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JIMMY IZBISTER

Mr. Izbister is a long time resident of La Ronge and one of the first members of the Metis Association there.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- La Ronge; before and after the road came.
- Early meetings of the Metis Association in La Ronge.
- Problems in the north resulting from welfare payments.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Jimmy Izbister is a long time resident of La Ronge and one of the first members of the Metis Association in La Ronge. A friend of Brady.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: Jimmy, could you tell me a bit about what La Ronge was like, what the area was like, thirty years ago? You know, after the war. Who was living here and what were people doing then?

Jimmy: There wasn't very many alright but they were fishing.

That's what they were doing, fishing. Mostly prospecting and fishing. Thirty years ago, there wasn't very much. There was only about three, four stores. Yeah, three stores. Three stores, Chris Olsen, Hudson's Bay, and...

Murray: Robertson's?

Jimmy: Yeah, well it wasn't... La Ronge Groceries then.

Murray: What kind of community was there? What did people do at night to get together? Did you visit back and forth?

Jimmy: Oh, they had some dances and visiting. That's how they lived. They never went on a drunk because there was hardly any liquor. (chuckles)

Murray: Right. Were people happier then than they are now do you think?

Jimmy: Yes, they were, they were. They were a lot better off than what they are right now.

Murray: Why do you think that is? Why were they better off then?

Jimmy: Well, you see this here welfare and stuff like that now, the people are not trying to work. They are depending on this here, too much on welfare.

Murray: And that didn't happen then, eh?

Jimmy: Never happened then. They made a lot of lazy guys.

Murray: Everybody worked back then, eh?

Jimmy: Everybody worked.

Murray: Were they trapping and fishing and...?

Jimmy: Trapping and fishing.

Murray: Living off the land, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: When you say there were dances and those kinds of things, who would organize those dances?

Jimmy: Well, sometimes it was the church, you know, an old pie social or something like that. To bring up some money for the church. And then, like for sickness or something like that. We had to reserve some money out. That's in around 35 years ago. They had a little... somebody looked after the money in case if anybody got sick in the north, they could pay for it.

Murray: This was the church that did that was it?

Jimmy: Yeah. Well, it wasn't really the church. I think it was a woman's WA or something. Anyway, there was a few men in with it. I know about that. They fixed up a kind of little collection.

Murray: Do you remember the names of people who were involved in that?

Jimmy: No, I couldn't. Even sometimes now I don't remember my grandchild. See, my head is...

Murray: You got hurt in that accident.

Jimmy: Yeah, and sometimes I can't even remember my grandchildren who are living here, till I lay down and rest and then I think of them.

Murray: Right. Were there quite a few dances and those kinds of things in those days?

Jimmy: Oh, there was a few. There weren't very many, you know. Like we used to have a hall out here. I didn't know where that money went to. But house dances and things like that, you know, there would be a collection and I think that went to the church. But that hall dance, I think it went to a private owner.

Murray: Did that go on for a long time, many years? Those kinds of dances and things like that or did they not last very long?

Jimmy: They didn't last very long. Maybe three years or two years, something like that. Then they quiet down since the road come in, you see.

Murray: So those things stopped when the road came in?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: When did the road come in? After the war?

Jimmy: 1947.

Murray: Yeah, I think that's what I've heard before.

Jimmy: 1947. I used to have the records of all... and then my tent burnt down and everything burnt. And I can't just remember, especially late now, you know. I can't remember.

Murray: A bit fuzzy, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah. Especially when I get tired.

Murray: What other kinds of things did the road bring? What changes came with the road?

Jimmy: Oh, they brought in some tourists. The tourist business started up and there was a lot of guys working out from the tourist outfitters; kept them out of welfare.

Murray: So that was good and it provided jobs for people.

Jimmy: Sure, sure.

(break in tape)

Murray: Do you think that the road brought more good things or more bad things to La Ronge?

Jimmy: It sure helped to get the young fellows in mischief anyway.

Murray: Is that right? What kind of mischief would they get into?

Jimmy: Oh, they were into stealing, everything.

Murray: And that didn't used to happen before the road, eh?

Jimmy: You had your cabin wide open with money on the table, it would never be touched, them days. Them old days.

Murray: This before the road, eh?

Jimmy: Nowadays, you can have three locks, they still get in.

Murray: So there wasn't very much crime at all before the road, eh?

Jimmy: No, not with youngsters. Just the older generation used to get caught whenever trapping over season.

Murray: But as far as crime against each other there wasn't very much, eh?

Jimmy: No, no, there wasn't.

Murray: How did the road make that change? Why did young people start to steal do you think?

Jimmy: Other people showing them.

Murray: The white people, eh?

Jimmy: Not only white people. There were native Indians from the south too, you know. They got learned from their people.

Murray: When they came north.

Jimmy: When they came up north. That's the only thing I can think of.

Murray: When did you start to notice the change? Was it

pretty soon after the road came or did it take a few years?

Jimmy: Yeah, it was just a few years after the road came in.

Murray: Is that when welfare came as well, the same time about that the road came in?

Jimmy: No, it was a few years after that.

Murray: Do you think most Indian and Metis people think the same, that the welfare is bad for people and that the road brought a lot of trouble?

Jimmy: Oh, I couldn't tell you, I couldn't tell you that. I didn't talk to them.

Murray: But that's your feeling?

Jimmy: That's my feeling about it.

Murray: Yeah. Was there much alcohol in La Ronge before the road came in?

Jimmy: No, there wasn't. Sure, they'd send for it in Prince Albert. A plane would come in, maybe there might be about six, seven forties, but they'd all get together and have a little drink. Nobody got drunk.

Murray: So nobody had a bottle to themselves?

Jimmy: No, no.

Murray: And were these sort of social parties and everybody had a good time?

Jimmy: Oh yeah.

Murray: And that's different now, eh?

Jimmy: It's all different. As soon as they get a bottle in there, you got to watch or you get clobbered over the head.

Murray: Like Tommy Haroldson?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: So do you think native people now are not as close and friendly? They are more competing with each other?

Jimmy: They are not friendly with each other now. Not as what they used to be. Just the older generations, I guess. But the younger generations, they are not like the old people.

Murray: How are they different?

Jimmy: Well, they even fight one another. You never heard about that years ago around here. That was a, it seemed like

that was a crime if anybody...

Murray: If an Indian hit another Indian.

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: So that hardly ever happened before the alcohol started coming in, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Were there any native leaders in those days?

Jimmy: Oh, the Indian band had four and a chief, here. They had councillors and a chief them days.

Murray: So he was sort of a leader was he? Would people go to him if they had problems?

Jimmy: Well, that was on the reserve.

Murray: On the reserve.

Jimmy: On the reserve. But us, we didn't have no head chief. Our head chief was the cop.

Murray: The cop. Did the Indian and Metis people live together on the reserve in those days a lot or was it...?

Jimmy: Not very much.

Murray: So was there a separation in those two communities?

Jimmy: Yeah, there was a separation.

Murray: So if you were Metis you would associate mostly with Metis people and if you were treaty you would associate...

Jimmy: They all would associate together.

Murray: Together. But you'd live in different spots?

Jimmy: In spots.

Murray: What would happen if a Metis person was having difficulty, if he got hurt and couldn't work? Would other people help him out?

Jimmy: Yeah, they would.

Murray: That was just something that would happen. You wouldn't have to go and ask for help? People would just help you out?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Were there any particular people that you would go to

if you were in trouble, if you had some problem?

Jimmy: Oh, you could go to the stores, the storekeepers. They used to help quite a lot.

Murray: But there wasn't any Metis leader of any sort in those days, eh? That you would go to like a chief or something?

Jimmy: No, there wasn't.

Murray: What were the police like in those days?

Jimmy: Oh, they were pretty good. There wasn't very many. They used dogs. The same way with the field officer. He had a big ground to look after and he used to go all the way around, back around by Iron House all the way through Stanley and Cumberland and all that. Now there is about sixty or seventy that fellow, what he used to do.

Murray: Right.

Jimmy: The same way with the cops. There was only one cop and he looked after Reindeer and all those places and he went by boat and dogs.

Murray: That's all that was needed was one cop?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: What kinds of things would he be looking after?

Jimmy: Well, I couldn't say.

Murray: Fights or something maybe if he was...?

Jimmy: Fights. He'd have to make that round for sure. The same way with the field officer. Whether he was wanted there but he had to make that round.

Murray: He would just check on things as he went?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Can you remember when you first met Jim Brady?

Jimmy: Now, it was after the war. I couldn't remember. 1949? 1950.

Murray: He was in La Ronge in 1950 I think, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: And he was in Cumberland for a while before that.

Jimmy: I think he was in here, when I met him, I think it was in 1951. Now I couldn't say for sure.

Murray: I think that's about when he came, 1950, 1951, to La Ronge. What kind of man do you remember Jim Brady to be?

Jimmy: Oh, he was an awful nice guy. (Inaudible) He was really more for Indians than anybody else. Well, he was with Metis too.

Murray: Right.

Jimmy: And this Malcolm Norris, he come in after and he started to talk and he used to be over at Jim Brady's camp. But after he got mixed up in this here Metis business and I haven't got no papers of that. Either Stan or Janet. I had a couple slips of them but when everything burnt I...

Murray: It was gone.

Jimmy: The copies, see we had four or five copies of it. He had his own typewriter. And I don't know where all them went to.

Murray: What would these be? What would be on paper?

Jimmy: Oh that was members of...

Murray: Oh, I see. A list of members.

Jimmy: And how we're going to go at it you know, and stuff like that. We had to put out so much money to get one fellow to go and talk out. Go out you know, go talk for...

Murray: You would raise money among yourselves so that someone could go out and organize somewhere else?

Jimmy: Organize, yeah.

Murray: Where would that person, what place would he go?

Jimmy: Oh, I don't know. I think he'd go to Ottawa, to the first headquarters he'd get to.

Murray: The top, eh? Would they send people out to other communities too, to talk to people? Like Sucker River or Reindeer, places like that?

Jimmy: Well, now like I'm not sure. We might have had one from Stanley, I couldn't say for sure. And one from Pinehouse, I think. And Molanosa.

Murray: Would Jim have gone to those places to talk to people or would that be someone else?

Jimmy: No, that would be someone else. I don't think he went once.

Murray: He stayed in La Ronge, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember who it might have been who went to those places?

Jimmy: No, I have no idea because I was out, you see.

Murray: You weren't at the meetings then.

Jimmy: No.

Murray: When you would see Brady, where would you usually see him? Would you see him at his house or on the street or...?

Jimmy: Right at his house.

Murray: Did people go to his house a lot?

Jimmy: Quite a lot. Well, that's where they'd have the meetings. I was there once, for the first meeting when they tried to organize. And then I was up here once. That's the only two meetings I think I was ever into. I seen Jim Brady before but, well I had to keep on working.

Murray: Right. Do you remember what year that first meeting was?

Jimmy: 1959 or 1960. No, maybe in '60 somewhere.

Murray: 1964 maybe or would it be earlier than that?

Jimmy: Oh I couldn't say. It was in '60 anyway. But my brother and them, they should know that.

Murray: They remember that, eh. What kinds of things would people talk about when they met over at Jim Brady's house?

Jimmy: Oh, about this Metis Association. They wanted to bring that out. That's why they go to that.

Murray: What kinds of things did they hope that the Association would be able to do?

Jimmy: Well, I have no idea. I haven't been to their meetings.

Murray: But that one meeting? Do you remember what they talked about in that first meeting?

Jimmy: Well, we had to get organized and have some numbers. So we all get together and that was it.

Murray: Would you go out and talk to other people and say, "We're having a meeting, come to the meeting,"? That's the

kind of thing you would do, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what they'd do. I was only once here to do that.

Murray: Right. Do you remember what Jim said at that first meeting? What he was talking about as far as native rights and that were concerned.

Jimmy: Oh, I have no idea. (Inaudible).

Murray: Right. Was it Indian and Metis people in the organization or was it just the Metis?

Jimmy: No, just the Metis.

Murray: Just the Metis, eh?

Jimmy: I went there once that the Indians were going to give, to start it off for us. Like you know, help. And I think there was two. They joined us and they were Indians, a native band, treaty Indians.

Murray: And they joined the Metis Association?

Jimmy: Yeah. They were going to work and try to work in so's to get everything organized, I guess. I wasn't there but Jim was telling me this when I come back that time.

Murray: You don't know the names of those two Indian fellows, eh?

Jimmy: One was Adam, Adam Henry Charles. And the other one I don't know. There was two of them I'm pretty sure. Oh, Abbie, Abbie Halkett, that's one that got lost with...

Murray: With Jim.

Jimmy: And there was another one. He joined up after I guess.

Murray: Is this Adam Charles still around?

Jimmy: Yeah. I seen him here last, oh a week ago. I don't know just where he's living. He lives in the reserve.

Murray: You say you didn't go to very many meetings but did they have quite a few? Do you know how many they used to have? How often would they meet?

Jimmy: Well, the ones that I went to, they must have been about, the first one about around ten. And then the next one that was up here while I was up here, they must have had about around fifteen or maybe more. I didn't count them because there was no secretary then. Just a listening.

Murray: Right, just informal, eh.

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Would they have a meeting once a month or once a week? How often?

Jimmy: Now I don't know. I couldn't tell you. I think it was supposed to be once a month but I don't think they did have. See, the people are out working in the summer.

Murray: Right. Was that when the first meeting happened, in the summertime?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Was there a president and a secretary and that sort of thing of the Association after a while?

Jimmy: I think there was. I think there was.

Murray: That didn't happen right at first though, eh?

Jimmy: No, that didn't. I think that third meeting they had, I think that's when they kind of organized the... I belonged to it. I did my card alright, you know.

Murray: Right. Who was first elected president?

Jimmy: I have no idea.

Murray: Would it have been Jim do you think?

Jimmy: I think it was. Jim was one.

Murray: And you mentioned the name of the secretary before. That's ...

Jimmy: That's Stan Durocher.

Murray: Stan Durocher. Was he the first secretary do you think? Do you remember that? Was he involved in it right from the start?

Jimmy: Right from the start. I think he was the first one.

Murray: Did the Metis Association try to help people who needed help? Do you remember any kind of thing like that?

Jimmy: Well, it wasn't big enough and it hadn't went through the way that I heard it. They couldn't help nobody. Now when they did get a little power, what I heard, that they helped the rich but they didn't help the poor.

Murray: The Metis Association, eh? That's been in the last few years, after Brady died, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah, that's why I don't belong to it now. I just left it myself. I don't live very long anyway.

Murray: So the Metis Society these days isn't very popular with the people, eh?

Jimmy: No. Sure they are building houses all around but nothing in La Ronge.

Murray: Right.

Jimmy: Any damn house that they use..., no you'd be better off if you seen Stan Durocher and he'd tell you a lot more because he tended to the meetings more than I...

Murray: More than you did? I'm just wondering if you remember any names of people who were at the meetings that you were at that are still around La Ronge besides Stan and Janet and your brother? Who were some of the other people who might have come to the meetings?

Jimmy: Oh, Gilbert Arthur Sanderson I know for a fact. Oh, I can't think of it.

Murray: Was Brady a popular man with the people?

Jimmy: Yes, he was.

Murray: Would people go to him just as an individual for help?

Jimmy: Sure, yeah.

Murray: What kinds of things might they go to him for?

Jimmy: Oh, he helped a lot of people out. For food, something like that.

Murray: Or a place to sleep.

Jimmy: A place to sleep. I know a couple of guys, one woman and another guy, they couldn't get no credit. Took them over to the store and he'd give them credit. That's how he was.

Murray: That's the kind of thing he would do, eh? And he would lend money to people if they were broke?

Jimmy: If they were broke or they were stuck to go back or something like that, well he'd lend them money. Yeah. Sure know him, boy. Well, ever since I met him I stayed with him a few nights, you know, talk, have a beer and drink a little bit.

Murray: He liked to talk, eh?

Jimmy: Oh he talked.

Murray: Was he a good talker? Did you like to listen to him?

Jimmy: Oh cripe, he was. He'd outtalk a lawyer I think.

Murray: What did he like to talk about? Anything or everything?

Jimmy: Oh, anything, prospecting and mining. But he was interested in this Metis all the time, that's what he was...

Murray: So he was talking politics a lot, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Did he encourage Indian people to be proud of their ancestry?

Jimmy: Oh yes, yeah.

Murray: Do you think he had an effect on people? Did people listen to him?

Jimmy: Well, I couldn't say, but he was really good at everything. I can say that.

Murray: Do you think that when Brady talked to people about organizing the Metis Association that they understood what he wanted and that they saw what he wanted them to see?

Jimmy: Oh yeah, well that's, they didn't see nothing. Well, some of them seen them housing and stuff like that, alright. But otherwise if it wasn't, a lot of this here now that is going on, it's all welfare. Now they can't see nothing.

Murray: So it's hard to organize people now, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah, it's pretty hard to organize people because of that darn welfare. Made a lazy bunch.

Murray: Right. Were there any other people besides Brady who were good leaders who talked like Brady did and tried to organize the Association?

Jimmy: Well, my brother Ernie and Stan Durocher, them were the ones that was really...

Murray: Those were the three. Those two and Brady were the three strongest ones, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: And Janet Fietz.

Jimmy: And Janet Fietz and there is a Bill, darn it, he's from Wollaston.

Murray: Bill Daniels?

Jimmy: Bill Daniels.

Murray: He would know Brady too, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah. And they worked pretty well together. And when they have a meeting in the (inaudible) hall, they just rub it into the big stuff.

Murray: Like the government people, eh?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember any meetings?

Jimmy: No, I had never went to any.

Murray: But you heard about that?

Jimmy: Yeah, I heard about it.

Murray: Well, unless there is something else you can think of, we can...

Jimmy: No, I can't think of anymore. I'm not well you know.

Murray: Right, it's hard to think of those things when you're sick, yeah.

Jimmy: Sometimes I'm just like daylight and sometimes I'm kind of, like I'm dizzy.

Murray: In a fog sort of, eh.

Jimmy: Yeah, see once it starts to hurt right up to here and then I'm out.

(End of Side A)

(End of Tape)

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