed and he said, "Well I'll go to town and see what happened." So, he gets on the bus. It was the 2:00 bus I think, another one went out. So, he gets on the bus and away he goes. I wouldn't go there. And he came home with the gun. Dad wasn't allowed to have a gun in the house any more that was it. When he wanted to hunt, he came home and hunted. So that was post-traumatic stress disorder.

SD: And did your dad listen to your grandpa?

JB: Oh yes. Grandpa was the boss. He was the main guy. Yes, that was a traumatic thing for me. And then my mom borrowed my skates away, so I never did skate again. I didn't get to go skating over there. I skated on the river. But yes, that was a memory that was in my mind. But when I think of it, like even now, they can't help those soldiers that went through the war. And he lost a brother there. There must be 17 of the family that were in the war, including my uncles and great-uncles. And I remember saying to one of the people that I met, we talked about the vets. I said, "I have lots that are in my family. You don't have lots and I have lots. I can name three generations of fighters." But anyway, that kind of stuff really sticks in a person's mind. And then a couple years ago, I was down to see Rose Boyer. She was very involved with the Métis vets, and I got invited to go down to Roche Percée where my grandfather lived right across the road. They have a park there, Roche Percée Park and they were going to give it to us Métis. Then we were going to call it "Valour Road" and put big stones there with our families' names on it. Then we got flooded out, and all those things went down the river. I don't know what's going to happen. Rose passed on. Her kidneys shut down. She needed kidneys and a heart or something. Yes, she was very smart, and she would have been my second cousin. There's a Rose Boyer from up by Battleford or Batoche, but there was another one here, down at Roche Percée. Her mom is an elder in Alberta. Rose's mom and my mom would be first cousins. Yes, there are lots of things. A person could go and see where the people lived. But that was the most traumatic thing. I was too young to know when dad went to war, but I remember when he came home.

SD: How were the Métis treated in your community?

JB: I don't ever recall some of them said they were called "Half-Breeds." I don't remember ever being called anything.

SD: Did your family encounter racism at all?

JB: I can't say because they all worked at different places and were all recognized when you walked down the street. We'd say, "Hi Jim, or hi Fred" to different white people. That's how I am when I walk down the street there. And there was too much drinking when I was growing up. When mom and dad lived in town, there was way too much drinking. Dad wanted to get a loan to buy a house there, but he couldn't get a loan because he was Métis. First Nations got land when they got back. but not the Métis. I go with the RCMP once in a while and talk about the Métis, and I tell them how they were treated. And the one thing that I remember now was that they weren't all sitting in the bar. They were having house parties because the white guys had to buy the booze and bring it for them because they weren't allowed to drink or buy liquor. Now, you know, isn't that something? Like dad said, he fought in France, he fought all over in Europe, but when he walked into any bar, they didn't say, "You can't be served." Well here, you just didn't. I guess nobody told him that, but dad would have ripped their heads off.

SD: Did those white guys bring all the alcohol?

JB: They all knew dad and actually the one guy owned a big construction company in Estevan, and he was very, very good to the Métis. He always gave them jobs. And when dad died, he came to my house crying. He passed away not too long ago. And every time I'd walk into Estevan, he used to go to the Husky all the time. And we'd go and meet the cowboy chuckwagon people there and race with Emile. We'd go down there and meet them. They knew me since I was a little girl in that town. When I walked in, he'd say, "Well hello Josephine!" because that was my mom's name. He knew that I belonged there, but he could never say Joanne. He'd call me Josephine. He said, "You look like your mom." Yes, mom died in 1961. I lost my dad, my grandpa, and my grandma in nine months. Not in the same year, but in nine months, right behind one another. My dad got killed. He was 43 years old. He got killed doing construction work. A crane fell on his head. I guess that would be a traumatic thing. I had my daughter already. And mom, well, she always worked. I can never remember mom not working. And the police and the mayor came to tell me to come with them to go and tell mom. They picked me up and took me down there. I told them, "Get out. Don't talk like that. Get out of my house." Yes, I was 21 when dad died. When dad got killed, they wouldn't give mom any compensation because he didn't have a hard hat on when the crane fell on his head, but he did have it. Somebody picked it up because the paper from Estevan, they took a picture and it had Jamesy boy right there with a crushed helmet. And they said, "Oh he didn't have a helmet somebody picked it up from where he got killed." Then, about three years later, a guy came down and one of my uncles ran a Legion down there and so this guy was in the army with my dad and he lived in Toronto. He was a lawyer there and he was looking after all the Legions across Canada. He came down and he grew up in Estevan. He came and he said, "Well, I guess I'll go and visit James." He said, "Where's Jim Boy?" My

uncle said he got killed three years ago, about three and a half years ago in September. He said, "Well how's the family, and how did this happen, and is she okay?" And he said, "No, she couldn't get compensation." "What do you mean she couldn't get it?" "Well, he got killed on the job." "Yes, we'll see about that," he said. So he went down and got all the death certificates and dad's army records, and all that stuff. And about three months later, mom got a cheque from the compensation board. But it never amounted to much, but still, it was something to help her. But things like that, you see how the bureaucracy treats us. Here, they treat me excellent. They have no choice; I'm in their face.

SD: Where is here?

JB: Fenwood and Melville they treat me excellent. That paper would have been a good thing to give you, remember with the big write up about me?

SD: That was in the news paper?

JB: Yes.

SD: When about was this?

JB: Just before I won that Métis women's award.

SD: What year?

JB: Just this year, September.

SD: Well, if we need to look for it, it was in Melville newspaper.

JB: What's her name got it I think because I sent her...

SD: Karon?

JB: Karon. Yes, I won a Métis women's award, and they phoned me up about Cuthbert Grant. This is what happened: a young guy found a medallion or something with Cuthbert Grant's name on it, just south here. They wanted to find out about it, so they phoned Metchild Morin because the guy who writes the Melville paper, he said Metchild had something to do with that lord who came. So, then they phoned me, and I said, "Yah, he's my relative through my grandmother." So, we talked about that, and he wrote a big deal about it, about a page and a half. So, it was in the paper here. It had my coats and how I did history with some of the schools. I had to go to Estevan and talk about Métis to the kids down there in the Catholic school because the Métis were down there and nobody even knew it. So, I went down and those kids were so excited. They were feeling the coats and putting them on. Some of these children went home and then they phoned their teacher because the teacher phoned me after and said, "Some of these children went home and talked about the Métis and found out they were Métis and were related to you." They were so excited, but there are a lot of people down there related to me.

SD: Can you describe the coats?

JB: These are the Hudson's Bay coats with the points on them.

SD: Do you make them in your shop?

JB: Here.

SD: When did you start doing that?
JB: I guess when I took an upholstery course and got a big machine, and then I was always interested in Métis history and started doing things about it. And then I fell in love with these coats and the trapper coats because my family were the voyageurs, the Blondeaus. And so, I thought I'll make a couple of them, and I found them at garage sales and different places so that's how it started. Yes, because nobody wants a wool blanket. Women, young people don't know how to wash them or look after them so that's the hard thing. So now with any wool blanket, I can make a coat.
SD: So, when did people leave your road allowance community?
JB: I imagine in the '60s. Because, you know, they lived there until they had better jobs working in the bigger mines and the power plant and in Estevan where there are jobs. Our people got educated, enough to get all of them kind of things. And a lot of my first cousins are Ukrainian and Frenchmen from Willow Bunch. We got European people in families now.
SD: When did you leave?
JB: I left Estevan in 1967, but I wasn't on the road allowance. I had a new home. My children's dad was a welder, and he bought a new house for me. But we lived in a trailer in my aunt's backyard for quite a few years. We had three children in a little wee trailer so then we bought a new house.
SD: Estevan itself was just a place where Métis squatted for a while?
JB: Yes, around that town and in town. There are a lot of older houses, and they'd rent them. And then they lived down along the river, the older people. And a lot the older people worked for farmers. Farmers gave you a house, and they'd live in their old house. Or they'd give it to them and move it somewhere on the road allowance. That's you know, when you think about all those things and wonder how did they get there? My dad was a construction guy. He moved heavy equipment. He moved houses and all kinds of things. And sometimes, I'd go with him on Saturdays, when he wasn't shooting up the house. There's a thought that's in my mind all the time. When you think of it, you hear all the time of these guys committing suicide and his brother was missing in action. My son lives in Estevan, and he's an oil field consultant. He phoned me the one day and he said, "Mom, who's Anthony Blondeau?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because some people just came from Juno Beach and they found Anthony Blondeau's tombstone." I said, "Well, that's your grandpa's brother." "Oh really!" he said. I said, "Yah." I guess I didn't tell him. My son, Andrew hangs out with me. He knows all these stories because he hangs out with me. He'll be 50 coming this year. And he goes with me. He's got 11 years of sobriety. I'm very proud of him. And he lives in Regina, but whenever there are Métis things going on, he goes with me, and he still hunts and traps. So, the history in my family is quite huge. My grandpa on the Blondeau side knew Riel.
SD: Can you tell me where your grandparents from?

JB: My grandpa was from St. Lazare, Fort Ellice, and my grandma, I think, was born in Willow Bunch.
SD: That's your dad's parents?
JB: My mom's parents, my grandpa and grandma who raised me. My grandpa was from Fort Ellice, and my grandma was from Willow Bunch, after the Resistance, the Pierre Gardipy's family moved to Willow Bunch.
SD: After 1885?
JB: Yes, they moved from there.
SD: How about your dad's grandpa?
JB: Dad, they're the same place. Yes, the same group, they all come down.
SD: From Willow Bunch?
JB: Yes.
SD: And what about St. Lazare?
JB: St. Lazare was on the Blondeau side. The Blondeaus came and the Gardipys came through Willow Bunch.
SD: So, was your family involved in the 1885 Resistance?
JB: Yes, Pierre Gardipy. She was my grandmother's grandpa, and he was married to Cuthbert Grant's daughter. That's where that comes in. He was a councillor for Riel, and he was in jail with Riel.
SD: What happened to them after the Resistance?
JB: I don't know. After the Resistance was done, they all moved down to Willow Bunch. And my grandpa, well they were already down towards Estevan. They came from St. Lazare and they moved to Lebret. And then from Lebret, the boys scattered for work. My grandpa worked on the railroad and his relative was the one who drove the last spike. And that man, he was the mayor of Fort Garry, just before the Resistance. I got the Red River running through my blood and the Rebellion. My cousin, Marg Harrison said to me, "When we were finding out all this stuff and we were sitting here laughing, no wonder you're always ready for a fight." And I am. I tell you I am. That's not a lie. If somebody says something, look out then. I just say, "What is your problem? Now you got me for a problem." One guy was out here. He was inspecting the dump for this little town, and he's out there, and it's a really bad day like today. I come driving down the road, and I looked and two guys were out there looking and taking a picture. I said, "Have you got a problem?" I stopped to see if he had car trouble. "No," he said. I said, "Well do you want one?" He looked. "No," he said. He started to laugh. "Have a good day," he said. And then later he came through town here and he saw my car parked here, beep beep. He went up to the office and this woman who runs the office, she said, "Joanna who are you fighting with today on the road?" I said, "Nobody. I asked him if he was looking for a problem." "What would make you do that?" I said, "I meant a problem in the car, but then it ended up being taken the wrong way." But you know, our history is so

important. We need more of it. Really, I don't know what we're going to do. We've got to get it going because our elders are dying. And like Emile, he grew up just half a mile from me.

SD: Who all in the family served in the military? Your dad and?

JB: Oh God. My dad and his brother.

SD: World War Two?

JB: Yep, and his family before that were in the First World War. And my uncle, my dad's uncles were all in the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War. I have tons of family that were in the war, and they're mostly all Blondeaus. Paratroopers. Dad was a gunner and he drove tanks. And his brother was the infantry. They met while they were in Paris by accident, walking down the street on leave. And yesterday I was watching. Emile is a big history war person. He loves that. He sits there and watches that. Anyway, this Canadian was talking about the war and the vets. They were all talking, and he's sitting there and he's a minister or Padre or whatever they call them, and he said, "We took Rome. We got all the Germans out of Rome." He said, "All of a sudden, we got orders to come back out of Rome. So, they came back out and the Americans went in." Were they mad. He said, "Boy, if we would have known that we would have shot them faster than we shot the Germans." They were so mad because they were the ones who cleaned it out.

SD: Who told this story?

JB: A real vet, part of the army vets, the old ones. He said, "I would have shot them faster than I shot the Germans." And then a whole bunch of Germans were up on the other end where they pulled the Canadians back out and a whole pile of them got shot. He was really angry with that. It's on all the time. Every once in a while, they show the actual films. It's just unbelievable.

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

JB: Yes, Chris Blondeau Perry, her dad, Alec Blondeau, was the first president at Estevan. I have one of the books here that has his name in it.

SD: That would be your dad's brother?

JB: No, my grandpa's brother. Yep, that's Chris Perry. She's a historian. There's one lady you should go talk to.

SD: She lived on the road allowance?

JB: Yes, half the time she still does. She's got to be 82, 81 now. She's very active. She's on the farm board at Lebret. She's very active. She'll tell you and she has a map of the Métis families that lived near the Souris River.

SD: Anyone else in your family involved in the Métis Society?

JB: My sister was the president at Lebret and then she was the president at Estevan. My son helps me out full time now. And my daughters always did my books for me when I was the president.

SD: What was your sister's name?

JB: June Blondeau.
SD: Do you have anything else that you would like to share about the road allowance?
JB: The thing that I think of now actually, now that you mentioned it, was that a lot of the women were alone because the husbands had gone to war. The Kleins and the Pelletiers, all of them road allowance young men, of my dad's age, had gone to war. And the women were the ones left on the road allowances raising the kids. That's something that people don't think about
SD: Okay, well thank you very much.
JB: Well, thank you.