Road Allowance Interview, Walter Falcon

Conducted by Scott Duffee
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SD: Could you please tell me your name and your home community?
WF: My name is Walter Falcon. I live in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan.
SD: What community or communities did you grow up in?
WF: I grew up around the North Battleford area, Biggar, Rosetown, Spring Water, all Saskatchewan towns.
SD: Where is Spring Water located?
WF: Spring Water is west of Biggar, about twenty miles, on the way to Kerrobert.
SD: Does that town still exist?
WF: There are still a few houses there. It was a small village. It never got any bigger than a village. It's almost a hamlet now.
SD: Were road allowances communities?
WF: Just when my dad had to go up and work. He'd have to set up camps, and it was always on a road allowance. So, we spent our spring and summers out on a road allowance in a camp, and that was home. Home away form home, I guess.
SD: So, when you set up the camp, when you left somewhere, what would you do in winter?
WF: In winter, we'd go live in a house in Spring Water.
SD: You'd rent a house or you?
WF: Yes, we would rent a house.
SD: Then in spring and summer, you'd set up camp, and your dad would work for farmers?
WF: Yes.
SD: So that's in all those communities that you just mentioned?
WF: Yeah.
SD: You would live there in the winter and then…?
WF: Yeah.
SD: In the communities that you lived in, did other Métis families live like that with you guys, too?
WF: Oh yeah, but they had their own camps.
SD: How closely were you guys spaced apart from each other? Would it be a kilometre down the road?
WF: Not that close, usually it was further, about twenty-five, thirty miles away.
SD: There'd be another Métis family?
WF: Yeah, because each Métis family had their own farmers they worked for. Then, maybe twenty-five to thirty miles down the road, there would be another group of farmers that another Métis family worked for.
SD: That explains a lot. Did families work close enough together to be one Métis community

in one spot?
WF: Not really, no. Just from time-to-time, we would visit each other, you know?
SD: Did other Métis families spend their winters in the same towns you guys did?
WF: Oh yes. My grandpa lived south of Battleford in a place called Baljennie, Saskatchewan. He had some land there, and sometimes, there would be families that would come spend a winter there. At one time, there were up to thirty families living right around his house. They even built little shacks where they could live in or put up tents. That's where they'd spend the winter.
SD: So, he let families squat on his land?
WF: Yes.
SD: Do you mind me using that term?
WF: Well, he invited them or they'd come and ask if they could come if they had no place to go. So, he'd put them up there. Plus, he'd get a little bit of work out of them. He went out also to work for farmers. He'd go to the southern part of the province, like Maple Creek, and Kindersley, and that area. He'd take some of these guys with him in the spring and they'd go help. They'd go and work for him. Some would work for him in the spring and summer or in the summer and fall. Then in the wintertime, they'd stay at his place.
SD: Did your family do that sometimes?
WF: We did that for a couple years until my dad went further out. He went on his own.
SD: So, who was this man that you're talking about?
WF: My, grandfather, George Pritchard.
SD: George Pritchard, and that community name of Baljennie is that just the name of their community of the town?
WF: It was a place where there were two stores and two garages. It was a hamlet pretty much, a very small village.
SD: And his land was near that?
WF: His land was west of there about five or six miles. He was close to the Red Pheasant Reserve, just maybe four or five miles east.
SD: How many years did he allow families to come to stay on his land?
WF: Probably twenty, twenty-five years.
SD: What years would that have been?
WF: I'd say the '50s and the'60s, and in the early '70s until he sold that land. He went back to the homestead, which was south of there about five miles, or six miles in an area called the Willowfield. It's East of Cando, about ten miles.
SD: And that was your grandfather?
WF: George Pritchard, my mom's dad.
SD: Your mom's dad, and who was your maternal grandmother?
WF: Her name was Mary Whiteford Pritchard. She was a Whiteford, and she married George Pritchard.

SD: Who were your paternal grandparents?
WF: Alice Foy Falcon. She married my grandpa Joe Falcon.
SD: What were your parents' names?
WF: Lawrence Falcon and Leona Pritchard.
SD: Did your parents and grandparents always live in that area you're talking about, Rosetown, Biggar, Baljennie?
WF: Actually, my dad was the first one from our family to work and live in Rosetown and in the Kindersley area, and in Spring Water.
SD: Where did he come from when he went there?
WF: My dad spent the biggest part of his life in Alberta before he got married. They lived in the Vermillion area. Actually, he was born in Vermillion, and they lived on road allowances around the Vermillion area. There were quite a few Métis families who lived in walking distance from each other in the Vermillion area. The majority of them lived on road allowances. One year, they'd live on one road allowance, and the next year people would tell them they'd have to move because they wanted to break up the land. Well, it's the government's land. The government said, "We could use it, so we gotta break it up." So, they'd have to find another road allowance to move to and to live on. That was probably back in the '30s.
SD: That's what happened to your dad?
WF: My dad and his family.
SD: But your mom's family was from George Pritchard?
WF: Yeah, and he pretty much got a homestead when he was very young, but they still lived on the road allowance. My grandpa went to work all summer. He was gone all year. He'd have to live on the road allowances wherever he could find a road allowance that wasn't being used. Some farmers, they fenced them off and used them for cattle, or they'd break it up without even asking the government. They just broke it up and just used it. Nobody would say anything. The Métis people—like my dad and my grandpa and them—they knew exactly where the road allowances were.
SD: How would you describe what is a road allowance? In terms of size and where it's usually located.
WF: Actually, a road allowance is divided land. I think north to south every mile there's a road, and east to west, I think it's every two miles.
SD: Okay, a grid road.
WF: Yeah, but sometimes there'd be roads where there'd be a big slough, so they never made a road there. But there used to be an old trail there, and that's where they'd go and set up camp, on an old trail, like not right in the middle of it. Kind of off to the side, close to water usually.
SD: And it was just land that was never sold for homesteading or?
WF: No, because it was for future roads. It's how they were divided.
SD: How big would a road allowance piece of land usually be?

WF: You mean where the camp was on?
SD: Yeah.
WF: Probably an acre. Some even put in gardens; potatoes, a few vegetables.
SD: So, every so often on the side of a grid road there'd be land that's not being used and supposedly the government owns it, and that land would be a few acres in size?
WF: Yeah, well wherever they set up their camp. The road could go for two three miles. It could be an old road like they used to use back in the horse and buggy time. It wasn't being used anymore, not very much. So that's why they put their camps, kind of off to the side. They wouldn't put them right on the road, just in case a farmer wanted to come through, or somebody came traveling through. They decided to use that old road. Usually, they had no ditches.
SD: It was just a trail?
WF: Just more or less a trail.
SD: So, the communities that you grew up in were Biggar, Rosetown, and Spring Water?
WF: Yeah.
SD: What was the other one, around Kindersley?
WF: Netherhill. I didn't live there, but my brother and them they lived right in town. It's called Netherhill. It's east of Kindersley, and Brock, Saskatchewan.
SD: So, in those communities, what other Métis families would move there for winter and then go out and set up camp?
WF: Parkers, Lawrence Parker, Leo Amyotte. Some of the ones I can't remember the names. They'd go to wherever they could find a place to set up their tent to set up camp. That's where they would work from. They'd travel to work from there.
SD: Were there certain families that you grew up with?
WF: Mostly relatives.
SD: They moved to the same town in winter?
WF: Yeah.
SD: What families were those?
WF: Amyottes, Parkers. Mind you, living on road allowances wasn't as much of a thing when I was growing up. It was more when my dad was growing up. But there were other families that still did it more often. They'd leave and live there in the winter right on the road allowances.
SD: What families were those?
WF: Some Pritchards, some Trotchies.
SD: Did any non-Métis live like that?
WF: Yes, there were a few. I don't know if they were mistreated too because of their backgrounds. Where they came from? They felt more comfortable with the Métis people than they did with their own kind. I guess just because the way they were segregated.
SD: Were there lots of non-Métis families like that?
WF: Not a whole bunch, but there were a few.

SD: Do you remember any of their names?
WF: Porters. I forget the names. Bob Porter and his family. I was just young and I can't remember any names. But I know people used to set up camp next to us. Obviously, they had blonde hair, blue eyes. We knew darn well they weren't Métis.
SD: Can you think of any other communities that you may have lived in growing up, other than the ones you mentioned?
WF: Basically, those are the only ones I remember, but when I was fairly young, we used to live on road allowances in the Wainwright area. My dad used to work for farmers in Flaxcombe, Saskatchewan.
SD: So, is that a similar situation, where you rented a place in Wainwright and then in the spring and summer, your dad would go?
WF: Yes.
SD: You set up camp when near a farmer and you work for that farmer?
WF: Yes.
SD: In the spring and summer?
WF: Two or three different farmers.
SD: How long was your dad's work season with farmers?
WF: Usually, the first of April until freeze up, October, November.
SD: And you were with him from spring until fall starts?
WF: Oh yeah, we'd pick rocks, fix fence, make new fences, haul bails. That one year, my dad had, I think, twelve half-ton trucks. My brother Bruce decided to keep track of how many bails we hauled that year. And right from early haying time in July until two days before Christmas, we hauled about 320,000 hay bales, straw bales.
SD: Did you say your dad had how many pick up trucks?
WF: About twelve.
SD: He owned twelve pick up trucks?
WF: Well, some of them were owned by us boys?
SD: Your family's operation had twelve trucks?
WF: Twelve pick up trucks.
SD: Twelve half tons.
WF: For hauling bails
SD: That's quite an operation you guys had going.
WF: Yeah, it was for a few years until they came in with those new bail pickers. Then they started making the bails bigger, like big round ones.
SD: So, what did you kids do for school from April to October?
WF: We older boys maybe spent about forty percent, thirty percent of our time in school. The rest of the time, we were helping dad.
SD: Did any of those other families own their own property?
WF: Not that I can remember. Some of them eventually bought homes. My dad bought a house in Spring Water. Actually, it was a small three-bedroom house with twelve kids. When

we lived in Rosetown every winter we would rent the same house. It was a two-bedroom house. Our grandpa lived with us, my dad's dad, Joe Falcon. I think that was in 1963 and '64 in Rosetown. It was a pretty small place. I remember that one time our cousins, my dad's sister, her and her family came from Drayton Valley, Alberta. They came in a '53 Ford car, four-door. I think they had nine kids with them. And we all stayed in that house, for three or four months. In our little house which was crowded to begin with.

SD: So, how many people all together in the three-bedroom house for the three or four months?

WF: Probably twenty-four.

SD: Twenty-four as opposed to twelve or ten?

WF: Yeah.

SD: Which was what you were used to?

WF: Probably eleven.

SD: And there were times when it was up to twenty-four?

WF: Yeah, wall-to-wall people. But that's better than living out in the country in tents, and in the elements. But my dad used to spend winters on the road allowance in tents. All winter when he was a kid.

SD: Did he talk about that much?

WF: Oh Yeah.

SD: What did he used to say about that?

WF: He said it used to be so cold that they put bales or sheaves against the tent. They'd have to get up every hour to make a fire and…

SD: Just to get through the night?

WF: Yeah, or even if it stormed, or if it got cold for a few days, which it did. And some of them had horses. They'd take their horses with them and would live out there in the road allowances.

SD: So how did your family and other Métis families make a living in those communities that you grew up in?

WF: Whatever labour jobs we could find. Most of it was farm work, and if they couldn't find any work, they'd go and cut fence posts, like willow, poplar, and they'd treat the poplar posts. Then they'd go and sell them to the supplier out in wherever they could sell it. Sometimes they'd sell them to big farmers.

SD: To big farmers you say?

WF: Yeah, big ranchers, mostly ones with cattle. That's when they couldn't find work for farmers. They'd try to find another way to make a living.

SD: Can you briefly describe the different jobs that they would do for farmers?

WF: Pick rocks, fix fence, haul bales, basically that was it.

SD: What sort of resources did your family harvest in terms of wild game, natural plants, fruit?

WF: With my grandpa Joe Falcon, we'd snare rabbits, and my dad would get his brother-in-law, and he'd come, and they'd go and get a deer or two, or whatever we needed. We'd

even eat gophers in the spring. My grandpa Joe used to get us with pails, and we'd go and drown the gophers, and he'd be waiting by the holes with a shoelace or a piece of twine, and he'd snare them. He'd make a fire singe their hair, gut them, and then cook them over an open fire with salt. We'd have bannock with them.

SD: They'd come swimming out of the hole, and he'd catch them around the neck with a snare?

WF: Yeah.

SD: And then would they be dead when they came out of the hole?

WF: No, he'd hit them over the head or something.

SD: So, deer, rabbits, gophers, any other wild game?

WF: That was pretty much it.

SD: Where and when were these collected?

WF: The gophers were usually late spring. The deer usually close to wintertime, sometimes in the middle of the summer. Rabbits most of them were in the wintertime, late fall, early winter, all through the winter.

SD: Was there much picking berries and stuff?

WF: Oh yeah, we did lots of that too: chokecherries and Saskatoons, wild raspberries, strawberries, and gooseberries. Whatever was available, we'd find them.

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

WF: Peppermint from the sloughs. They'd get a lot of rat root from the muskrat houses. They break it open and take the rat root from there.

SD: Those little muskrats got that root themselves?

WF: Yeah, they'd get the root and they'd harvest it, and they'd put it in their little houses.

SD: And they eat that?

WF: Oh yeah, that's what keeps their teeth, their mouths healthy. There's something in it a lot of people today even use it for toothaches when they get sore gums or cankers.

SD: And you guys would harvest that right from their rat house?

WF: Yeah, that was the easiest way, rather than digging up the plant. I'm not even sure what kind of plant it was. It obviously grew around the slough. Some type of root. I never thought to ask. Oh, there were times too when they couldn't find any work. My dad would go way up north and would dig for Seneca roots. It was a type of medicine. They used to sell it in different places. If there wasn't much work out there for the summers, they'd go to the old pastures. They knew how to find the plant and dig it up. They'd dry the roots. You could sell the roots green or dry them out in the sun. There were different prices: you'd get a low price for the un-dried Seneca roots, and you'd get more for the dried stuff. And some of the people that used to come live with us did not have any kids. A couple would come, and the one would be a trapper. He'd go trap muskrats. And his wife would help around the house, too. She'd help my mom. And the guy would go out and trap for muskrats mostly, but sometimes weasels and mink. You had a lot of that too. On the road allowance, you'd have people who wouldn't really come to pick rocks or to help with the farm work, but they'd

come trap. They'd go and work for another farmer and would do the smaller jobs. They'd live at the camp for a while until they found a place where they could set up their own camp. They probably did that to help each other out.

SD: So, the camps you remember, would there often be two or three families in those camps or just yourselves usually?

WF: Mostly just ourselves. But there were a few times when some people were just a few miles down the road, and in walking distance. Most of the time, they're too busy, but there were times that we got together. They'd come visit or we'd go and visit them.

SD: Who were the medicine people in your family and community?

WF: The elders, usually the old grandmas.

SD: Do you remember any of their names?

WF: Oh, my grandma Mary Pritchard knew a lot of medicines as did my grandma Alice, my dad's mom. It seemed like the women were always the ones that kept the medicines, and they knew what to use them for. That was their job, I guess. But I think if they needed rat root, they'd send their husband or their son to go and get it. They'd take care of the medicine and kept them in different bags. There are a lot of times they didn't tell us what the medicine was. Well, we were too young to have it explained to us. They'd say, "Well, this medicine will help you with your fever," or sore throat or whatever, or if you're cut. If you cut yourself, they'd put some kind of plant on your sore, and just kind of tie it up and leave it on there for a day. Usually, when you took it off, it was starting to heal already. They knew what kinds of medicines to use and passed them down.

SD: Did you have anyone in your family that beaded or embroidered moccasins or other items?

WF: Not that I can remember. They're too busy raising kids, but there were some who sewed mitts and socks. But as far as beaded things, if we acquired them, they were usually from people further north because their summers were shorter and there were fewer farmers to work for. That's why we got mukluks and moccasins, and those kinds of things from the people further north.

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

WF: Like the moccasins and stuff? People just wore them out until they couldn't use them any more.

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

WF: For a lot of years, we'd go down to my Grandpa George Pritchard's farm. Usually, we spent New Year's there and sometimes Thanksgiving, and Easter. We usually celebrated Christmas at home, most of the time. On Boxing Day, we'd go to my grandpa's, and we'd have a gathering there and a meal. Usually, there were—with kids and adults—probably about fifty, sixty people, if not more. Everybody would contribute, like my uncle would go and shoot a couple deer and he'd contribute deer meet. Some of us would go and hunt rabbits, snare rabbits, and we'd skin them and, and of course there were the chokecherries my

grandma used to dry in the fall. And she'd save them for the winter, and she'd bring them out and would cook them.

SD: Did those have a name when they were cooked up like that?

WF: Lii grenn, which they'd mix with rendered beef fat and pork fat. Whatever was left after taking all the fat out, they'd mix it with lii grenn or berries, Saskatoon berries. They'd sprinkle some brown sugar on there. Different ways of doing stuff, I guess. Whatever is available, you know? They knew what was good to eat and what wasn't. It was a treat to have fish in the wintertime. Sometimes, they'd go to bigger centres to buy fish. They'd have someone selling fish off their vehicle. If we couldn't get fish, then we had to take cod liver oil. That was awful stuff.

SD: I bet.

WF: A person never forgets how that tastes.

SD: Do you remember anything else about celebrating special occasions, anything special on New Year's Eve or Christmas Eve?

WF: Usually, on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day, we'd have lii boolet, and we'd go and visit. If we were living in a bigger place, any relatives or friends of my dad's, we'd go and visit and them. Three or four different families in a day, we're pretty full by then. When we get home, usually around supper time, they'd come visit us. And my mom would cook a big meal and feed them. Everybody had a little bit to offer each other. Most of them had lii boolet, which they called oversize meatballs. I was told that the first time they started making them they were small. They were just like the bullets of a canon or guns, like from the old Métis. Whoever started making them said, "lii boolet" because they're round and are shaped like a bullet. Some made them nice and big, and some made them small.

SD: Well, every family must have had a meat grinder?

WF: They must have.

SD: Because everyone seems to have made those.

WF: Hamburger, yeah. How else would you make hamburger?

SD: Does anyone in your family speak Michif?

WF: My dad, my mom, and my grandparents on both sides did. I spoke a little bit, but when I was younger, I more or less lost most of it. I can understand some of it. Basically, it is a little bit of French, a little bit of Cree, and a little bit of English. It's just from the mixture I guess of French and Native people. Their offspring had to communicate with English-speaking people, with French-speaking people, with Cree or Ojibway or whatever language they spoke in the area.

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

WF: I used to, but I can't remember them.

SD: What are your best memories about living in a road allowance community?

WF: The nice sunny day after a bad storm through the night. It was hard to sleep through thunder and lightning in a tent or under a wagon. Playing with other kids or sometimes driving.

SD: Alright, are there any bad memories that you'd like to share?
WF: Well, we had to go to Catholic schools. Of course, it was predominantly white people that were in the school system. The Métis had to go to school. The government said we had to go to school. When we went to school, we'd get blamed for stuff we didn't do by some of the nuns and teachers. They took our lunch. In the winter, they would put it outside and sometimes the dogs would get it, or by the time it was dinner or lunch time, when we got our lunch, it was frozen. And we always got blamed for stuff we didn't do, and quite a few of us got the strap. We got pointers broken over our shoulders or were hit over the head with pointer sticks, or chalkboard brushes were thrown at us from the teachers. Or, if we needed to go to the bathroom, they wouldn't let us, so we'd go in our pants, and they'd put us in front of the class and make us kneel in the corner. For a little while then they'd send us home, if we lived close, in walking distance. A lot of times, we didn't tell our parents because they would say, "Well, it's your fault you got into trouble. That's why you got treated that way." But a lot of the times, we didn't do anything. Somebody did do something, and we'd get the blame for it. Some kid would say, "Oh, it was that Indian kid over there." They used to call us Indians. "They did it" or "He did it." So, we'd get punished for stuff we didn't do. A lot had to do with segregation, labelling. School wasn't a place we wanted to go when that happened. We got picked on too much. That's why we'd sooner go out and work rather than go to school. But, usually in the wintertime, we had to go to school because the government said, "Those kids have to go to school." Of course, it's hard to learn anything in school when you're always getting picked on.
SD: How were the Métis treated in the communities that you lived in?
WF: The ones that were darker, they were treated badly, and the ones that could pass as French or white people, they moved on to communities where other Métis didn't live. So, no one would say, "Well that's a mixed-blood family." So, they more or less passed themselves off as French, and they hid their shame, like they're supposed to be shameful for being a Métis. That was the best way to have it, to hide it. They could then survive. Different families had their own ways of surviving, especially the ones that had Métis farms given to them, like the land scrip. And whenever they got their land, in the community, they'd say, "Oh, we're French" or "We're English," or whatever. But deep down inside a lot of the people in the community knew that they were part Native. But they just said, "Well as long as they don't cause any trouble, we'll have them." Traditionally, the Métis were always labelled as troublemakers because they always had to fight from way back. So, they were labelled as troublemakers. People had to do a little extra to survive.
SD: Is that how you see it in terms of your own experience?
WF: Yes, that's exactly the way I see it. The Treaty Indians didn't want us, and the white communities didn't want us because it seemed like they were both embarrassed of the outcome of mixed blood. I guess to them pure bred means more than anything else. That's my opinion.

SD: Did your family encounter racism from the larger community?
WF: Oh yes. Oh yes, all the time.
SD: Do you have uh specific examples?
WF: "Look at those Indians." "Go back to your land Indians." Stuff like that.
SD: Who would say that?
WF: Just other kids.
SD: So, in school you'd here about it?
WF: Oh yeah, lots of times. Adults would say something to us, if we were walking through their yard, or down the back alley. They'd say, "Get out of here. We don't want your kind around here."
SD: Oh boy.
WF: "Your kind," but we knew what they meant, eh? They tried to make us ashamed of whom we were. Because you could talk to someone on the phone, and if you didn't sound Native, they accepted you for who you are. But as soon as they saw you, and if you were dark-skinned, they would discriminate because of your appearance. You saw it, not only with kids, but with adults. It's just the way they were brought up; I guess.
SD: Would you see that with adults and older people?
WF: Well, saying things like, "Why don't your own kind go back where you come from?"
SD: You'd here that from older people?
WF: Oh yes, but there were a lot of nice people, too. Farmers would give you work if they had no one else, and they couldn't do it. As long as you're working for them, you're a-okay. But when you weren't working for them, and you saw them in town, they wouldn't look at you. They wanted to avoid you. They got what they wanted from you already. They didn't want to communicate with you in public. That's what happens when the people go to another country and they take over the country. Well look at South Africa, just a handful of white people ran that country for years. There were millions of Africans when Apartheid was in, until they took over their own country.
SD: When did people start to leave the road allowance communities, and why?
WF: I think when the municipalities started getting more organized. They had their ways of fencing of road allowances so the Métis couldn't live there any more. Or they'd work up the land, and no one wanted to set up land in dirt, in a little chunk of prairie. I think that's why people realized they had to quit living on road allowances. They had to try to get to smaller communities maybe? As long as you stayed on your own property, and you didn't go and bother the neighbours, you're okay. They wouldn't even let you play with their kids. They wouldn't even let us play with their kids because of the threat that some day, their boy or girl would marry one of us. There was lots of that. It's how people were brought up, I guess.
SD: When did that lifestyle start coming to an end?
WF: Probably the middle to late '60s. It was more common in the '50s and '40s, and '30s.
SD: So, when it came to an end you just had to find different sources of work?
WF: Well, I guess parents started realizing that their kids' education was a big thing. So, they

made sure they got their schooling, even though they had to put up with a bunch of stuff. We lived in the Baljennie area, and there was a lot of Métis as well as a lot of white people in the school. They got along well. Because it was pretty even, fifty-fifty more or less. So, there wasn't as much discrimination. We're closer because it's a smaller community. It's in the bigger communities, where all these different racist people ended up.

SD: So where did you say that your parents and grandparents were originally from?

WF: My grandpa George had his homestead by Willowfield, east of Cando, and his wife was from the south. My grandpa was raised in the Ponteix area and in the Lake Pelletier area. And my grandma was from the southern part of the province, and right into Montana, the Whiteford family. My dad's dad, Joe Falcon, was probably from southern Alberta, then around Vermillion. Then my grandma grew up around Lumsden. But that was their childhood, where they grew up. But as they got married, they moved. Wherever Grandpa Joe could find work, that's where they would move. And there seemed to be lots of work in southern Alberta, closer to the mountains. Usually, a lot of them were stooking wheat for farmers or they worked in the sugar beet fields.

SD: Were your ancestors involved in the 1885 Resistance?

WF: I'm not sure. All I knew is when they had the 1885 Rebellion, Gregoire Falcon and his wife took off to Montana and Idaho to be with his other brothers. He was afraid of the consequences because he supported Louis Riel. He never hid it. He admitted it; he figured everyone else was running away because they were afraid to get persecuted like Riel. So, they took off to Montana and Idaho. A few years after, they came back. They lived around the Cochin area, north of Battleford. They kinda kept low profile.

SD: And how about the Pritchard side?

WF: They tried to be hard workers. They lived in the communities where they did as much as they could to help farmers so that farmers would stick up for them. When they lived in the bigger communities, they'd have more people saying, "These are Riel's followers, you know?" Stuff like that. And I think my grandpa had an English or Welsh name, Pritchard. They more or less picked on people with French names because Riel, being part French, and a lot of them didn't understand what a Métis was. They figured, "Well, it's half Indian, half French." So, they went with that. If you had a French name, well then, you were part Indian. They figured you were a Riel follower. Look in the history books, there's very little mention of any English names or Welsh names, or Scottish names. It's all mostly French names in Riel's Rebellion. But look at his army led Dumont. That's all French, Dumont, Pelletier. The list goes on and on. And like Pritchard or Whiteford, you seldom here of that, although there are a lot of people that are followers of Riel who fought with Riel with English names or Scottish names. They kept a low profile, I guess.

SD: Pritchards have some involvement in the 1885?

WF: I think maybe some relatives on the opposite side that the Pritchards married into.

SD: I thought there was some in there who were involved in the Frog Lake events?

WF: Well, that was my great-great-grandpa John Pritchard. He was actually just an

interpreter for Big Bear. Wherever you found Big Bear, Pritchard wasn't very far behind because he was always helping Big Bear to interpret what the government people wanted or what they were saying. And my great-grandpa, he was just a young guy during the Frog Lake Massacre. When one Big Bear's warriors, Wandering Spirit went to look for food in the Frog Lake area, he went to an Indian Agent. You know the ones that are supposed to teach them how to farm? They went and asked for food to [Thomas] Quinn. He wouldn't give him. Big Bear's people were starving because there was no more buffalo. And they could only go certain places because they were kinda hiding out. So Wandering Spirit got aggressive. He shot one of the guys and pretty soon they started to fight back. So, they started shooting people. Wandering Spirit captured two white women. I think one was a McLean, and they went to the Fort Pitt area, towards Loon Lake. John Pritchard told Big Bear, "I'd like those two women to be my wives, to come live with me. I'll trade you these horses for them." So Wandering Spirit, said, "Well, you gonna keep, sleep with both of them?" "Yeah," he said. So he looked at his horses. "Okay," he said. So, in the middle of the night, my great-grandpa John Pritchard took those two white women to safety to the Fort Pitt area. So, they wouldn't be harmed. He felt there were too many charges that were gonna be pending against Big Bear's tribe. So, he saved those two women. Then as the years went by, I think it was 1963 or '64, '65, they had that show, "Front Page Challenge." My great-grandpa Samuel Pritchard was invited to "Front Page Challenge." They had to guess who he was because they are talking about the Frog Lake Massacre. He was a youngster when that happened. He was there, and it just happened when they took a break on the show, they got a call from somewhere in BC, Williams Lake. There was a phone call from this woman who said that she was one of the women that John Pritchard saved

SD: Oh boy.

WF: I think she was close to a 100, if not a 100. She was in the old folks' home. She wanted to thank John Pritchard for saving her life, but he was gone. So, here's John Pritchard's son. He was there when that happened. She remembered him, and she wanted to thank him in person. So "Front Page Challenge," and the CBC sent him all the way over there and she thanked him for his dad saving her life and another lady's life. So that was something to be proud of. We're not all bad.

SD: Of course not.

WF: Like they say we are.

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

WF: Yes, my grandpa George's brother, Ed Pritchard served in the Second World War, and one of my grandpa's brothers, John Falcon.

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

WF: Oh yeah. My great-grandpa Solomon Pritchard, grandpa George Pritchard, my dad Lawrence Falcon, my uncle Norman Falcon, my brother Bruce Falcon, my brothers Gordon and Wayne, and myself. I even worked for the Métis Association in Alberta in the middle '70s. Then the late '70s, I worked for the Métis Association of Saskatchewan as a field worker.

Then later on, in the early '80s, I worked for the Gabriel Dumont Institute as a liaison person. I just went to the Métis communities to see what the needs were for education, and if any forms needed to be filled for the SUNTEP program. That's the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program. I'd take applications out. I'd go and try to promote the SUNTEP program to see what the educational needs were out in the Métis communities until we got tired of fighting and not getting anywhere. We just kind of more or less gave up. The governments are too strong. They finally figured out ways to make sure that they don't have to help any Métis organizations.

SD: Can you tell me that story about that group of Métis that was isolated in northern Alberta that you ran into?

WF: Oh yeah. When I was working for the Métis Association of Alberta, I think it was winter of '74 and 75', we had to take a petition around for Métis people to sign. They wanted a study done before the Mackenzie Delta Pipeline from Alaska could go down to the mainland United States. And we had to go and see this Métis colony south of Grand Prairie. It was called Nose Creek. The car broke down on us while we were waiting for to get it towed out. There was a school teacher who told us how this community became a Métis community when Riel first got sent into exile to the United States before the Rebellion. Many Métis people in that area were so scared that they felt that they had to run for their lives, or otherwise they'd get exiled or who knows maybe hung? So, a group of them started moving west, and as they went along, they were telling other Métis and other Natives that didn't live on the reserve. The ones that came across said, "The white man is gonna come. The soldiers are going to come and kill us all." And they kind of added more onto it, but it's just the way they were. Scare tactics you know? Whatever they used from Riel's people, you know? So, they ended up in the Nose Creek area, and they hid there for years until it was '58 or '59. They were doing a survey to take lumber out of that area. And here they found those people there. So, they made it a colony. And there were all kinds of people, like northern Cree, Plains Cree who were running away, and mixed blood, and Métis and other ones. That's where they ended up. This is what the school teacher told me, a little bit of history, eh?

SD: So Walter could you tell me that story about Rosetown?

WF: When we lived in Rosetown and in Biggar, mostly Rosetown, a lot of young kids used to call us "Indians" and would make fun of us. It turns out, years later when the Métis had a right to hunt for a while, a lot of these people came out and proved that they were Métis. And those were the ones that picked on us the most in school, or if they saw us down the street, they'd call us "Indians" and stuff. And I think it's because the parents helped it along because they didn't want people to know that they were Métis when they used to pick on us. Of course, the parents are dead and gone. So, I guess the kids saw an opportunity to get free hunting, so they proved that they were Métis. They got a right to hunt, and they proved it through family trees that they were Métis. They had Indian blood in them. And not only Rosetown, but it was also in Biggar, too in the different communities we lived in. We heard

these names. People would say, "Hey this one is Métis." We always figured they were because we could sense it because some of them were dark. I remember when we lived in Spring Water there were these three girls, two sisters and one of their friends. They used to come over and visit us. One time, they weren't there, but their dads came over and a couple of their dad's friends. They were drunk and half cut, and they came over. We lived in a two-room shack behind a main house. They asked where their girls were. And they said, "The girls are here. You guys bother them?" "No, they're not here." So, they barged into the house, and they checked the two-room shack, but they couldn't find these girls. So, we were telling these girls about this a couple of weeks after. They were actually over there visiting us on a Friday night. Then this truck pulled up again. Here were these guys again. So, the one girl hid behind one guy in the top bunk, and one hid behind the other in the bottom bunk. Right behind them, they looked. They were covered up with a blanket. It looked like it was just these guys laying there to pretend they were sleeping. Then the one girl, they put her in the closet and threw a bunch of blankets over her and left the closet door open. So, when they barged in again looking for these girls, they couldn't see them and then they left. Then these girls come out and they're just laughing at their dads' and their dads' friends. You know, how they handled it.

SD: These were white girls that hung out with you guys and their dads didn't like it?

WF: Yeah, and their dads' friends. None of us had any close contact with the girls. We were real good friends with them. You know how kids are? You know how young people are? The first thing that runs through their minds, they're having sex or whatever.

SD: Yeah.

WF: But we were accepted by them. I guess that was probably 1968, and I guess that's about the time when a lot of the younger generation were accepting Métis people, especially the female population. They thought of us as renegades. I guess they realized when they got close enough to us that we're just like them. You know we can love just as good as the next, or we can be as kind as the next person. It doesn't matter what breed you.

SD: So what was your theory about those Métis kids in Rosetown that would say racist stuff towards you?

WF: Well, I think it's because their parents promoted it because they were trying to make it look like they didn't want the rest of the community to find out they were Métis themselves. So, they promoted their kids to pick on us more. It's just my own theory. To pick on us more to take off any suspicions that they were Métis themselves. I honestly believe that.

SD: Okay, thank Walter. Thank you very much for sharing.

WF: Oh, you're welcome.