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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Raised in northeastern Saskatchewan on Manitoba border.
Traditional lifestyle.
- Memories of childhood in the bush.
- Regrets at changes in lifestyle and values.
- Account of her husband's disappearance in the bush.
- Lack of housing and facilities for elderly people in Sandy Bay.
Annie Richard interviewed by Janet Fietz 311981, Sandy
Bay, Saskatchewan, for the Oral History Project, INDIAN AND
METIS ELDERS OF LA RONGE. (Partial transcript and translation
from Cree.)

My father was a good provider. We used to move around a lot. He used to be a real good trapper. We were never out of food. As long as I can remember, I never saw him take a drink of whiskey. My mother never used it either. They were very quiet people. He used to fish too, for sturgeon. We used to move from Sandy Bay to other places where he used to fish and hunt for moose. We used to visit Pukatawagan, Pelican Narrows, Little La Pas where I was born. This is the way we lived, always moving around from place to place. I used to get very tired paddling and going over portages, packing stuff on my back over the portages. I used to pack a canoe over portages too.

When my father used to kill a moose, we used to have lots of work drying meat. We were never hungry as my father really

looked after us good.

Since my father died there have been many times when my mother didn't have things she needed. It is not so long ago that they started looking after old people, giving them the old age pension. Some of us had to fish. I used to set snares for rabbits to make a living. My mother used to set a fish net and trap too. I used to trap when I was young. Even when my father was alive we used to have our own trap lines.

I never saw my grandfather but my father used to tell us about him. We lived with my grandmother for a long time. She used to go paddling and hunting and used to make her own living. She had her own canoe which she used to paddle herself. My grandfather taught my father hunting and how to trap.

My father used to make birch bark canoes. This is something the old people used to do. He used to peel the birch trees until he had gathered enough for a canoe. He used to make these at Pelican Narrows. He used to make lots of these birch bark canoes. It took him a long time to sew them together. These are the only canoes they had for travelling around. Sometimes my mother used to tell him to stop making them and to go hunting instead. When we used to go hunting, the whole family went along.

This land where Jackson's store is now, is the land my uncle used to have. He lived here and used to fish for

sturgeon just out here where that island is. There used to be a portage here. We lived there in the bay. This land, where all these houses are, used to be all our land. My father, my uncle and our chief used to live here at that time. The chief's name was Cornelius Bear. He was my father's brother. He was a very good speaker at treaty time and at meetings everywhere. He was the one who spoke for the people about a better living and better housing. He was a fisherman and a trapper. He did all these things until he got sick. Lots of his children are still living here. They never visit me. It seems to me that I have no relatives around. One's name is Pierre. I never see him although he lives close by here. He is always drunk.

My father used to tell us there used to be five houses here before. I don't remember myself as I was just a little child then. They used to hunt caribou and moose all around here. All the stoves they had were the ones made of clay and stone. Since the power house at the dam has been here, they spoiled everything. We have to use their power now for stoves and other things.

We used to go home late in the evening after the men finished looking after the nets. We used to go over the portage. They used to haul all of the fish they caught home. They used to pull heavy loads. It seems they never stopped working.

Since they built the dam we have no sturgeon here. They spoiled our fishing for us.

Long ago there were lots of good people. They made a good living. They earned their own living. I guess lots of people notice that.

We were never taught English in those days. We learned things from our parents. I still remember my parents teaching me. Now lots of children learn of other things. They are real smart.

My uncle's name was Cornelius Bear, my father's name was Pierre Bear, my mother's name was Mary Ann Bear and my uncle's wife's name was Harriet Bear. I had lots of brothers older than me. There are only two of us left. My brother is younger than me.

My father used to tell us about ministers who were preaching around here. They had spruce bow houses at that time. They had a big one made for them where they used to gather. They were all Catholic priests. One stayed here for a long time until he got too old to work.

Question - Do you think it is better for the children to go to school now? Do you think they are taught to respect people as we were taught in the old days?

I think they are treated the same way as before. The children were taught to respect everyone. Even in school, they are taught how to make a living but they can't make a living in any way.

The young boys and girls are always playing around doing nothing useful. Since the old age pension was given to us, the young folk live off of us. They ask the old people for money instead of working to make a living. The old folks are partly to blame as they give their money away to these young folk so easily.

I have lots of grandchildren that go to school, I look after two of them. I buy warm clothes and shoes for them while they attend school. I have one grandson that lives far away. He comes to visit once a year. He went to high school. He told us he would be here this coming Christmas. I brought him up. He was a small boy when he started living with us. He has great respect for me.

I have another grandson, I don't think he is right in the head because he breaks everything. He has no respect for anyone. I got him sent out somewhere, where they keep those kind of people. I am sorry he had to go because he could have helped me a lot. I blame liquor for that. Also, the stuff they smoke.

My husband was in the army. He was a soldier. He was married at Cumberland House. When his first wife died, he came

here. He lived with his first wife for four years. He was a very good, educated man. He drank a bit. When he came up here, I married him. He worked at building the dam here, which is straight across from here. He always worked at Island Falls until he got his pension, the pension they get when they work for so many years. From then on he was poor. He was always sick. We told him all the time, "Don't drink. Don't go out in the bush by yourself." He used to take liquor in the bush and drink over there by himself. We used to try to follow him but he used to disappear from us. He used to take an axe with him. We found him three times. From then on I did not look for him. I hoped they would send him to a place where they could keep him so he would not get lost, down south where they keep old people. I told the head people at that time but they did not listen to me. So it happened one day that he took off. He was never seen or heard of since. Until today, we have not

seen or heard from him since he got lost in the bush. If anyone has heard of him or seen him, I wish they would let me know as I always wonder where he went.

Question - Was he a soldier?

Yes, he was a soldier in the First World War. He came from Winnipeg. He was an Indian. He knew a lot of things as he came from a big city. He always wished he had learned English but his father only taught him how to speak French. He could speak a little English but could not write it. He was always sorry he could not write it.

(Speaks briefly of his work at the dam.)

We used to have big gardens here. We used to get around 50 bags of potatoes in the fall. My husband used to pay for the land every year. He built a big house there and a dock too. Since they started building houses, they took away my home and land and they also chopped up the dock which my husband had built for us, using it for firewood. Now I am poor. They made me move away from there. They hauled my house away. My husband was a good carpenter. You can still see how big the garden was today and where our house stood. They took away my house and gave me this little shack which was very cold in the winter. I think I will freeze here yet this coming winter.

Question - Did he lease this land or buy it?

He leased it, not buy it.

Question - Are they building an old folks home here?

No, they are not. My sister's home is falling apart too. The roofing blows off. The ones that are the heads of this place are the ones that are taking our homes from us. They came to us with pieces of paper. We put our "X" on it and our land and homes are gone. They did not even tell us what this paper was about.

Collector - This should not have happened. They should have had someone to explain all these things to you so you would understand what was happening. Also, they should have someone to speak for you in getting housing for the old people. We have homes for our old people. They are sure happy there.

This house I live in is about 100 years old, it is falling apart... (general comments about wanting an old folks home). I asked one of the heads of this place, who is my grandson, "When are they going to start building homes for us?" They said, after they finish the other houses, then they will start building houses for me and one for Angus Bear. I would like a house, even a small one as long as it is warm. One man came to see me. He told me they should have built me a house long ago.

We used to go visiting at Pukatawagan but we lived here on this point. That's where we had our gardens.

At treaty time, there used to be lots of people here from all over the place. Friends of my father used to laugh a lot, telling each other stories of trapping and hunting. There used to be men who came with the treaty party. One's name was "Weasel" (Alfred Sanderson). Another man, they called Fox. There used to be lots of fun, eating and dancing. I used to like to see the old folks dance. We used to have lots to eat, fish and meat and anything we had at that time. The treaty party also gave out welfare. We seldom went as we did not like welfare.

Some old people from here used to work on those long boats that used to haul freight on the Churchill River. Lots of them died of such hard work hauling stuff over the portages. It was real hard on those boats. Lots of them are buried along the Churchill River. I used to watch the boats when they were along the shoreline ready to leave. My father used to give them dry meat to eat along their journey. They all used to shake hands and wish them a good journey. These people used to wear clothes made of leather. They had lovely clothes. They used to have dances too while they stopped here. They would dress in their best clothes. They were lovely to look at, all merry and dancing.

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