Road Allowance Interview: Laura Parisien, Elffie Bourassa, Agnes Pelletier, Elsie Lampard

Conducted by Scott Duffee
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SD: Could you please tell me your name and your home community?
LP: My name is Laura Elaine Parisien. I am from Lebret, Saskatchewan, from the road allowance. It's better known as "Chicago Street" to the people of that community.
SD: Who were your parents and grandparents?
LP: My parents were Jean Pelletier, who was married to Napoleon Stephen Parisien. My grandparents were, on my mother's side, were… At the moment I can't think, but it'll come to me.
SD: It's okay, yeah.
LP: My mother was a Pelletier, and my father's grandparents were Melanie Major(e) and she married three or four times. Her first husband, my grandfather, was Solomon Parisien. I remember her last husband, he was Napoleon Sansregret. And our history dates back with Jean-Baptiste Parisien, dating back to the 1700s and every line, every generation that came down had a Jean-Baptiste Parisien in my father's side of the family. And the last Jean-Baptiste Parisien was my brother, who would have been born in 1948. He died around three to four years ago in Calgary. So that is where the name Jean-Baptiste ends.
SD: Did your parents, grandparents always live in this community?
AP: Yes.
LP: No, apparently, my grandparents immigrated here. My history doesn't tell me where they come from, but I would imagine Europe somewhere. They mixed into the Red River Settlement, which is now known as Winnipeg. And they immigrated this way into Saskatchewan, and the French and the Aboriginal people became integrated, and we became Métis for generations over the years. I was told that I have a blood line that is got some Scotch and some Irish, some generations prior to me being born. And, of course, my skin was very white when I was born, and I had blonde hair and green eyes. My dad had green eyes also, and he was considered Métis. He was Napoleon Stephen Parisien, and the generations down the line started to show different colour skin and eyes. It's almost like you wonder where you came from while growing up in a Métis community. Everybody was so dark, and you're kinda shunned a little bit because your skin is a different colour and you can't understand it.
SD: Okay, interesting.
LP: Mhmm, yeah.
SD: What Métis families lived in this community?
LP: Oh, we had plenty, mostly relatives. We had LaRocques, Pelletiers, Brazeaus, Morins, Morans, Desjarlais, LaRocques, and Bourassa. Those are all Métis names. That's just a few I

can think of.

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

LP: Yes, the town was kind of divided. It was called "Uptown" and "Downtown." In town it was all the white people, they were of Scotch, just your general white people according to us. No Métis people lived in town. We all lived on the outskirts. It's almost like you were not allowed to live a certain part in Lebret. You had to be on the outside of the town.

SD: Did you live in any other road allowance communities?

LP: We may have lived in one above the black bridge, but I'm not certain because that is where my father's mother lived. This was Grandma Melanie Major. Somehow, my memory only lets me remember Chicago Street.

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

LP: No, we eventually bought a piece of property up on the hill towards Balcarres after my brother Adolphe was killed in a car accident. I was nine years old. He was single and he was in the army, and he was only 21. His life insurance money was paid out to my mother. My mother and my father purchased a small piece of land, and my dad built a house there. Well, no, he didn't build a house, it took him about three years after that. So, we got off the road allowance finally. My dad was too proud to move to the Métis Farm, which was where the majority of the Métis lived. They were provided jobs, so that they had food and everything. And all my mother's brothers moved there with their families. They all worked on this community farm. But my father and his brothers would have no part of that. It was called pride. He wanted to look after his large family. And that was that. Even though my mother's brothers lived there, there was always an argument that he would never move his family to a Métis Farm.

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

LP: Dad worked for some farmers, stooking hay for not very much, .25 to .50 cents a day. For the farmers, they also picked stones.

SD: What does that mean to stook hay?

LP: Stook hay with a shovel when they're harvesting. The difference between what comes up. Then they take shovels. I used to have pictures, and I just wished I could've found them. They threw it onto the big combine, and it would separate. So, he did a lot of that and picked stones for the farmers. My father never held a job in his life where he paid income tax until the day he died. He worked for Bargrin for a half of beef, so it could be canned in jars, so we had food. It could be chickens, or it would be a half a pig until finally, he was able to raise his own cow to feed the family. I remember the pig he raised and then butchered, and the chickens we had, but mostly, my dad was a trapper. He did everything from rabbits to mink to beaver, so we ate a lot of wild meat. He had nets, and he was allowed to put them in the water for winter. All that fish was sold to the mink farm once a year. His brother who lived in Montana owned half of that, so half of the money was sent to his brother in the States. My dad could barely write, so by the time I was ten years old, I was always helping

him. I did his money orders and his writing for him. I did his bookwork for him. Later on, he cut pickets for farmers. So, he had his own little business going, and he eventually bought a small saw where he could cut wood and sell it to the townspeople by the load.
He always had a job. I laugh at this one because he ended up working for the Department of Highways cleaning the garbage op the hills towards Balcarres every week. He would have had his little stops with his one-horse buggy. They paid him, and he never paid a cent of income tax to the government. That's how smart he was. He used to bury his money in cans, and he was never out of money. There was no such thing as a bank for him. He never drove a car. He finally owned a little red tractor. I'll always remember that. We had a lot of hard times. We planted rows in fields of potatoes, and corn and onions. My dad had the most beautiful garden you'd ever wanna see. It was straight, nothing was ever crooked.
So, God gave him a gift there. Even when he moved to the city, he just had a way. Times were rough, and lots of times there was no meat. You picked chokecherries, and you put them through a grinder, and you made like little hamburger meat patties. You dried them in the sun, and that was used as meat in the wintertime, or as filler, I guess.

SD: Put that right in the meat that stuff, or you use it as meat?

LP: You'd use it as meat.

SD: Ground chokecherries.

LP: Chokecherries that taste like a burger.

SD: How'd they end up tasting like a burger?

LP: Oh, they were a little bit on the sweet side. To this day, they're still very tasty.

SD: You put them through a meat grinder?

LP: Yes, when they're ripe. You make small patties. You gotta totally dry them in the sun. Then you cover them with nets, so the flies wouldn't get in there. It's quite tasty. All our medicines came from herbs and plants. You only saw a doctor when you were dying. Those ladies just had a natural knowledge. All babies were born at home. It was a sharing thing amongst the midwives. As a matter of fact, I was able to be there with one, and when the women yelled, they'd shove a sock in their mouth or something to keep them from… It was quite the thing, but they're healthy babies let me tell you. I love my life. I always have good memories, and later on in life, when I got to be maybe about eight or nine, once a year, my father made a trip to Regina. His pelts were in immaculate condition. He went to sell them just before Christmas, and we all got a Christmas gift from the Army and Navy store in Regina. These are memories that will be in my heart forever.

SD: Back to the medicines and other resources that were harvested. What resources did your family harvest, berries, meat, medicines, everything?

LP: Yes, wild cranberries, hazelnuts, buffalo berries you ate and you kept the seeds for rosaries and sold them to the nuns or gave them to the nuns. They made you rosaries. There were wild pin cherries that were canned. All the food was natural. There were no preservatives put in it like food has today, and maybe that's why we're in such excellent health. Strawberries and wild mint. It was boiled, and there was another one they called "li

boom." It was picked and dried and turned upside down in a shack. When you had a cold, it was boiled like tea, and in two days you were fine.

SD: What was it called?

LP: Baume. Yeah, and it smelled almost like a wild mint, but a little bit stronger. I would know where to pick that today if I went home. And we used a lot of mustard plasters. Bulrushes were also used as plaster, like in my plaster to draw the inflammation out. Hawthorns were boiled for people with heart disease. It was made into a strong tea, which was very bitter, but that was used. Gooseberries were also another staple used to keep people healthy.

SD: Do you remember where and when these things were collected?

LP: Oh yes. Mostly, it would be in the fields and along the hillsides, and anywhere where there were little creeks running, like in our backyard. For pin cherries and the chokecherries, you had to climb the hills, and the Seneca root was dug up on the hills, where it was flat.

SD: Did you guys use the Seneca root, or did you just sell it?

LP: We just sold it.

SD: Okay.

LP: At that time, we didn't know Jimmy LaRocque had a contract to buy Seneca roots. We didn't know why at the time. Maybe I didn't pay attention.

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

LP: My mother. My mother was very, very up to health.

SD: That's Jean Pelletier?

LP: Yeah.

SD: How did you spell her first name?

LP: J E A N. But everybody called her Jean. Most of the Métis women had all that knowledge. They grew up with it. Quite a few of them were midwives.

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

LP: No, I do believe that was from more of the Aboriginal people than the Métis.

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

LP: Christmas was beautiful. At Christmastime and at New Year's, we had all the relatives who travelled in circles by buggy. Our door was always open. There were no locks on the doors so people would stop. You'd feed them and give them a glass of wine, all of them. So, Mother always had a big pot of bullets, hamburger meatballs that were boiled with potatoes on the stove. So, everybody got to eat. At Christmas, you got chicken and dumplings, and the same at Easter time. Those were special times. If there wasn't chicken, my dad was also a good hunter. We always had ducks or a wild goose or something.

SD: How about New Year's? Do you remember anything about New Year's?

LP: Yes. New Year's for some people was not good.

SD: Oh?

LP: I'm talking about my relatives. My mother's brothers who were in the war, and they had shellshock, and they became funny people. Well, one in particular lived next door to us. He used to take a whip, and on New Year's Day, he whipped all his kids. I don't know why he said that was a "blessing," but I hated him for it. And to do this day, I think it has scarred them. I mean they talk about it, but when you witness something like that. But other than that, New Year's was a happy day because you got to see relatives who lived in the city. They came home to visit.

SD: Thanks for sharing that.

LP: Mhmm.

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

LP: Yes, it has been spoken in my family. My sister Doris carried quite a bit of it, but we didn't pay attention because having nuns as teachers, we were not allowed to use that language. And if you were caught speaking it, you were hauled aside. I feel very sad in my heart today because we kinda lost it. To this day, I can understand some. If I had to do a conversation with somebody, I can carry on. But to speak it fluently, our generation lost it due to the fact that we had teachers who didn't allow us to carry that language on, which is very sad. Auntie Agnes Pelletier still speaks a lot of it, and I do believe that perhaps he might. But he's not proud of his heritage, so you don't get too much.

SD: Do you speak Michif?

LP: If I had to, yeah. Yes.

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

LP: We always had silly little Métis stories, you know that? I'm sure you've heard plenty of them. But the best one I've ever heard was the roogaroo, which was a devil. That was told to keep us in at Lent time, especially when you're becoming a teenager. They didn't want you to drink. That's a sin, you know? They don't want you partying and things, so they told you these, and you believed them. Like a devil will appear, and he's got black gloves and a black coat on, and you'll disappear through the floor, and you won't even notice him. Ugh, I think today, "Who thought this garbage up and embedded in out heads?" We wouldn't even get off of the bed because they'd say, "The roogaroos gonna get you." You wouldn't even get off your bed because we would see things. We had one gentleman whose name was Joe Lemon. I think he's distantly related to Elfie. In the war he contracted syphilis, and it was almost like a stroke with his mouth, and he limped. He was apparently a good-looking man before that, but this is how they used him as a devil. He was one of them because he used to like going picking berries in the bushes and going for walks. As little kids we didn't understand that, so we thought he was the roogaroo. See that was pretty silly to think that, but that was one example. Come on sit down Elfie.

SD: Any other traditional Métis stories or songs you'd care to?

LP: Well not at the moment. Maybe Elfie can tell you one.

SD: If any come later you let me know.

LP: I certainly will.

SD: What are your best memories about living in a road allowance?
LP: My best memories are freedom. We were able to climb haystacks at 11:30 at night and not worry about anybody bothering the children. We could stay alone while Mom cleaned cabins, and nobody bothered us. We were trusted. We had freedom. Good, clean, healthy air, and I guess those are my best memories. We walked to school and did not worry about some car stopping and some asshole coming out, trying to grab you, and put you in a car. I mean we walked for miles alone all the time. You'd see kids walking over there, and you knew everybody. It was freedom. It was the clean life of freedom. Even though we were poor, cleanliness was a big thing with my mother. To this day if you were to walk into my house, Elsie's house, Doris' house, you would notice that. There were no excuses for un-cleanliness, even for bathing, we didn't have tubs. You know what we had? We had the river, and a bar of soap. You put it in your hair, and your hair was dull, but that was cleanliness, right? When you couldn't make it to the river you had a tub to catch water, or where they used to wash clothes. Mom stuck every girl in there, the same water. "I don't care, but you're gonna be cleaned." In the wintertime she would just put up a towel and that was it. Lots of times, you didn't have a bath, and it was not nice. If there was no water, and no wood to warm the water, you just didn't get it. That's the way life was. But Mother stressed that. From the time I was nine years old, I had to learn to bake bread. We had to learn to wash clothes on a scrub board. So, there were five girls and everyday, we had to bake bread to keep the family going.
SD: Did you make your own soap?
LP: Mom did with lye. It was called poiseau.
SD: What was it called?
EB: It was pig parts.
LP: Lye and fat from the animal.
EB: About that long, and it's about that wide, and about that thick
SD: Big chunk of it?
EB: The old people used to make that.
LP: Let me tell you, your whites where white. They still sell that soap in Mexico today. I brought it. Sister Terry and I brought a bar home seven years ago.
EB: Really, that's one thing I missed, how to watch mom how make soap. That would have been something.
LP: And there were no chemicals other than the lye that was put in there.
EB: Something that they just made up.
LP: Yeah.
EB: And bang it came out and that was it.
LP: Although there was one bad thing we grew up with, and not because the houses were not clean. Because of crowding, there were bed bugs in every home, and so mom would use DDT to kill them in the mattresses. It had to be used quite often. When you went to school, if one person had lice the whole community ended up with lice. So then again, you

had to have your hair washed with coal oil. It's not that the people weren't clean, it was the crowding. Even the schools were crowded.
EB: Did you hear what she said? One will probably give it to all of them.
LP: Yeah. So, DDT was a bad thing.
EB: We knew nothing. Who got it and…
LP: I often wondered because my mother and my father both died from different cancers. My mother died at an early age. She was only 63, I believe. She didn't even collect a pension. My mother used DDT a lot for us growing up. I think that's the only chemical that I can think of that would have got into the people. To this day, I'll never know for sure, but my belief is that DDT did a lot of those people in at an early age.
SD: Oh boy. Okay. So, I'll just get you to say your name and home community.
EB: Well, I'm Elffie Bourassa.
SD: And what was your home community?
EB: Lebret. I don't know what made you guys wait so long to come to ask us about our history. That should have been done years ago when dad and mom were alive. They would have given you guys an earful.
LP: Yeah, but nobody was interested in Métis people back then.
EB: Yeah, now all of a sudden bang, it comes up to us for what happened. You get the First Nations first, and then we come in after.
LP: Mhmm, that is true.
EB: It's just like First Nations get what they want, the white people get what they want, and we're in between. It just goes over top of us and that's it.
SD: Jeez.
EB: We don't get anything.
LP: But it's always been like that even growing up.
EB: Yeah, it's been like that, and it's still like that.
SD: Well and that brings me to my next question here. Are there any bad memories that you would like to share about living in a road allowance?
LP: Segregation in school, too.
EB: Yeah. You know I don't like to be prejudiced to the First Nations, no way. They claim they're the first ones here, but I don't know if that's true or not. I always say, "I don't believe we're the first ones that matter." But First Nations, well you know. For us we used to live on food stamps.
LP: See I don't remember food stamps.
EB: And then we used to live on, once a year.
LP: Social aid.
EB: Once or twice a year.
LP: To pay for the books.
EB: No, they used to come out with a clothing allowance. That's how we used to get our clothes. Welfare gave us a clothing allowance.

LP: Mhmm.
EB: And then we used to live on food stamps. It's what they called "food vouchers."
LP: See and I don't remember that.
EB: Yeah. See that's…
LP: Because dad was always trapping and…
EB: Oh yeah, my dad was always trapping, but still when comes in to the point that you have to get something to put on the table. Oh, and we used to live off of gophers.
LP: Oh yes.
EB: Rabbits.
LP: Muskrat.
EB: Muskrat, beavers.
LP: Mhmm.
EB: There are so many times, I'd just like to just sit back and think about what we used to eat. Now we're eating a little better.
LP: I don't know if we're eating better, Elffie.
EB: I know, I know but still there's…
LP: There are steroids in everything we eat now.
SD: Okay so how were the Métis treated in your communities?
EB: Oh God.
LP: Not good.
EB: Not bloody good that's for damn sure.
LP: Mhmm.
EB: I'll tell you something about the Métis and the whites and then First Nations. First Nations never had a licence to fish, whites did. And the Métis were right in there with the whites. We had to have a licence to fish. When we used to live off the lake, your dad used to live off the lake.
LP: Yes.
EB: The game warden used to come along, but then we got smart. We started working for people that had a licence to fish, and that's how we survived with this.
LP: Yes, Jimmy LaRocque had one.
EB: I mean we were getting the second-hand help all the time where the First Nations were getting the first-hand help. We were getting nothing for return.
LP: Yes.
EB: Absolutely, not a damn thing. We weren't getting houses, they were. We weren't getting land, they were. We're not getting a damn thing. And still until this day, we're still like that. There's no difference from back in the '40s and the '30s. They're still the same.
LP: A lot of segregation in the schools.
SD: Okay.
EB: And if we get something the First Nations start yelling discrimination. Well, it's not discrimination for God's sakes give us a break. We're trying to get something out of this.

LP: Mhmm.
EB: I don't know if you know this, but a few years ago the First Nations were trying to make us join in with them. They were trying to call us First Nations. I don't know if you heard about it.
LP: That is a whole total different generation and time in our life. I think he wants to know about growing up in Lebret, not the fact that there's fighting now. It's a government issue now.
EB: All I know is growing up in Lebret we used to have so much.
SD: Did your families encounter racism from the larger community?
LP: Oh, of course. You weren't known, you weren't even called by your name. You were called "Half-breed."
SD: Okay.
LP: "Hey, Half-breed get over here."
SD: What are the specific examples that come to mind?
EB: Well, when we used to go to school we used to get a shit kicking from the white people.
LP: All the time.
SD: From the teachers, from the kids?
EB: Even from the nuns.
LP: The nuns.
EB: The nuns. We used to get a damn lickin' from them.
LP: Total cruelty.
EB: Yeah.
LP: I think today those nuns, if they were alive, they would be put in jail. That's how bad they were.
EB: They used to take our shirts off and turn them inside out to make sure we were not carrying bugs or in our hair.
LP: Mhmm. And they would pull you by the ears up to the front of the class.
EB: And then they'd pull our pants down, and they'd spank us right in front of the class.
LP: Yes, of course. And when you got the strap, which was a quarter of an inch, they made sure they didn't hit you in the hand. They hit you where the veins were, so it swelled up and you couldn't move your hand.
EB: I came home and my dad looked at my wrist. It was just black and blue, and he didn't even have to ask me anything. He walked right to Sister Oliver, remember her?
LP: Yes.
EB: He went right up to her and I guess. I don't know what the hell he'd did, but he told her if he ever catches her handling us like he was coming back. I guess she got the message only by putting a scare into her.
LP: Yeah.
EB: But she was a wicked bloody.
LP: There was a lot of mental cruelty as well from the nuns towards the Métis people, total

mental cruelty.
EB: Yeah, there's another thing. We'll stay on the same track. When the First Nations had discrimination or cruelty what are they getting now? They're getting 40-75 thousand dollars for stuff like that.
LP: We live with the memories.
EB: Where are we?
LP: But you know.
EB: We're living on just the memories, that's it.
LP: That's what makes you a strong person, maybe.
EB: Hey?
LP: Maybe that's what makes us a strong breed of people.
EB: Yeah, but still. Out in Lebret, we were poor, but we had enjoyment.
LP: Mhmm.
EB: We didn't give a damn. Hey as long as I had five cents to go to downtown to go buy myself a little bottle of coke and a little tray of chips.
LP: Candy.
EB: Man, that was a treat.
LP: Yeah.
SD: Do you guys have anything else to share about some of the racism that you encountered?
EB: No.
SD: Or did you cover it all?
EB: I think we did mostly.
LP: There was a lot of sexual abuse towards the people as well from the priests that perhaps a lot of people do not want to talk about. My brothers were sexual abused by the priests.
EB: You are telling the truth because there's stuff that I'd like to bring up, but I'll just keep it to myself.
LP: It's better to talk about it because you know what, it happens all over the world.
EB: Oh yeah.
LP: You're not the only one. The nuns were also very abusive.
EB: But then when you bring it out now, it's about 67 years, too Goddamn far behind.
LP: Well, it's a healing process to me.
EB: And then to try to let the people know after x amount of years.
LP: Mhmm.
EB: They're not even gonna look at it. They're just gonna say, "Oh yeah." But there were a lot of times when we were growing up and I was only eight years old, nine years old, I was getting up anywhere between 4:00 and 4:30. We used to sneak down to the lake and pull our nets out before the game warden used to get there. That's how we used to make our living. You know it wasn't easy, but everyday we enjoyed it.
LP: But I think of the bad memories, where it got to the point where you didn't want to go to

school because of the abuse we suffered for many years.
EB: We used to take bannock to school for our lunch when mom never had bread.
LP: Yeah.
EB: To have bannock, and these white kids would say, "Oh my God. Look at this guy eating his bannock. Oh, look at that guy eating his bannock."
LP: And today it is so popular. Come sit down Auntie Agnes.
EB: Now today.
LP: You got a lot of history to tell us.
EB: They have.
AP: I should say, our gopher-eating days.
LP: Oh yes indeed. We were just talking about that.
EB: Now they have soup and bannock. The white people are right in there now. That's today. But in our days, they used to laugh at us when we used to take bannock and lard to school.
AP: We had to eat whatever we could.
LP: There you go.
AP: Well, those gophers were really getting us in the spring. Even muskrat.
LP: Lots of muskrat. Dad would shoot them right in the creek.
EB: She trapped a gopher last year or two years ago. And she set the trap. All of a sudden, she looked at the trap, and there was only one leg.
AP: It ran under the building.
EB: The following year, I said, "Agnes, I saw a three-legged gopher running.
SD: Did you want to start the interview?
AP: Okay.
SD: Can I get you to say your name and your home community
AP: My name is Agnes Pelletier. I was born on December 2, 1917. My father was Russell Brown, and my mother was Celina Parisien. My Mom's mother's dad was French. After grandma's mom got pregnant, he went back to his wife. So, grandma was the only Major(e). They left her at my grandma's and didn't come back for her. So that's how some of us are Major(e)s in the family.
SD: Okay and what's your home community?
AP: Lebret. I never heard of the "Road Allowance." It was just a road with houses on the side. One was Chicago Street and our place was on Jackrabbit Street. Our street had eight houses and Chicago Street had 12. It was Jack Rabbit Street and Chicago Street. There was only one lumber house. It was Alex Desjarlais's home. The rest was logs and mud.
LP: I guess you would have been at Auntie Celena's? You would have been on Jackrabbit Street before you moved to the Métis Farm?
AP: Oh yeah. We lived on Jackrabbit Street and on top of the hill there, and we lived down at the Métis Farm until we moved here.
LP: Mhmm.

SD: Mind if you say your name again so that whoever does the recording can distinguish between your voices?
LP: My name is Laura Parisien.
SD: Parisien. Thank you.
LP: Yes.
SD: When did people leave your road allowance community and why?
AP: Road allowance, gee I don't know.
EB: On the road allowance community, the people left the road allowance when the municipality stepped in there. Now you're living right here. How much time do you got there? AP: Where is the road allowance?
EB: That's by where Toussaint Desjarlais and them lived. That's the road allowance.
AP: Right down in the coulee there.
EB: Yeah.
LP: Anything that the government owned and could pick up anytime.
EB: Now, if you got so many acres in there, you have to pay taxes on that. That's why they came. That's why we moved out because they were dinging us. They said, "Well to hell with you guys. You guys aren't gonna live here anymore."
AP: Oh, the taxes just came once a year.
EB: Yeah, but how much? How much were they? Where were we gonna get the money from to pay for that?
LP: Well, dad eventually bought a piece of land and built a house.
EB: Yeah, down in the other coulee.
LP: Yeah.
AP: But that was a beautiful house. What happened to that house?
EB: It's still up.
LP: He bought that land after Adolphe was killed in a car accident.
AP: Yeah. That house was beautiful.
LP: Wasn't it? No, it's down and they rebuilt.
EB: They rebuilt the same house. It's the same house.
LP: Is it? I'll have to go look at it.
EB: Oh yeah, because I drove by there.
LP: He built it with a grade one education. He built us a new house, and it was an L shape. Those houses were just coming into existence. That was the popular house, but all he did was see a picture, and he built this house.
EB: And we thought they were living in heaven. What their dad did. He was a smart old bugger. He put power in the house, run by a battery.
AP: I started working at twelve-years-old. I was making .25 cents a day. And they let Dad go. He worked in the tracks for ten years less a month. They let him go a month before he made ten years, just so they wouldn't have to pay a pension. So, the town gave us .50 cents a day for six kids. So, I had to work at twelve-years-old for 35 cents a day.

LP: But that .25 cents Auntie was equal to…
AP: Oh yeah, you could buy lard, butter, and sugar. Butter was .10 cents a pound.
LP: It would probably be equal to about twenty-five to thirty dollars.
AP: The flour was in a hundred-pound cloth bag. That was a dollar and a half.
LP: And we never wasted any. The cloth bags were used to make slips and panties for the little girls.
AP: Sheets and slips. I could just buy a dress.
LP: Mhmm.
EB: White t-shirts
AP: And bloomers. Bloomers went below your heal, your knees.
LP: Your knees.
EB: Mom used to make white t-shirts out of flour bags.
LP: Yes, and porridge bags. Nothing was wasted.
AP: It took five bags to make a sheet.
LP: Yeah.
SD: Do you remember when people were starting to leave the road allowance community?
LP: We left the road allowance when I was ten years old after Adolphe died. Adolphe died when he was…
AP: Where was the road allowance?
LP: Where Uncle Scottie lived, where Mom and Dad lived, where Auntie Celina lived.
AP: Chicago Street then
LP: Chicago and Jackrabbit Street were all road allowances. That was all owned by the government. They could take it and build highways through there at any time. They could come and demolish it.
EB: Actually, we have one big crook that was collecting rent.
LP: And that was Jimmy LaRocque.
EB: J.-Z., his dad.
LP: Yeah.
AP: His dad.
EB: And he didn't even own the land, and we were so stupid. We were paying him rent to live in that house, and it wasn't even his. It was the government's.
LP: Well, some people had owned a piece of land.
AP: Yeah, they did.
LP: And after the war, they were forced to sell that piece of land for five dollars to feed their families.
AP: The house we lived in, we owned that.
LP: Mhmm.
SD: After World War two?
LP: Mhmm.
SD: Okay. After they came back?

LP: Mhmm
EB: Yeah.
SD: Do you remember when people started moving off of these bits and pieces?
LP: Yes, I do. It would have been probably 19…
AP: Who are they?
LP: Uncle Scottie, Auntie Lise, Chuckles Kelly.
AP: Oh, from Chicago Street.
LP: Yeah. And that's all road allowance.
AP: There were 12 houses there.
LP: Caplettes.
AP: Jim LaRocque was trying to…
LP: Uncle Leo
EB: Jim LaRocque had his farm.
AP: Yeah.
LP: It would have been '57. Anytime after 1958, they all eventually left that place.
AP: Yeah, there are twelve houses in that place.
LP: Yeah.
EB: It still stands.
AP: No, there's no house anymore.
EB: Oh yes. Down where?
AP: Down in Chicago Street.
EB: Yes.
LP: I didn't see any when I was there.
EB: I drove by there so many times. Every year still stands.
LP: The Morans way up by the thing, but I never…
AP: Not Chicago Street.
EB: Yes. Yes. But they…
AP: No, there isn't.
EB: Well, I'll show you.
LP: Jackrabbit has.
AP: Jackrabbit has.
EB: Listen to me. They're leasing it.
LP: Oh, LaRocques went and rebuilt.
EB: No, white people are living in there.
LP: Yeah.
EB: Yeah.
LP: They're all new cottages. LaRocque sold estates.
EB: Yeah, cottages.
LP: Yeah, but they're not out original homes. No, no, no.
EB: And you know where we used to live?

LP: Yes.
EB: Well, you know what that is now?
LP: LaRocques got all that in subdivided the estates.
EB: No that's wrong. That's a sewer.
LP: Yeah.
EB: Lagoon.
AP: Chicago Street has no houses.
LP: Well yeah, that has been there for twenty years.
AP: Other than one house.
LP: Yeah.
AP: He's trying to say there are houses on Jackrabbit, Chicago Street. There's nothing.
EL: Not anymore.
LP: It's LaRocque Estates. LaRocque subdivided the land.
EL: Yes.
EL: No, but there are no houses there. A couple years ago, there was a little shack there.
EB: I will take you guys over there. And you will have your earful because I drive there every year. I go by the bridge.
AP: That must be a different Chicago Street.
EB: It's gotta be, or maybe I was in Chicago.
LP: Jackrabbit has some.
EL: The LaRocques' house is there still.
EB: Yeah, I know.
AP: Just remember.
EB: And from there you come around the corner, and on that stretch there's one, two, three houses there.
AP: No way.
LP: Because that's known as the Larocque Estates now.
EL: Oh yeah.
LP: No, we're talking about our original mud shacks.
EL: Your mud shack is gone.
LP: Well yeah, I know that.
EL: Yes.
SD: Well, I've got this argument recorded, so we're gonna straighten this out.
LP: Oh dear. No, on the original Chicago Street there are no mud shacks.
EL: Non-existent.
LP: They're gone.
AP: Everybody had a mud shack in our days out there.
EB: But I'll tell you another thing, not all the mud shacks are gone. I'll take you over. My sister Margaret used to live on that farm.
EL: What farm?

EB: Oh, just on just, across the street on from Jackle Houses farm.
AP: Oh, in the coulee.
EB: No, it's not in the coulee. It's on top the hill, that mud shack is no word of a lie, it still stands.
EL: Oh good.
EB: Okay.
LP: Have to take a camera some time.
EB: And my niece used to go up there every year. I said here, "Look and we'll stop." She said, "Oh my God."
AP: It's nice to see those old shacks.
LP: Yeah, it is. It brings memories back.
EB: Oh yeah.
LP: Goodness, warm feelings to the heart.
AP: Well, we lived a hard life.
LP: Yeah.
EB: Yeah.
AP: Making mud and then.
LP: Calcimine as paint.
AP: Mudding the sides of the shacks with that.
EB: And the Ponderosa was burnt down.
AP: The Ponderosa used to be around the lake.
EB: No, that used to be at Bill Moran's house.
AP: Down the coulee?
EB: Yeah.
SD: Since we're on the topic, would you guys like to describe how you built these mud shacks?
EB: Oh logs.
LP: And mud and straw was the plaster. Dad would just dig a bit of a hole in the ground and fill it with the mud and water and hay. And we kids would take our feet and…
EB: Stomp it.
LP: And then it was just slapped on to the side, and you packed it in. You let it dry for…
EB: That was our job every fall.
AP: Our log shacks, to fill the space between the logs, it was dirt…just mixed it together with water. It was very thick and mud in between the logs, and we used calcimine in-between. It's a powder. They were not hard to keep warm. After it dried, we would whitewash it.
LP: On the outside, yeah.
AP: And then we'd like it with paper. What do you call that paper?
LP: Tar.
AP: Wallpaper.
SD: Tarpaper maybe?

EB: Tarpaper.
AP: It was a light blue. We lined the house with that inside.
LP: We didn't have that inside. We had calcimine.
SD: The same log house would get a treatment every fall?
EB: Every fall.
AP: Oh yeah.
LP: Well, sometimes.
SD: Was it like topsoil or was it clay mixed with sand?
EL: Well, the sand down there was like clay. It was clay.
AP: The straw held it together.
EB: What they call straw houses.
LP: Mhmm. Because when you have lots of rain, it kinda washed the wall down from wind and rain.
EB: Listen to what Agnes said. The straw houses.
AP: They were warm houses.
LP: Yeah, they were.
AP: Log houses were warm.
LP: Mhmm.
SD: How did you make that straw?
EB: We got it from the grass.
SD: You picked that grass yourself?
EB: Yeah, picked it up from the…
AP: Cow turd was good for that.
LP: Yeah, you mixed the cow turd in there, too.
SD: Would you dry the grass that you've picked?
LP: Oh, it'd have to be dry, oh yeah. No, hay in the ditch was dry. Yeah.
SD: I guess it would be in fall.
LP: All over the place, yeah.
SD: Okay.
AP: Boy you're learning a lot from us, eh?
SD: You bet. I might go build one of those yet.
EB: But you know. Just like out of town, Scott. It come just a little too late this should have been done years ago.
SD: These log shacks, when you put the logs together, how did you build? How did you notch them at the end?
LP: They were cut with an axe. They were fit.
SD: Was it like a saddle notch or?
LP: Just a little square piece.
EB: One on top of the other one, like that.
LP: Yeah.

AP: Yeah.
LP: And you just cut in.
EB: And they just cut a notch right here.
LP: A square notch where they fit in.
SD: Oh, a square notch, they didn't round it?
LP: No, Dad hacked little squares there, and on this piece. Where they fit in like a…
SD: Did the logs rest on each other?
AP: Yeah.
LP: Mhmm.
SD: Fairly tight?
LP: Yeah.
EB: You ever see the show, "Yukon Men"?
SD: Yeah
EB: You ever see that program where they build logs?
SD: Yeah.
EB: That's how we built houses.
SD: Oh okay, and you just use poplar trees or?
AP: Any kind of trees.
EB: Any kind of trees.
LP: Whatever was handy.
SD: Skin them?
EB: I pity the people that had bushes because…
AP: As straight as possible.
LP: Yeah.
SD: And it was always round logs, eh?
EB: Yeah.
AP: Oh yeah.
LP: Yeah.
EB: And then, we used to build…
AP: We whitewashed the mud after.
EB: The window sills or window frames all by hand.
PL: Mhmm.
EB: Everything was done by hand.
PL: They froze over in wintertime. You couldn't see. So, you'd scrape the frost off and of course, you'd only have a little woodstove. You'd wake up in the morning, and you'd see the nails had frost on them above your head, and you know it was very cold.
AP: We struggled.
PL: Yeah.
AP: Today, people wouldn't be able to go through that.
PL: No, they would not.

EB: They wouldn't live like the way we lived.
AP: Never.
PL: They couldn't survive.
AP: We had to hitch the horses in the field to go to work.
EB: Christ, we used to.
AP: Before we go to town, you know?
EB: When we used to get.
AP: One time it hailed. Next day, I was gonna hitch my horse. Its eyes were swollen from the hail. The girls' lips are all thick.
LP: Yeah.
AP: We went Saskatoon picking, and then we were coming back, and it started hailing. The hail was that thick, honest to goodness.
LP: Mhmm. Mhmm.
AP: I couldn't let the lines go. So, there was a granary there. I turned the horse there.
LP: And I can always remember my dad always had a horse. I grew up with horses all my life. Sometimes, we had as much as nine horses.
AP: Those were our cars.
LP: Yeah.
AP: Next day, I was gonna hitch the horse up. His eyes were swollen. He couldn't move.
LP: Yeah.
EB: When my dad passed away, we had three horses, and mom had to sell them to pay for the funeral. LP: Yeah.
EB: That's how tough it was.
LP: Yeah, mhmm.
EB: Couldn't do anything.
AP: We struggled.
SD: We'll get back to some early history, and we'll just take turns starting with Agnes and we'll go around. Where were your parents and grandparents originally from? And what were their names?
AP: Oh, Grandpa was Solomon Parisien, and Grandma was Melanie Major(e). She had eleven kids. She got married at really early age. Thirteen-years-old when she got married. I don't know why they let them get married that early.
LP: They all did.
EB: That was their way of living, I guess.
AP: And she had so many kids. I was five months old when Mom got married. It was a struggle.
LP: And your mother was…
SD Do you remember where your parents or grandparents were originally from?
AP: Down in Lebret.
SD: They were all from Lebret?

AP: Yeah, down in the coulee there.
SD: How about your grandparents, do you know where they originally came from?
AP: I think Grandma had come from Lebret. Yeah, Mom and Dad. There were eleven of them in the family. Her dad was one of them. And Grandma got married at thirteen-years-old.
SD: And what was her name?
AP: Melanie Major. Yeah, she was too young to get married and she had thirteen kids. She worked hard, too. And they bootlegged a lot. They bought a gallon of wine at $2.50, and they made $7.50 out of it. No one was rich. We used to go dig Seneca root. We'd leave our house with the windows open. No one done anything and everyone was safe. We had to make a living some way. It was nice camping out. We made a bonfire outside, and we had our meals out there. Mom used to make braided rugs, and I'd go house-to-house to see if people would buy them. She wanted me to ask $2.50 a rug. It was good money. In them days sugar was .10 cents a pound, so was lard meat for stews. You could buy .25 cents worth, and it was enough for a meal. My stepdad worked on the railroad. A month before he was supposed to retire, they let him go. So, he was off work rather than being given a pension. They gave us .25 cents a day for six kids. See people were crooked in them days as well. I had to go scrub floors for the town women for .25 cents. They would give me second-hand clothes as well, so that helped. I started to work at an early age. I was the oldest. Mom made rugs and made homemade wine. We bootlegged and that helped. Everybody had their way of living. My brother worked for farmers. He got paid with potatoes by the bag and with meat, so that was better than cash as you got more than you could buy. There were six of us kids.
LP: To feed the families.
AP: Yeah, it was pretty good.
LP: You're damn rights it was.
AP: Even when Auntie was selling booze, Mom used to come buy it and drink it right there. She wouldn't let him leave the place. He had to drink it right there.
LP: Yeah.
AP: .50 cents a beer bottle.
LP: Yeah.
AP: Paid $2.50 for a gallon of wine, you made $7.50 out of it.
EB: Didn't she get gypped one day? They gave her something you were telling me. Instead of giving her money, these people gave her washers or something.
AP: What?
EB: Washers, what in the hell was it? You were telling me this here. Jeez I laughed at her.
AP: I was telling you?
EB: Yeah.
AP: I wished I knew what.
SD: How about you Elffie, do you remember where your grandparents and parents were

originally from?
EB: Well, my dad came from Crooked Lake.
AP: You know your dad and them.
EB: My dad's father.
AP: On my side, they come from Dauphin.
EB: Came from the same place, but…
AP: You know.
EB: You know there's one person I never met. I only met my grandmother, my dad's mother.
SD: Okay.
EB: That's when she was living down…
SD: What was your dad's father's name?
EB: Oh God you know I'm not even. And I'm not even talking about my dad's mother because I was just yea high. I know where they used to live. And I know my Uncle Mike, my dad's brother, was in the First World War. He had a hairy lip. You know, Michel?
AP: Yeah, Michel had a split lip.
EB: Yeah.
SD: Michel Bourassa?
EB: Yeah, and then my dad was married twice. He married a woman from the reserve. That's where Margaret and Louis come from.
AP: Oh?
EB: And then she died, and then he married my real mother. Now my mother came from St. Lazare, Manitoba.
AP: And she was a red head.
EB: That's were all those Flamants were.
SD: What was your mother's name?
EB: Yeah, Margaret.
SD: Margaret, and her maiden name?
EB: Flamant.
SD: Flamant, okay.
EB: And they came from St. Lazare, Manitoba. Her parents were from St. Lazare, Manitoba, too.
SD: Okay, what were their names?
EB: They were Flamants.
SD: Okay.
EB: And then she moved down to and met dad.
SD: Okay.
EB: And then the next thing we know…
AP: George came from Dauphin, Manitoba, your folks.
LP: My mother.
AP: Yeah.

SD: So where were your parents originally from?
LP: My parents originated from the Assiniboine area, which is better known as Winnipeg, on my father's side.
SD: Okay, what were your parents' names again?
LP: My father was Steven Napoleon Parisien.
SD: And your mother?
LP: My mother was Jean Marie Pelletier.
SD: They both came from somewhere in Winnipeg, Assiniboine River?
LP: As far as I know.
SD: Okay, how about your grandparents, what were their names and where were they originally from?
LP: According to my history, it dates as far back in Europe when they first came this way.
SD: Your grandparents?
LP: My great-great-great grandparents.
SD: What about just your grandparents?
LP: Oh, my grandparents, the Assiniboine-Red River area now known as Winnipeg.
AP: Is that your mother's side?
LP: My dad's side.
EL: Well Auntie Cheech will know who's who because those are her parents, too.
SD: So, we can find that out later you think?
LP: Mhmm.
AP: They call me "Cheech."
LP: Yeah, Auntie Cheech. Auntie Cheech was my cousin, but she ended up marrying my mother's brother, which makes her my auntie.
SD: Agnes Pelletier is your?
AP: Agnes Brown was my maiden name.
SD: Oh, your birth name.
EL: She's our dad's sister. Her mother was his sister.
SD: And your nieces here, Laura calls you "Cheech"?
LP: Auntie Cheech, yes.
AP: I don't know why they call me that.
EL: Everybody had a nickname.
LP: So, they call me "Chickie" back home. What's the difference? They don't know my real name.
EB: They call her "Auntie Cheech," and they call her "Pot of Gold." I don't know what the hell
AP: You'll never run out of names for me.
LP: Because it's a tradition amongst Métis people back in that village.
AP: We all have nicknames.
LP: To this day, a lot of them can't even remember what the real first name was. They all had nicknames.

AP: Nicknames, yeah.
SD: So, your birth name is Agnes Brown?
AP: Agnes Brown, yeah. My birth certificate says.
SD: How'd you end up with that name as your birth name?
AP: Well mom had me when she was a girl.
SD: Okay.
LP: And that was quite common amongst families, you could have had a different father.
SD: But.
AP: I just saw him once.
LP: Yeah.
SD: And so, your birth dad's last name was Brown, is that right?
AP: Yes, Russell Brown.
SD: Where's he from?
AP: He was from…where in the heck was that? Scotland. They come down here. Then he's working in Moose Jaw, and that's where Mom met him.
SD: Okay.
AP: She was only seventeen.
LP: I think if you look at the features of some of the Métis people, you will see the distinguished marks of their father's, family secrets.
AP: I was five months old when Dad married Mom.
SD: Was your family involved in the 1885 Resistance?
LP: I don't know that for sure.
AP: They never talked about it.
LP: No.
AP: 1885, that's a long time ago.
SD: How about you Elffie, was your family involved in the 1885 Resistance that you could remember?
EB: 1885. Oh no. My dad was born in 1910, and my mother was born in 1901.
SD: Ah.
EB: I know my mother's birthday was May 18th. With my dad it was in January.
SD: So, no grandparents involved in the 1885 in Batoche?
LP: Not that we would know of.
SD: Did or does anyone in your families serve in the military?
LP: All my brothers did.
SD: Who served in the military, what did they do? Did they go overseas?
AP: I know he was in the army. I don't know what he did. They didn't tell us what they did in the army.
LP: All my mother's brothers were all in the war.
SD: Which war?
LP: What was that?

EB: Second World War and the Korean War.
LP: Second, yeah.
AP: Yeah.
LP: And Uncle Gandy was in.
SD: Do you feel comfortable to list their names, and where?
AP: There's George, Michael, Joseph, Scotty.
LP: Ernest.
AP: Yeah, that's Ernest.
LP: Yeah, Pelletier, four brothers.
AP: Four boys.
SD: Those are all Pelletiers?
AP: One got killed.
SD: One got killed.
AP: The other.
SD: This is all in World War Two?
LP: Yeah.
AP: That was Joe.
LP: Yeah, and as far as the army goes all my five living brothers were in the militia in one form or another. And Richard was stationed in Germany with the army. I don't know. He lied about his age to get in first. The Second World War had Uncle Scottie, Uncle George, and Uncle Mike. He was the only boy though, but Adolphe was in the army at the time of his death. He was with the Princess Patricias, the PPCLI.
SD: Okay.
LP: At the time of his passing, he was on leave and he got killed in a car accident. And my younger brothers were in the militia. A couple of them were stationed in Manitoba in one of the army camps.
SD: Why did your brothers end up serving in the military, and your uncles?
LP: I believe for my brothers it was a way out. It was a way out of living the life that was crowded.
SD: Crowded homes?
LP: Crowded homes and…
EL: And poverty.
LP: Exactly. Yeah.
AP: Boy just think, I used to work for .25 cents a day. That was highway robbery.
LP: So, I worked for .25 cents an hour in 1960 as a waitress. Sandra was born 1966. That was my hourly wage.
AP: We used flour sacks to make my sheets. Boy, we made good use of those flour sacks, bloomers and all. They went past your knees not just to cover the spot.
SD: Fair enough.
EL: Look how far she's persevered, hey?

SD: Yeah.
LP: Leg warmers.
SD: Uh huh.
AP: Our bloomers went passed our knees.
LP: If you ever watch an old western movie, you'll see some of the women wearing them I just laugh. Yup, I know that story.
AP: And today it just covers the spot.
LP: Yeah.
AP: You got any daughters?
SD: Yes, I do. Elffie, did anyone in your family serve in the military?
EB: Yeah, my older brother Mike.
SD: Your oldest brother Mike?
EB: Yeah.
SD: Okay, did he go overseas?
EB: He went overseas, him and Jack my brother-in-law.
LP: Mhmm. Racette
EB: He went there with. I think he was in there with Richard, eh?
LP: Yup. They were. Mhmm.
EB: They were in the Korean War. But they couldn't shoot Mike because Mike came home and he didn't go back. He was running away from them. But they caught him just about, just about when the Korean War was over.
LP: Oh, a lot of them went to war.
SD: He was your oldest brother?
EB: Yeah.
SD: Yeah.
LP: Had no choice they were conscripted by the government at that time.
SD: For World War two?
LP: Yeah, and my dad was too skinny, he didn't make it.
SD: Ah.
LP: So, we got to keep him at home.
SD: Because he was too skinny?
LP: Yeah, he didn't have the proper weight to go into the army.
SD: So, they tried to conscript him, but they couldn't because he was too skinny.
LP: Yeah.
SD: Was anyone in your families involved in the Métis Society?
AP: My husband George was in the Métis Society.
SD: George. Sorry?
AP: Pelletier.
SD: George Pelletier.
LP: Well, both my sisters worked for Métis Society. My sister Elsie worked for them for a quite

a few years as did my other sister, Tara.
EB: Oh God, yeah.
EL: Sister Theresa.
SD: Anyone in your family Elffie work for the Métis Society?
AP: Uncle Leo was in there.
EB: No, none of us. We just…
LP: Went with the flow.
EB: Yeah, we all went with the flow.
AP: We all agreed to go, you know?
SD: Well, does anyone have anything else they'd like to share about living in a Métis road allowance community?
EB: All I'm gonna say is it was damn hard.
LP: It was hard, but it was good.
EB: But we enjoyed it.
AP: Nobody complained.
LP: I think everybody persevered.
AP: Yeah.
EB: Why complain now? We went through the hurdles, the big ones.
AP: And we all went through the same thing.
EB: Now we're sitting here eating bullets and bangs.
LP: That's a meal of bullets that was served New Year's Eve.
EB: Yeah, you know the hell of it is when it came to Christmas and New Year's we were poor. But where in the name of God did our parents get…
LP: They always had food on the stove for visitors.
EB: Everything.
LP: And a glass of wine.
EB: Yeah.
AP: Homemade wine.
LP: Yeah.
EB: They always made sure that we had something in our socks.
SD: Well Agnes and Elffie, can you guys tell me how your families celebrated special occasions and holidays like Christmas, Easter, and New Year's?
EB: Oh God.
AP: Christmas, there was no special nothing. Everybody celebrated the same. We used to go to dance. Make dances every weekend.
SD: Ah.
AP: In our houses and go from house to house because we didn't have phones.
SD: At Christmas time?
AP: Yeah.
LP: And New Year's.

AP: And in New Year's. We had to go house to house with no phones. And if you're mad at one you just passed their house.
EB: Where did our parents get the food from? There were always sandwiches.
AP: Yeah.
EB: Always sandwiches at midnight.
AP: And canned meat there.
EB: Feed the people. Where did our parents get the money from? I don't know.
SD: How do you remember celebrating Christmas and New Years?
EB: Oh God, it was lovely. We used to go to midnight mass.
LP: Yes, the best.
AP: Midnight mass, yeah.
EB: And then I would say, "Mom, it's midnight, did Santa Claus come?" "Well, we'll see when we get home." When we get home, the one time my dad was the Santa Claus, he dropped a whole damn bag of candies in our drinking water. That was our Santa Claus. The candies went right in the bloody water. "Oh my God," Mom said, "What the kids gonna have?" I don't know, but whatever they put in our sock we still enjoyed it. And mom said Santa Claus went in the water and took the bag.
EL: And when they said, "Tamarck it down," you knew the dance was starting.
EB: And my dad used to play the fiddle. My brother Mike used to play the used to cord, and my sister Rosa used to cord. And old Mack Moran used to play. Jimmy Dickins used to play, little Jimmy Pelletier.
LP: Yes.
EB: Henry Pelletier used to play. I mean we had fiddlers coming out of our ears.
LP: Yeah.
EB: There wasn't one dull moment down there. We were poor but by God.
AP: There was always a dance.
EB: Sometimes, we'd start to dance at Sunday, and we go right straight through to the following weekend. And we'd go from house to house.
AP: We'd put a dime inside a piece of cake. And who they wanted to take to the dance, they'd put it in the third piece. Then they'd put the dime in the third piece. There's one guy who said, "You get that thing in your cake?" "No." He swallowed his dime, gonna make him dance now.
LP: Good one. Have a party.
AP: Jimmy LaRocque that was.
LP: Yeah, you know what I loved also were pie socials.
AP: Yeah, we used to have good pie socials. It passed a lot of time.
LP: Mhmm. Yeah, got to meet a lot of people.
EB: Yeah, even though we were poor, but boy we enjoyed ourselves. How in the hell did we manage from living from one holiday to the other?
AP: It's harder today.

EB: Where did mom get the Easter eggs from? Mom used to go around out in the yard, and she would hide the Easter eggs. And then she said, "Oh the Easter bunny was here." We used to go out and, except for one day I didn't find a damn thing. James and Norman, my youngest brother, got all the Easter eggs. I didn't get anything. I didn't find any. You know the holidays were a good thing for us.
AP: New Year's was a big day for us.
LP: So, in Cree you would call what they're eating rubaboo?
AP: Boolets.
LP: Boolets.
SD: So, Agnes and Elffie, does anyone in your family speak Michif, or do you speak Michif?
AP: Oh yeah, we all talk Michif.
SD: Okay.
AP: Yeah.
SD: Do you speak Michif?
AP: Talk Michif.
EB: Oh God.
SD: People in your family did they speak Michif?
AP: Oh yeah.
EB: If we didn't, we'd got slapped right on the face. "You guys are this, you talk that."
SD: Oh.
EB: Mom couldn't talk English that good. It was always Michif, and we had to learn it, one way or another.
AP: Yeah, everybody talked Michif.
EB: Nowadays, you bring it up, they look at one another. "What the hell is going on?" "What kind of language is this?"
AP: Yeah, I think some of them pretend they don't know.
SD: Do you guys know any traditional Métis stories or songs?
LP: Start a song Auntie, we'll join in. Sing a little Half-breed song.
AP: (Sings song in Cree.)
LP: That's pretty cute.
AP: Oh, gee whiz.
SD: Do you know quite a few songs Agnes?
AP: I know a lot of songs, but…
SD: Maybe after I could record them if you want. It's pretty hard to find songs. Well, I haven't found too many yet. I'd really like to find some more.
AP: Cree songs?
SD: Métis songs.
AP: You have some?
SD: No? Elffie do you know any old Métis hunting stories or any other kind of Métis stories?
EB: No, I know my auntie. In order for us to go to bed, my mother's sister used to sit beside

our bed and she'd tell stories.
EL: The Roogaroo?
EB: And this was Cree.
AP: The Roogaroos, hey?
EB: And she would tell us stories for about two hours. The next thing you know, we're sound asleep. The next day, when we were sitting there having whatever we're eating, "Auntie did you finish telling us?" "No, you were sleeping." "Can you finish it tonight?" "Okay, I'll finish it tonight."
SD: What kind of stories were these?
EB: Oh, just make up stories.
SD: Oh okay.
EB: Yeah, just made-up stories about I don't know what. Those old people were talking Cree. That's how we went to bed, by my auntie telling us Cree stories. And they weren't true stories they were just made-up stories. Oh, but they were really nice stories. And oh my God, Sunday afternoon, we'd sit around after having our meal. "Auntie can you tell us a story? "Today is Sunday, we're not going to sit." "Tell us a story." All of us would sit around on the floor, and she'd be sitting in the middle.
AP: They used to tell stories.
EB: Then she would just tell.
AP: They'd play cards and tell stories.
EB: And we'd sit there and we'd listen to her talk and telling the stories.
SD: And you said she'd tell stories in Cree?
EB: She would talk Cree.
SD: And who was this auntie?
EB: She was a Grandbois.
SD: Sorry, what was that?
EB: Grandbois
SD: Grandbois.
AP: That's big wood. Big wood.
SD: Really?
EB: What?
AP: That means big wood, Grandbois.
EB: Well, that's something new to me.
AP: Don't you understand? "Grand" is big.
LP: Yes.
AP: And "bois" is wood.
EB: But her name was Grandbois.
SD: That was her maiden name?
EB: Yeah, her marriage name.
AP: Yeah.

EB: She was a Flamant. She was a sister to my mother. They were from St. Lazare. St. Lazare was a little Métis community with mixed French and Cree. Like that's where the Brazeaus used to live.
AP: People talked only Cree long ago.
EB: Oh yeah.
AP: When we were small, all we heard was Cree, Cree, Cree.
EB: And there were some people, even some kids they used to go to school and all they understand was Cree. They couldn't understand English.
LP: We couldn't speak Cree when my generation went to school.
AP: We learned English from our neighbours. We had McClellans there.
LP: Well, the only Cree you could speak was swearing.
AP: Oh jeez.
EB: Swear. Swear at the nuns.
EL: That's the first thing you learn really when you're a kid, right? You don't forget that word.
LP: Mhmm, yeah.
EL: You don't forget that word.
LP: Mihkwaan!
EL: Yeah, exactly like, like little…
EL: That just means big c…
EB: Oh my God.
AP: Mihkwaan, no.
LP: Yes, it does.
AP: No.
EL: Does that mean frog?
EB: No, that means that.
EL: Ribbit ribbit.
AP: You're Mihkwaan. You're a female that's what it is.
EL: No.
AP: You ask anybody they'll tell you.
SD: Okay we're getting off track here. I better ask another question.
AP: It's getting bad.
SD: Can you tell me the names of other Métis families that lived in your communities?
AP: Desjarlais.
LP: Blondeaus.
EL: Caplettes.
AP: Blondeaus, Desjarlais.
LP: Poitras.
AP: Poitras.
EB: Morans.
AP: Morans.

SD: Okay.
AP: Dubois.
SD: So, this is all the same community that you were talking about?
EB: Mhmm.
SD: So how did your family and other Métis families make a living in that road allowance?
AP: Picking Seneca roots in the summertime, .10 cents a pound. We used to soak them in the water to make them heavier. You got less for that. No matter where you went, there were people all over you because the wagons were going by.
LP: How did you make money on the road allowance for your family?
NW: Well, my dad worked for farmers.
EL: Yeah, our dad did, too.
NW: Farmers, and the winter was the "ice bang" as they called it. They delivered blocks of ice to people, and tried to sell it, and that kind of thing.
AP: Old Greg worked at the Indian school.
SD: And how about you Elffie do you remember how folks made a living on a road allowance?
EB: No, what we used to do was try to go make heads or tails for food. And even in the summertime, Dad used to work for the Indian school at one time.
AP: That's where old Greg worked, too.
EB: He had to quit because he fell off of the hay loft and busted his ribs. And that was it. And then he used to sell ice in wintertime.
AP: And Dad worked on the track.
EB: Used to go out and chop some ice, load it up on a flat deck on a sleigh. And Dad would go sell the ice. In those days, we never had a deepfreeze. No such thing as a fridge or deepfreeze. We had a root cellar. What they used to do, was they opened the window and shoot the ice down, and somebody would be there packing the ice. And then we'd cover up the ice with dirt, grass and all that, whatever we had down there to try and keep it from thawing out. It used to be good for just about all summer.
SD: What kind of resources did your families harvest, Elffie and Agnes?
AP: What do you mean?
SD: Plants, animals, hunting, picking plants, herbs, berries.
AP: Oh, we picked berries in the summer time. Digging Seneca roots, grenns, chokecherries. We crushed them and dried them. Mix them up in the wintertime. Everybody lived the same way.
EB: Just like when Agnes was telling me. She said, "My sister used to have lots of chokecherries piled up on the blanket." And I guess the foreman came along and said, "Jackie, what are those?" He said, "Those are what they call grenn burgers."
AP: That was the foreman from the Métis Farm and had these chokecherries drying up outside. He said, "What in the world do you call this?" "We call them grenn burgers." He's so crazy that Jackie.

EB: Yeah, that's just what Agnes was saying. In the summertime, we'd pick up berries and Mom would can them. That will do it for the winter.
SD: What all kinds of berries?
AP: Everybody did the same, Saskatoons.
EB: Pin cherries, Saskatoons, gooseberries, and strawberries.
AP: In those days, you dried a lot of berries.
EB: Raspberries, and mom used to make…
AP: Everybody did the same.
SD: You say people used to dry the berries?
AP: Dried them. Chokecherries, you crushed them.
EB: Yeah.
AP: And you make little bundles to dry in the sun. Then you put them in a bag for the winter.
SD: But all the other berries, how were they preserved?
AP: Well, you cook those.
LP: Pin cherries were canned.
AP: Canned Saskatoons.
EB: Saskatoons were canned, too, and we'd have Saskatoon pie.
AP: Everybody lived the same.
EB: And then it would come close to Christmas, Mom would have a treat.
AP: In summertime, we ate gophers, rats, rabbits.
EB: And apple pie and raisin pie. Oh my God. We thought we were living in heaven. We couldn't wait until Christmas came around, any of the holidays.
AP: On New Year's, we had a three-layered cake. No matter where you went there was a three-layered cake in the middle of the table.
EB: Yeah.
AP: Pie.
EB: And every place we would go and…
AP: Bayngs. We call them bayns, fried bread. What we were eating here, you know those?
EB: What we used to do, we used to feed them bullets, like we were having right there, and bannock.
LP: And rubaboo.
AP: Rubaboo.
EB: And a shot of wine.
AP: Homemade brew.
LP: Rubaboo is fat and was made into a porridge. It was made in greasy fats.
EB: Yeah, Mom used to make homemade wine.
SD: And Agnes, you said your mom used to trap some animals for food?
AP: Gophers, rabbits. Everybody lived the same way.
EB: We used to go out in the wintertime. I'd trap muskrats and beavers. Dad used to skin them and sell the fur.

SD: And you ate the meat yet, too?
EB: Hey?
SD: Good meat?
EB: For eating.
SD: Okay.
EB: What choice did you have? Meat was meat in those days. In fact, if we were caught throwing them away, we'd get a hell of a beating.
SD: What sort of traditional medicines were used in your community and family?
AP: Oh mint. It was good for colds. Li boom, that was good. Mom used to be a doctor with her weeds and stuff. She was good for the heart.
SD: Your mom?
AP: That was strawberries and probably blueberries.
SD: So, your?
AP: Hawthorns
SD: So, your mom was good at certain kind of medicines?
AP: Yeah.
SD: Your dad was good at other kind of?
AP: He worked on the track.
SD: But you said your mom was good?
AP: She used to heal hearts.
SD: She knew what kind of medicine to pick?
AP: Yeah, she knew strawberries, hawthorns.
EB: When we were growing up, we asked Agie this, too. We never heard of cancer.
AP: No, there was no cancer.
EB: Never heard about that. The only thing we heard about would be TB.
AP: It was TB.
EB: I told her how cancer came in all that shit chemicals that they're growing out in the farms to make their farm grow better.
AP: You know we never used to have any needles those days. What people had was TB, and they landed in the sanatorium.
EB: That was number one for us. And of course, the number one was your heart, but never heard about it really.
SD: So, heart troubles and TB was the main troubles?
EB: Yeah, yeah.
AP: Yeah.
SD: And you folks usually had a cure for heart problems?
AP: Oh, my mom did, yeah.
SD: What about for TB, no one had a cure?
AP: No.
EB: Well, we had a sanatorium.

AP: The sanatorium, we had so many relatives in there.
EB: Some would come out, and some wouldn't come out.
AP: ____ was in there for so many years, and my sister Marie, Fred, Joe, there was so many of them. I don't know how I got away with everything.
EB: Your mom knew heart medicine?
AP: Oh yeah.
EB: And what was your mom's name again?
AP: Celina
SD: Celina?
AP: Parisien.
SD: Parisien. Okay. Did you have anyone in your family that made beaded or embroidered moccasins?
AP: Mom did that. She made braided rugs. She made beaded rugs as well.
EB: Oh, mom used to do that too, if we got the hide. If we could get the hide, she'd make it but…
SD: You didn't tan the hide yourself?
EB: No.
SD: You'd buy it?
EB: No, Dad would sometimes get it, but sometimes there'd be some lady that would come. It takes a lot of work.
SD: It does.
AP: Yeah.
EB: Takes a lot of work.
EL: My dad was a trapper.
AP: He was a hunter. Good.
SD: Did your dad hunt Elsie?
EL: Oh yeah, he did.
AP: And my uncle.
EL: He did hides.
EB: Dad used to hook up the one horse and a stone-boat, and then between the stone-oat, there used to be a seat for my dad, and a little box in the back. And he'd go around checking the traps. Load up whatever he'd catch. He'd put it in there and he'd come home. Sometimes, he'd have a little parcel for the horse, a little gift. Give him maybe a few oats. Oh Jesus, you'd think that horse was in heaven. And he used to sit out there. He used to shoot a rabbit and would cook it right out there. Yeah, I went out with my dad. Couple of times and…
AP: Yeah, those muskrats were warm.
EB: Oh yeah. And then dad used to say, "There's a storm coming." And where in the hell did my father used to go? He used to in the old shack. He'd head for that shack. That shack was good for shelter.

AP: We all had mud shacks.
EB: The horse would have shelter. We'd have shelter. And we'd pray for the winters. You know it was just like I was telling you about that Yukon TV show. That's what they do. They have those shacks all over, in case they can't make it back to their cottage. Well they got little shacks. That reminds me of how we used to live.
AP: There used to be twelve houses in Chicago there except Alex Desjarlais had a lumber house.
SD: So, these beaded or embroidered or braided rugs, do you know what happened to any of those?
AP: Oh, we sold them. Yeah, when mom made braided rugs, I'd have to go and sell them.
SD: Okay.
AP: .65 cents.
EB: Yeah, that's what Mom used to make a living on.
SD: How about beadwork moccasins or anything that was embroidered, do you know what happened to any of those?
AP: Oh, we'd sell them. We had to make money somehow.
EB: Mom never used to sell them. She used to make them for us for the winter. And oh my God, those things used to be warm. One pair of socks, and moccasins and a old shoes or rubber. And you'd have the warmest Goddamn feet you ever had in your life.
EL: Quit swearing.
LP: We had to. We all lived with dirt floors and one layer of linoleum.
EB: Hey?
EL: I told you to quit swearing.
EL: Hit him, kick him. Kick him in the butt.
LP: Our floors were made of dirt, and there was one piece of linoleum, if you were lucky so you had to have those socks.
AP: Oh yeah, the floors were just bare.
LP: So, there was no getting out of it. That's the truth.
AP: I remember when I had to scrub those board floors. No linoleum, no rugs, no way. We used to put the brush from ashes and then scrub the board. The board would just go white. Well ashes kind of rough, you know.
SD: So where was this, in your home?
AP: No, when I worked out in houses. I had to work. I was the oldest.
EB: I was thirteen years old when we moved out of road allowance.
AP: Well, sometimes they gave me clothes, too, shoes, coat.
EB: And then we moved into town. We didn't even know what the hell electricity was. "What the hell is this?" Turn it on, and there the lights go on. Oh my God. We thought we were in heaven.
SD: So, you didn't know what electricity was when you moved?
EB: Well of course we did, but you know to live with it.

SD: No experience.
EB: We never lived in a house with the power on. That was another thing, the phone.
AP: Oh, the phones, the party line.
EB: Especially, when they had the party line.
AP: Yeah.
EB: First time the phone rang, all the phones rang.
AP: All the phones rang when one phone rang.
SD: Okay.
AP: Of course, everybody listened to your gossip, and this farmer knew this old lady was breathing heavy. You know through the phone you could hear everything. He said, "Hello, Mrs. …" He knew it was her. He could hear her breathing. Everybody knew each others' business.
EB: We come up so far, it's not even funny, cell phones, radios in the car. All you gotta do is press a button. You can talk to anybody in there.
LP: I can't live without a radio or TV.
EB: What the hell. How did we live before?
SD: Okay so back to this important question. Does anyone know where there might be some old moccasins or beadwork?
AP: Some what?
SD: Old moccasins, or anything embroidered, or hook rugs.
AP: Oh boy.
SD: Do you know if any of those things are still around?
AP: Oh yeah, hooked rugs are still around.
EB: I'm thinking of that hut in Lebret. They've got a whole bunch of native stuff in there. I mean a whole bunch.
AP: What hut is that?
EB: Where James Parisien used to live. It used to be the meat shop at one time, where Morris Schmidt used to have that meat shop.
LP: You talking uptown?
EB: Yeah, in Lebret. Now, because I was in there and I saw a whole bunch of braided dresses and…
AP: Where's this at?
LP: There's a guy in Fort Qu'Appelle who runs this shop.
EB: No, this is in Lebret.
EL: It's Aboriginal.
EB: Is it? What the hell they call it? Red Hut?
EL: No, she's not Métis. She's…
EB: No, but she gets all the Métis clothes.
AP: Oh.
EB: And all that.

AP: That store.
EB: So, I wouldn't be surprised if they have some Métis moccasins and all that. But they gotta be old. They can't be brand new.
AP: Well people give their stuff.
LP: You know Marlene Parisien might have some Grandma Melanie's moccasins.
AP: Grandma she lived with me.
LP: Marlene was pretty good at saving things.
AP: Grandma lived with me until she went, right?
LP: Yeah.
EB: Those braided rugs Mom used to make those, and then she used to sell them.
AP: Mom made those beaded moccasins and stuff.
EB: Well, we're not talking about moccasins, we're talking about braided rugs.
AP: Braided rugs are not hard to make.
EB: Oh, no. Hell, I can even make them myself.
LP: Yeah, but they want something that was made way back.
AP: Long ago.
EB: But you know we used to wear those things out. They used to get wore out.
LP: Maybe Peewee Blondeau might have a few of his mom and dad's, too. Peewee might have some of his mom and dad's, you never know.
EB: No.
SD: Agnes and Elffie, what are your best memories about living in a road allowance community?
AP: Oh, getting all together. There were no enemies in those days. Everybody got along.
EB: In those days, we never heard of that.
SD: Okay.
EB: And we used to get up with a smile on our face.
AP: Go pick berries.
EB: Whatever mom had in the tent, we'd eat that. Go to bed with a smile on our face.
AP: At dances, sometimes there'd be big fights.
EB: Go to bed like that. But put it this way, we never had another choice, but to enjoy life. We just thanked God that we're still here to talk about it, but we had a pretty rough life.
AP: But there's no other way. That's the only way.
EB: Yeah, there's no other way we had to live. How in the hell did our parents survive us? No education, you know? But they always found something. Yeah, they always had food on the table. Every Sunday my mom used to have that old man St. Denis come to dinner. He always came to dinner. There was always food on the table.
AP: Had to go to church every Sunday. A three-layered cake on New Year's. No matter how poor you were, you managed to get that three-layered cake, and bullets, ground chokecherries, and everybody had the same thing.
SD: How about Agnes, I never got a chance to ask you this, are there any bad memories that

you'd like to share?
AP: Bad memories?
SD: Yeah.
AP: Oh, there's a lot. Yeah, there's a lot.
SD: Do you feel comfortable sharing them right now, or would you like to share them later?
AP: No, no, it's not worth talking about it. I went through hell.
SD: Okay.
EB: It's just like what I was saying a few minutes back. Why talk about it, it's over.
AP: Yeah.
EB: We're living here. We're enjoying ourselves. We'd just like to thank you for the interview.
AP: Did you learn anything?
SD: Oh yeah. Well and the purpose of it is so that future generations can learn.
EB: Well, you know the hell of it is the future generation can only get this far.
AP: They don't talk to me nowadays. It would be hard for them to talk Cree because nobody talks Cree now.
EB: Oh yeah. Well, you see with our Cree, we talk our own Cree.
LP: Michif.
AP: The Métis language is a mix of French and Cree.
EB: And this lady right there she can talk Cree, real Cree from the north. And man, it's just like she's singing. I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" "Well, it's Cree."
AP: "They still eat gophers over there," she said. "If they like gophers what's wrong with that?"
EB: It's just like…
AP: Prairie chickens. That's good meat.
EB: French. They got the low French, and they got high French. Frenchmen here they can talk French, but they go to Quebec that's real French. In Montreal, that's real French.
AP: Our language is French and Cree mixed together. That's the way the Métis spoke—French and Cree. I guess that's what we're half-breeds.
LP: And other ones, too. It's a Heinz '57.
SD: I'll end this interview right now.