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RAYMOND ARMSTRONG

Raymond Armstrong, born on the West Bay Reserve, led an unhappy childhood in a variety of foster homes. He began drinking alcohol when only five years old. His alcohol addiction led him into trouble with the police, a life of pimping and bootlegging in Toronto, and a charge of attempted murder before he married and quit drinking.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Miserable childhood in a variety of foster homes where the life of adults and children was dominated by alcohol.
- Attendance at day school. Treatment by priests and nuns.
Tony: ...1984 and I'm in the home of Raymond Armstrong who I'm talking to on the West Bay Reserve on Manitoulin Island.
Raymond, first of all, when were you born?

Raymond: 1937, July 17.

Tony: And where were you born?

Raymond: West Bay.

Tony: You were born here in West Bay?

Raymond: Yes.

Tony: And where did you grow up?

Raymond: In West Bay until I was, maybe, I was about four years old when my parents left me. Four or five years old.

Tony: What happened to you then?

Raymond: I was in one foster home to another. Because I remember when I was in the foster home at the end of the war in Blind River. We were living in Blind River then in 1945. We might have been there from 1944 but I remember quite well at the end of the war, 1945, where they were drinking and dancing right on the streets. And my mother wasn't too far from where we were living then in the foster home. And I was running back and forth to my mother's place where there was quite a bit of drinking then. I didn't know that at the time. All I knew was that they were drinking juice out of a bottle which I learned later on in the years they call katabo (?) or Four Aces in them days. And I used to drink that and it used to make me feel good. Not knowing what it was doing to me.

Tony: When you say you used to drink it, you used to drink it when you were a kid, you're saying now?

Raymond: When I was about four or five years old, yes, in 1945.

Tony: You were drinking then?

Raymond: Yes.

Tony: You didn't know what you were drinking?

Raymond: I didn't know what I was drinking. This is the stuff that I found at my mother's residence but I wasn't living there. But I used to go there to visit.

Tony: You said, "We were in foster homes." Did you have brothers and sisters?

Raymond: Yes, I had brothers and sisters. At the time, maybe in 1944 we were taken from the reserve here in West Bay by the Indian agent over to what they call the shelter in Sudbury and we lived there all summer in one room. A room that I can say now, which is only about the size of a bedroom. Maybe eight by ten. It wasn't too wide and there was only one bed. The girls would sleep on the bed and me, they put me in the corner on the floor. And they would bring our food on a paper plate, not on a dish because they were scared that we might do something or cut ourselves or try to commit suicide if they would bring a plate or a fork. And there was only a spoon. I learned later that the prisoners are only using spoons to eat their meals, and this is how we were treated in that shelter where we were living. And this is when I started to, maybe, resent my parents or the white people that were doing this to me. It wasn't everybody that I hated. I got along well with the white people because that's where I got most of my education from, my English. I didn't do very well in school. I only went, maybe as far as grade 6. But all the English that I know now is what I picked up from the skid row where I lived for sixteen years in Toronto. And then going back now again to when I was a kid living in a foster home. One foster home to another. If I had

made a mess in bed, I'd be kicked out of that foster home or else I'd be put in a dog house for the night, or in a chicken coop. I'd be locked in there for the night.

Tony: Were these Indian homes you were in or white homes?

Raymond: White homes.

Tony: How many foster homes do you think you went to?

Raymond: Oh, at that particular time from 1945 until 1950, I'd say about, maybe anywheres from 25 to 35. And if I was eating too much at the table, then the people wouldn't want us anymore because it would cost them too much to keep us. If we ate too much food, it would take up all the money to buy the grub of what we were eating. So this is where I started to resent not only the white people, the clergymen, the priests. Any clergyman that came around, I resented them because a man with a black dress was something to me. In the later years, I learned that I had to bow my head or lift up my head whenever I met these men. And the women that taught me, too, they are called sisters and nuns. They don't dress like that now.

They dress just like the way we are. In them years, in 1945 to 1950, they had to be dressed in black. And I know because I was trapped many a times by the clergymen, the priests, the sisters. And I knew what was going on and I knew what they were doing, because I was doing all their dirty work.

Tony: How do you mean you were doing their dirty work? What do you mean by that?

Raymond: Well, like mopping the floors and taking out the garbage, setting the tables, helping the house worker. Whenever they had a party I'd be the one that would be picking up the pieces, say like the broken bottles and broken glass on the floor. I'd be doing that and I'd be picking it up on my hands and knees. It would have to be all swept up before the head of the rectory came home. Anyone who was at the head of the rectory or anyplace where I lived. Any white man's home.

It's not only the white man's home this happened. It happened into my own relatives' home where I ate out of a frying pan three times a day. I was lucky if I ate three times a day. At times I only ate maybe twice a day. And at that time, a bag of rolled oats might have been only three or four dollars a bag, and this is the only thing that we lived on. Any other thing besides, if we wanted something else, they'd cook us some eggs. And there was lots of eggs on the farm then where we were living. The eggs that we had to gather ourselves. If we broke one egg, that meant that we didn't have no egg that day, me and my sister. I learned that I was put up with later years. So maybe that's why my sister died from, from cirrhosis of the liver.

Tony: Well, you went through all these foster homes and then you ended up living with some relatives?

Raymond: Yes.

Tony: Whereabouts?

Raymond: In Wikwemikong.

Tony: In Wikwemikong. But when did you start drinking at your mother's place?

Raymond: When I was about five years old.

Tony: And when were you at Wikwemikong with your relatives?

Raymond: When I was about six years old.

Tony: Oh, so this was about a year later you were now living at Wikwemikong?

Raymond: Yeah, because this is in 1946.

Tony: And why were you eating out of a fry pan?

Raymond: Because all they had was two dishes, maybe three or four cups and we ate out of a wooden spoon. They didn't have any spoons. If we ate out of a spoon it was just one that we found on the side of the road or in the garbage someplace. But it would always be a wooden spoon. We had our own wooden spoons that we were using. And then a frying pan, a big frying pan we'd use with only maybe a cupful of porridge, maybe a half a cupful of porridge. That's all we had. Maybe one egg. And a bun about half the size of my fist. That's all we had. This is the Indian bread they call scone, bannock. That's all we had. Just twice a day, three times a day. We were lucky if it was three times a day.

Tony: How many people were living in this house?

Raymond: There was only the four of us.

Tony: Who was the other one, your sister?

Raymond: My sister, my youngest sister, she was a year younger than I am, and then my grandmother's sister and her common-law husband. And we were getting welfare. I used to see the Indian agent visiting that home. I didn't know he was the Indian agent. I knew him because I was pretty happy when he came because every time that he came, he came with a pocket full of candy he'd bring us. And I used to see him giving stuff to the people where we were living and we never seen this stuff again. Maybe a bag of candy that he'd leave us behind. We didn't see this. Maybe, it would be when he came. If he happened to come by, maybe the following week or the next day (because there used to be a short cut there), he'd stop there. And my grandmother's sister, she'd make sure that we had that sucker in our mouth when that Indian agent was there. That's the only time that we got it. Any other time we didn't. And I

used to have to steal that for us during the night so we'd have our belly full. I always carried a pocketful of porridge for my sister.

Tony: Dry porridge?

Raymond: Yes.

Tony: Dry rolled oats?

Raymond: Yes, just dry rolled oats. I always had a pocket full of that. We'd go back in the bush and eat it someplace out of my pocket. And this is how we got filled up.

Tony: How did you come to be living with your relatives after you'd been moved around to all those foster homes?

Raymond: Well, it was through the Indian agent. And my grandmother was very close to the Indian agent, so this is how I got there. Why this was, maybe my grandmother had something to do with it because my grandmother was an interpreter in court and she was working with the Children's Aid. There was only one Children's Aid woman here who they called, Mrs. Long was her name. And she worked all over the island. And it wasn't here, it was in Sudbury where we were taken out of our home, out of our parent's home. It wasn't in here, here in the reserve. It was after my parents moved to Sudbury. And we were picking berries then, outside of Sudbury - what they call Whitefish Reserve now. This is where we were living, in a tent.

My dad drank quite a bit, my mother had started to drink quite a bit and this is how they got separated. It was all through alcohol. And my dad, I used to see him drink shaving lotion. I didn't know then at the time that it was shaving lotion. Because my dad died drinking antifreeze from a car - that he drained out of a car. That's what he drank, so it killed him. I guess this is the stuff that he used to drink, shaving lotions. Because I used to see all these bottles behind the tent where we were living, or on the side of the track where he'd be spending most of his day with some of his friends that came around. It wasn't any big bottles, it was just the small bottles they were drinking out of. And I didn't know that they were drinking shaving lotion at the time. It was just something that smelled real nice. I used to carry a bottle in my pocket just to smell nice. And then this is what my father drank, I guess. It took him. This is what took my dad, alcohol. It wasn't alcohol, it was something else that he drank but if it wasn't for the alcohol, he would have been still living today. He wasn't that old. He was only about 51 years old when he died. So that's what killed him, drinking that antifreeze. I worked with antifreeze you know, sometimes. I drank it myself when I lived in this (inaudible).

But going back again, when I lived in 1945, 1946 when I lived in Wikwemikong, I used to see an awful lot of this homemade

brew, making homemade brew. Because the people that looked after us never used to buy any food. They used to buy a bag of shorts(?) and then maybe a bag of sugar, lot of raisins and yeast cake. And this is the stuff that they used to make the

homebrew out of and they invited all their friends. But they would buy a bag of rolled oats along with this and that's all we'd have. Maybe a few pounds of lard. And we used to eat rolled oats with grease, salt and pepper. I never ate porridge with sugar, it was always salt and pepper and grease. That's why I like my porridge with salt and pepper. That's just how I was brought up. People wonder now sometimes when they see me here, when they come in if it's in the morning. If there is any leftover porridge, my family gone to school, my girl - if her porridge is not warm enough, well I'll just throw it in the frying pan. I'll eat it like that. I'll put it in a dish and I'll eat it with salt and pepper. People wonder how I can eat my porridge with salt and pepper but this is how I was brought up, eating porridge with salt and pepper.

Tony: So how long did you live with your relatives in Wikwemikong?

Raymond: Oh, I lived with them for about two years.

Tony: Did you continue to drink then?

Raymond: Yes.

Tony: Or had you stopped?

Raymond: As I said before they used to buy a lot of stuff, bran to make booze out of. What they call, it used to be a bag of shorts, a hundred pound bag of shorts. They make homebrew out of. And I used to see those beans and we'd get hungry because the only thing that we were living on was porridge. We used to see those beans after they had strained this homebrew and we used to eat those beans. And the raisins that we'd see, the raisins were sweet because we liked them. We used to eat the beans and then it got to be that we knew where they were hiding this homebrew. It was under a manure pile. We used to go and get a tomato can full. My sister had her own can. We'd make a mud pie playing in a sand pile right by the river. We'd pretend that we'd have mud water in there whenever the man came by to look at us, see how we were doing. And here we were drinking this sweet stuff. It wasn't even done yet. Maybe that's why our bellies were so big. Because it was full of yeast yet, it wasn't done. And this is how we were like. We were like that. My sister, she was like that. She was always big. Maybe it's from drinking this homebrew that was never done. It wasn't set right. We just started drinking it right away, as soon as it was set. I was always glad when I knew that there'd be a party; they would get us to strain this in

the barn. If the Mountie went in - they knew the Mounties were going to come - they'd have us playing on the manure pile and the Mounties wouldn't come near us. They'd just laugh at us.

Maybe they threw a stick of gum at us. Because that's where this booze was and the Mounties wouldn't come near where we were. And that's what we were used for. If it wasn't for us, they wouldn't have that booze today. They wouldn't have had the parties that they had. But it was only for us, the money that they got to look after us, why they were having those parties. And the only way that they didn't get caught was by us sitting on that manure pile where the stuff was being made. Because, you know, manure is very warm. They can put anything in the manure pile because that manure is warm all the time, in winter. Don't matter how cold it is, if you have anything in there, because I learned later in the years it's the thing that you could keep warm on. I didn't know this then, at the time, but I know now. Because this is the only reason why they kept us was on account of that, their parties, to keep having those parties. To keep up with their friends. They'd use booze to ask people to come to their place and have parties.

They had an old what they called a record player that used to have to wind. They'd have my little sister standing by the record player and she used to have to wind that record player by hand with her two little arms going like this, winding that. Winding the record player for them so they'd stepdance and all this and sing. They'd listen to that and my little sister sitting on a log by there or standing in the corner. If there wasn't any log there they'd make her stand there for two or three hours at a time. She got too tired, I'd take her place then. They bought this through our money. They were looking after us, getting paid welfare money; this is how they got this record player. It was a record player that would stand about that high. I remember my sister broke the spring on that, something broke. She was whipped. She was licked for about a week for that. Somebody, I seen them fixing it. I didn't know at the time it was a spring but they put something that was coiled up in there. It was fixed again. And she didn't wind it anymore, it was me that was doing that. Winding the record player then. Later on in the years, maybe in a year, they asked her to do it again when I wasn't available, when I was out straining homebrew in the barn.

It was only a one room house where we were living. Maybe eight by twelve or eight by ten. There was a box stove right in the middle of the floor with their bed right across the little homemade bed from where we were. It was just a bag full of straw. A box that was made into a bed where this bag of straw was thrown in. There was just a big box and this is where we slept. Right beside the box stove and I'd have to keep that fire going all night. If it went out that meant that I had to

go and stand out in the cold for an hour. But I would make sure that stove was going because I didn't want to go and stand outside for an hour. We lived back in the country. There wasn't that many neighbors around. The only time that we seen someone is if they were looking for a drink or if they were looking for something to borrow or if they were looking for someone to haul their wood out of the bush. Or someone to come and cut wood in the bush because Wikki (Wikwemikong) is a crown

land. You can go and cut anyplace that you want to cut wood there. I didn't know that at the time. But in the years to come, I thought that they owned the land, too. They'd be the relatives of the family where we were living. No, I found out later on in the years that it was crown land. Anybody could have come and built a house right alongside of the house where we were living, I found out later.

But I know now, if it wasn't for the alcohol, I wouldn't have the resentments that I have, that I had at one time. I had found my way to work these resentments out of my system, out of me. It took a long time. I thought I'd straighten up everybody by moving over to the city. But no, I ruined my life by going to the city. I brainwashed myself living in the skid row for sixteen years.

Tony: When you left your relatives in Wikwemikong, you said you were only there for a year or two, where did you go then, Raymond?

Raymond: We came over to my grandmother's place here.

Tony: In West Bay?

Raymond: In West Bay. Not too far from here, maybe about a couple of miles from here. I lived on that farm for about three or four years after I got married. I had pretty near everything what they had when I was living there. When I moved back there, when I was brought up to my grandmother's place again by the same Indian agent and the Children's Aid woman, the same thing happened again. They were making homebrew, having parties...

Tony: Your grandmother was?

Raymond: Yes. Only this time there was more open, there was more people, there was more neighbors around. But there wasn't that much. It was only maybe once a month, once every two weeks maybe. Not as often as it used to be where we were before. It used to be every other day where we were before. My grandmother, she was a little different because she was a religious person. It was something that you had to do. If she told you not to eat fish that day, she wouldn't put fish on the

table. All she'd have was something that she wanted you to eat on the table, and that's what you had to eat. She was that strict and that religious.

And then from that time, my mother was getting back on her feet then, I guess, back in Blind River. She was living with somebody else again. She'd come and get us every now and then to go and visit her for a month or two on our summer holidays. And this is where there was a lot of drinking done again. My mother was always into parties. Anyone that she lived with was always drinking. Maybe she didn't want to drink at times but there was people all around, people around all the time that drank. But she had to drink to keep up with the people that

was around in there. I used to see her sitting on the side of her bed crying, wondering why she was crying. And I'd come over and she'd tell me, "If it wasn't for this," and she'd pick up a bottle that was sitting beside her bed and say, "If it wasn't for this, we'd be all together now. All the girls would be with us now, your sisters and your brother. I don't know where your sisters are now, I don't know where your brother is now," she'd say. And then I'd run out again. She'd come out of there again when the neighbors came and drank. They started to drink, dance. And I started to pick up the wine bottles. There'd be a little bit, about that much in a wine bottle.

Tony: About an inch in the bottle?

Raymond: About an inch or half an inch and I'd put this all together until I got maybe a cupful. Maybe I'd get a can someplace laying around the house, a tomato can. And if there was maybe about half a tomato can, I'd go and get my sister. I'd say, "Look what I have, it's sweet." She'd grab for it, she drank half of it and I drank the other half. We started all over the neighbors, picking up all the wine bottles, take it back in the bush. When we were doing this we used to see a lot of things going back in that bush, people drinking. People would say, "Okay, this stuff is sweet. You run over to the store, I want some cigarettes or tobacco." There wasn't that much cigarettes in them years. It was mostly tobacco in them years. So I used to run over to the store for them and they'd give us maybe half a bottle of this stuff that they were drinking. Or wine, whatever they'd be drinking. And that's what I'd get paid for running over to the store to get their tobacco. I liked the stuff.

Tony: So you were getting wine for tobacco?

Raymond: I was getting, no, I was getting tobacco. See, we had wine from these men. They would laugh and they'd pour some wine into my tomato can, make a big laugh out of it. I'd run back into another section of the bush where my sister was, maybe another girl, and then this is where we'd drink this because it was sweet. Because we hardly ever knew what a pop was because in them days it was in the big bottles; it was cheap. Whenever we had seven cents, we'd go get a bottle of pop. It was very seldom that we had any. And it got to be that I learned to steal money from the people that were passed out. And this is how I'd get my pop, oranges, candies, and suckers. Suckers were only a nickel then. Suckers were about as big as your tongue.

Tony: So when people passed out, you'd go and look for money on them, eh?

Raymond: I'd go and look for money on them. I'd be just sitting on the side of the house waiting for people to pass out, anyone. Or anybody's purse. A woman's purse, to grab it. They wouldn't see me if they were dancing and partying in the house. I'd walk out with something else. I'd just throw maybe

an old shirt or an old sweater over and I'd walk out with the purse and look into the purse and take it back in again. Or threw it someplace in the house. Sometimes we'd get a lot of money from that. I lost a lot of money that way by hiding it in the bush. It would get wet, get soaked. We'd go and look for it again, it would be soaked, it wouldn't be any good. We'd have to dry it out on a stone. This is when I used to go and live with my mother.

Tony: Oh, so you went and lived with your mother after a while?

Raymond: Every now and then, yes. And we used to take off from there again, from the beatings that we got.

Tony: Who beat you?

Raymond: From the man that she was living with, her common-law husband. Because these people would come back and say, "Where is my money? I lost some money here yesterday." And then they'd see us with all this candy. They'd ask. They'd soon find out that we didn't get it. We named somebody that had given us the money. They'd say, "I don't remember giving them any monies," and then we'd get a licking for it. So, I learned again, to go and get change for that money. I don't know how much money it would be, maybe a few dollar bills, five dollars. I'd put it in a little bag because just silver, if it gets wet,

it wouldn't spoil; it would be still the same. But if it was in bills, it would soak and then it would be no good again if it got soaked, if it rained during the night. But this silver would be still the same. I learned that the hard way, after losing most of the money that I had stolen maybe for a week or through the weekend. I'd land up with nothing. We'd pick up beer bottles, we'd sell them at the breweries or sell them to somebody. Pick up pop bottles, sell them to the store for a candy. Whenever we came back to my grandmother's, it would be work, hard work. My grandfather would just be sitting in the shade. I doubt that he'd be working there someplace. We'd be hoeing the garden. Whenever the school started, we'd walk two and a half, three miles to school. Right downtown in there from the country, from out the country.

Tony: In downtown, you mean downtown in West Bay?

Raymond: West Bay, yes. And then about halfway to the lake where you're living now, that's where we lived then. Just this side of the boundary line. Towards the way the places where you're staying. And then we'd walk from there, everyday, rain or shine. There wasn't any roads like there is now. There was only wagon trails, muddy, hardly any decent bridges. We'd have to make our own trails in order to have a decent trail and then when we made our own trails in the bush we never knew where it was. We had a lot of trails in the bush. We knew where south and west was. We never got lost in the bush because we were used to living in the bush, all the time that we spent the time in the bush when our mother was drinking or our foster parents

were drinking. We spent a lot of time in the bush and we spent a lot of time sleeping together, me and my sister, trying to keep ourselves warm during the night. And then my sister died, I felt like as if she took part of me when she died.

Tony: Did she die then, around that time?

Raymond: No.

Tony: Much later on?

Raymond: She died later on.

Tony: So how long were you living with your grandmother and going back and forth to your mother's place?

Raymond: Until, when I was maybe about fourteen years old. But I was making my homebrew then, at that time. I started to work

when I was eleven years old, twelve years old working in the saw mill. Because I was always taught how to run a team of horses; I could handle a team of horses in the bush. This is how I was brought up.

Tony: Who taught you those things?

Raymond: My grandfather, my stepgrandfather.

Tony: When he wasn't drinking?

Raymond: Yes. My stepgrandfather. He taught me everything that I know now, everything that I do now. Gardening, that's what I do now. I have my own garden here now every summer since I've gotten married. But in them days, it was hard. I had to do it alone. Like working in the saw mill. At times I'd have to take a whole pile of lumber by myself. It was rough. Lumber was heavy then. I was used to the heavy work then, maybe at that time. I was used to working in the bush. I was a rough character. Because when I left the reserve here to go to Toronto, I was 187 pounds and I was able to lift maybe four bags of cement, three bags. The other guys would only be able to lift two bags of cement at a time when I didn't have no trouble lifting four bags of cement at a time. And that was at that age, the younger years before I left to go in to the city. But I had a good life at times. But it was through the clergymen again. I had to do this, I had to do that. I drank a lot of priests' wine. I worked in the church a lot, splitting wood for the priests, keeping fire for the priests. He'd take off and go for a walk in the reserve and visit the community. I'd gyp his wine because he always had an open bottle of wine here and there.

Tony: So he didn't know you were drinking it?

Raymond: He didn't know that I was drinking it. But I always made sure that the bottle had the same amount in it because I'd go and pour some water in it for him not to miss anything.

But he might have missed it, I don't know. But he never said anything but he kept asking me to do things for him. Which I never got paid for. If I could get paid. He asked me to stay with him, he'd hand me a cigarette. I'd have a cigarette with him which I used to get sick on at first. But I learned all this when I was living in Blind River with my mother. We used to puff on cigarettes. When I was six or seven years old I learned how to smoke. I learned how to have that smoke come out of my ears, out of my nose. I used to get sick on it when I used to try and get it to come out of my nose. I used to see some guys doing it but I used to get awful sick when I tried

that smoke come out of my nose but I used to be able to do it. And this is where I learned how to smoke. I don't smoke that much now. When I visit and talk, like now, I smoke. But I try to stay away from it as much as I can. I smoke when I'm visiting. When I sit around here at home.

Tony: How did you come in contact with the priest? How did you come to be working there?

Raymond: My grandmother was the choir leader at the church here. She was with the choir and we went to church every Sunday on a horse and wagon. Rain or shine, on a horse and buggy, maybe. We'd be sitting at the back of the buggy with a blanket over us. Because there would be...

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(Side B)

Raymond: She did a lot of voluntary work in the church with the other women. At that time it was the nuns that were teaching school here then. They were my school teachers so she got to know them pretty well. If they needed some meat, we always had meat. Some fresh pork. They'd make me walk down, even if it was raining or the sun was out, I'd still come downtown. But I always managed to steal a horse in the pasture, our own horse, and I'd come down through the back. I'd go downtown on horseback. In later years I started to learn to run away from home. I was a runaway.

Tony: When was that?

Raymond: When I was about nine or ten years old. Because I had to do a lot of work - when I'd get home from school, early in the mornings. My friends, they didn't do any work. If I didn't do anything right, I'd get the strap that night before going to bed and it was a strap. If it wasn't a strap it would be a stick. They'd make me go and get a stick in the bush; they'd tell me what kind of stick. Something that was hard and something that was hard to break. They'd bring this up to my bed and they'd make me strip right down to the skin and this is where I'd be whipped then.

Tony: They'd make you go out in the bush to get a stick to get beaten with?

Raymond: Yeah, and I did that. Because if I didn't, I'd get whipped maybe two, three times a night. Every night for three days. I done it in order to get away from the whipping, one

night whippings. And I usually just closed my eyes and clenched my teeth. Maybe I didn't feel a thing for a minute or two at times. The next day I could hardly sit around. I could hardly sit in my desk at school. I was always getting told off why I wasn't sitting still. Because I was getting sore sitting on one side and I'd sit on one side for half a day. My work had to be done, my school work. I was always given lots of homework. If it wasn't done, well, it meant that I'd have to stay behind after school. Maybe bring in wood for the school teacher. Do some chores. And then maybe kneeling on the corner someplace for a half an hour in front of the class the next day. If I didn't do my work right, this is what I got by the school teacher, from the nun. They make you kneel right in front of the class and it's very hard to kneel on the floor with nothing except the material that you have on your knees. Maybe a pair of pants. And you kneel on that wooden floor for half an hour and you got to be on your knees for a half an hour.

And this is when you started to, you look at those nuns and this is where the resentment builds up. Used to build up. I didn't know I had this resentment till I started to drink myself later on in the years. Maybe I used to get drunk, I don't know. Whenever I'd have a chance to steal the homebrew from someplace, I'd steal it. I'd pass out in the barn. I'd wake up the next morning cold. I'd go home, I'd get whipped again because I'd been in a blackout all night not knowing where I was and I didn't want to come home in the condition I was in. Maybe they knew that I was drinking but they didn't want to admit that I had been drinking, they didn't want to tell me why I was being hit. Because it was all through alcohol why I was leading this life, why I was going through this, why I was suffering through this. Now, I know this because any normal child that you see now, in the reserve here, any community that you go, don't build up any resentment from child, bringing up a child like I was brought up.

My parents would have been still together at that time if it wasn't for the alcohol. But no, they had to turn to something easy when they had troubles. Financial troubles, I know now. They had a lot of financial troubles. Not too far from my lot here, there is a gravel pit, a hundred acres of land they sold for \$75 for a bottle of whiskey when they were drinking. And this is what alcohol can do to people. I did it myself when I was drinking later on in the years. Because, in my talk now, I was only about eight or nine years old when the teachers would make me kneel on my knees for half an hour, the nuns, the priests. If I didn't know my catechism, if I didn't memorize my catechism or the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary, if I didn't know one, if I couldn't say my Deck of Beads, they'd make me do this. They'd make me kneel in that one corner. They'd be

sitting in the next room looking at me, laughing away, maybe drinking tea. I don't know what they'd be drinking, juice or something. If I didn't know my catechism or my Our Father. The things that I knew, that I know now by heart. I knew an awful lot of things by heart. Because this is how I had to know them, I had to learn them the hard way.

And I had to walk in the dark in the bush sometimes to go home. Especially, it gets dark early in the fall. By four thirty it's dark. That's when they let you out of the school yard; then you got to walk home. And then you don't want to be late. If you went the long way, and I went through the short cut, that meant through the bush. I went through the bush. Many a times I got lost and I wouldn't get home until twelve o'clock at night and I'd get another beating again waiting for me. So maybe I'd go straight to the barn where I knew there was something warm for me to drink, not bothering going into the house. I knew I was going to get beaten. If I go straight to the barn, I'd go back to the house. By the time I'd get warmed up by this stuff that I drank - if I had a bottle stashed away, homebrew - I'd go back to the house. They'd have an excuse then to strap me. They said that I had been out drinking with the boys and I'd tell them that I was out with the boys. I wouldn't tell them that I had just come from the school and it took me four hours to get home or six hours. I didn't tell them I got lost in the bush. Because I had a pride in me, too. This was building up in me, the resentment, the pride. This is where it all started. That's right.

(break in tape)

Tony: Okay.

Raymond: Now, as I just said before, that the pride was getting to me, was starting to get work in me. I wouldn't tell them that I'd got lost in the bush. It got to the point that I was always getting into this all the time, getting into trouble in school, too. Just over for nothing. I created trouble. I'd do something deliberately, too, so I'd stay away. I'd only be at the school maybe for twenty minutes or fifteen minutes and they'd let me go. And I'd go to somebody else's home then where I'd gather up some boys and we'd head up for someplace where there was a party. This is where we'd steal homebrew again. Like I'd carry on the life again that I was leading before when I lived in Blind River, steal money again. Steal anything that I can sell. Anything that I could sell, anything that I could grab my hands onto. But I used to get lucky. I'd get money. Two dollars was lots then, a quarter was quite a bit. Because if I ever got a quarter, I'd be able to get three

bottles of pop then, in them days. A bottle of pop was only seven cents a bottle then in them days. A sucker was only two cents. That meant that I was able to get twelve suckers out of a twenty-five cents. I'd pass them around the school and I'd be a big shot. People would look at me, boys would look at me, boys and girls. I'd always have something for them. I always

wanted to be a leader.

Even when I was drinking, I'd sneak away to the dances. They used to have house dances. I'd make an excuse that I had to go and stay at my stepbrother-in-law's place. I'd tell my stepgrandbrother that I had to go home and do my homework or something and he'd say, "Yes." And then I'd head for the dance where I'd get all the booze. I wouldn't even go to the dance, into the house where the dance was. I would be beating around the bush, the house there. Because there was always somebody there with a jug of booze, a few jugs of booze. If I seen them going back into the house, I'd follow them. And then this is where I'd see them hiding their booze. Or their cream can. They used to come to the dances with a cream can full of booze. And then I'd get a bunch of guys and we'd go and hide the cream can someplace else again, or maybe throw it on a wagon. Steal somebody else's horses and take it to a different location. We'd have it there for a day or two. We'd have a big party. Take the girls over. Sure, there was always girls that wanted to drink. It wasn't hard to find girls that would drink. Or to sell that booze.

And this is where I started to stay away from home. I'd go and stay at somebody else's place. I was called a runaway. I didn't want to be home anyways half the time. I was getting beat up whenever I was late, five minutes late, ten minutes late. Well, I had an excuse to stay away then. I'd be too scared. I didn't want to get beat up again. But no, there was another reason why I was staying away. Why was because there was a cream can of booze someplace where I wanted to be. Or there was a gang of boys where I wanted to be, but some boys that were a lot older than I am and I wanted to be like them. And yet I was too small to be like what they were. I always wanted to be someone. Not knowing that I was ruining my life. I was abusing my life. It got to be that I was getting beat up by the boys who were jealous. It got to be that I was going back home with black eyes, a broken arm. If I had a broken arm or a sore arm, I wouldn't tell them. I'd tell my grandparents that I'd slipped at the barn and then I'd have an excuse not to go to school the next day. Then I wouldn't have to face this older boy that had beaten me up the night before. I always knew, I knew because I learned when I was young how to con people. How I was going to do this. I learned all this when I was in Blind River when I was young. I see people doing it. So I used to think, why don't I try the same thing. It worked; it didn't work sometimes. So, it was all from alcohol, booze.

I wasn't doing good in school because I was getting into a lot of booze, to a lot of trouble. I had a lot of blackouts. The first blackout that I had was when I was in Blind River.

Tony: When you were five years old?

Raymond: When I was five years old, yeah. That's the first blackout that I remember. I don't remember a thing for two, three days. I don't remember walking up to the boat and crossing that bay, getting over to the alley where we went, me

and my sister. And this woman wasn't home and we broke into her home. I don't know how long we were there but anyways we were told that we were there for about four days when this woman came home. Because she was away for about four days on a trip someplace. She came home. We were lucky enough that she was a friend of my mothers. And she only reported us to my mother, not to the police. If anything was going to be reported, it was either to the priests or to my mother. Never to the police. If anything was ever reported to the police, well they would eventually take us to the court or Children's Aid. But the priests, they'd hide everything from the police. They wouldn't do anything. We would just get licked.

That's the first blackout that I remember. Because when I came out of there I had maybe three or four hundred pennies. I had a bag, I took a boat across the bay alone and I went and hid that bag. I came back again. When I got back, this is when this woman was coming across the bay on a motorboat with her boy friend. And there we were just getting in the boat telling her that we were just sent there to see if she was home. She says, "No, I'm just getting home now." And then she seen that we had broken into her house. She had lots of food in there. We got into all of her food.

This is the woman that my mother told us later that she was living with a devil, that this woman was demon-possessed. As I know, too. I hear people talking about her now and then, that this woman was demon-possessed but she had everything. Maybe they were right because everything that was in that house was just like new. Everything that she owned. You wonder how she took it across to the bay to the little island where she was living - and she had everything. I haven't seen any of the things yet in my travels that she had in her house. The clothes that she had was all silk. Everything was new. Sure, she was a nice looking lady. But I remember when she got sick, when she told my mother to burn everything that she owned so that she could watch that stuff burn - all her clothing, all her shoes, suits. I don't know how many pairs of suits that she had. She was an alcoholic, like my mother was, like everyone that I knew was. And she died the last item that was burned was her veil that she always wore around her neck. When

that thing was burned up, that's when she passed down, too. That's when I was told that she was demon-possessed. I knew that she was demon-possessed. I could feel that. I know that now. What I used to feel whenever we went to her place. This was in them years, the first blackout I had.

Now, going back to when I was eight or nine years old. I used to get into trouble. I was a lot older then, maybe twelve. That's when I started to handle my own way because I always wanted to be someone. Stealing from the people that were at the dance, people that were passed out outside of the dance halls. Stealing their booze. Not knowing when I was getting home, not knowing how I got home. Not remembering what I had in my pocket whenever I woke up. Not remembering what I had had in my pocket. Until my grandmother came into my room one

time with a handful of watches. And a handful of wallets. And her saying, "Here, Raymond, where did you get those?" We'd look into the wallet, we see a driver's license there or somebody's identification card. It would be somebody else's name there, that we knew where it goes. And she'd make me walk over to that person's home and say, "Here." I wouldn't admit that I stole that wallet. I told them that I found it on the side of the road. They'd be happy because they'd been looking for it. This is the stuff that I used to steal because it used to be easy for me to pull out a man's wallet when they were passed out or sitting on a chair someplace drunk, sleeping. It wasn't hard for me to pull out their purses. Or the women's purses, to take them out of the house. Or to dig into their bra where I later found out where they carry their money. It wasn't hard for me to dig in there when they were passed out. Sure enough, I found a roll of bills.

I always had money hidden away someplace. Maybe there is lots of money that I had hid that I don't remember yet. I'll never be able to get maybe. Even today, I don't remember how much money I have in Stover, Bank of Commerce bank. But I have a bank account in Stover yet I don't know how much money I have in that bank. If you were going to ask me how much money I have in that bank, I don't know. And this is what alcohol did to me. What alcohol will do to a person. You don't remember your loose change. Like I have. I don't know where my bank book, I don't even know whether I ever had a bank book. But I know that I have some money there someplace.

Anyways, to get back to where I was. Twelve years old. I was doing good in school. They started to have dances here in the reserve. I wanted to go to the dances. I had to do extra work. I did extra work, I worked extra hours. If I was asked to go and sell a gallon of syrup someplace which was only four dollars a gallon at the time, I'd take back six dollars with me or five dollars - the money that I would get out of my own pocket or out of my own hole where I had the money, that I had

stolen the week before. So at least my grandparents would be happy then. I'd say, "I got a tip, a dollar tip for taking that over to him. This is how happy he was that he got that gallon of syrup and this was my tip. Here's five dollars. I don't need it, you keep it," I'd tell my grandmother. And she'd say, "Okay, you can go to the dance tonight." That was three miles away then. I'd head out, sure enough there would be boys waiting for me about a mile away from the farm. I'd bring out my booze. I'd go and hide it in the bush first and we'd come around the back way; we'd come and get it. We never got to the dance hall sometimes. I'd wake up in the hospital sometimes all beat up, not knowing how I got there, what happened. A broken arm. A broken jaw. But I always got out. Start all over again. Same routine over and over again. Doing chores to do at home, school, mud holes to walk through to school to face the priests and I'd have to do their chores again. I'd go and do their chores, I knew where their bottles were hidden. I'd have a good drink before I started out. There wouldn't be anything for me to run up three miles at dark. It

got to be that I was getting just as wild as anyone can be. Maybe I was an alcoholic before I ever hit skid row in Toronto. I think I know. I think I was an alcoholic before I ever hit the skid row in Toronto. Some people would say that they're born an alcoholic. I don't know how I was. But I had alcohol from the time that I can remember in 1944 until 1967 or 1961.

(break in tape)

Raymond: They started to have dances here in the reserve around 1950. Somewhere's around there. That's when I started to go to the dance as regular event. If they didn't let me, if I didn't get permission from my grandparents to go, well, I always had a way of getting away from the farm to get to the dances. There was always alcohol there, homebrew. There was always somebody making a batch and we always knew who was making homebrew. And I always had money, like I said that I was a thief. I always had money and I always had stuff stashed away here and there to trade for homebrew. Say, like maybe a gallon of syrup which was only four dollars. And homebrew was seventy-five cents a bottle then maybe, or fifty cents a bottle at that time. I'd get maybe eight or nine bottles for a gallon of homebrew. I made out pretty good. This would buy my way into the dance hall. Which at that time, was fifty cents to get in to the dance hall. If they didn't have enough money to pay for the orchestra that was playing there, well they passed a dish around. If you wanted to throw in a quarter or a dime, well, that was okay. As long as they had enough money to pay for that night and for the hall, that's all they were interested in. And there was always a group of us starting trouble. We had a group of girl friends that were doing the same thing.

Tony: What sort of trouble were you starting?

Raymond: A gang, gang fights. My sister was a leader, too, my younger sister. She was only a year younger than I was. She always got away with anything that she wanted from my grandmother. She always had money. She always had a way of getting paid. Because we had strawberries in our farm. We'd sell those to the tourists. She'd stand on the side of the road selling baskets - a dozen or more baskets a day to the tourists. She always managed to get half of the money that she made. Give me the half that she had, we'd go downtown and find our friends. If we didn't have any booze, we'd buy it.

And it was this booze then that they boil to make moonshine out of. Because I remember that one time that I dropped a rusty nail in a bottle of that, in a ketchup bottle, and I didn't see that rusty nail anyplace the next morning. That's how strong that stuff was. It just ate that rusty nail right up. I didn't see it. But you know what I did, I just put that bottle away with the rest of my homebrew, with the rest of that moonshine. I drank a lot of that. It was hard to swallow but just the feeling that give me when I drank it, that's why I drank it. There was always booze.

The only time I remember that I had a good Christmas was in 1951, we had a good Christmas and a good New Year's. I think it was in 1951 or in 1952 that Hank Williams died and he used to sing on the radio. I had a radio in the barn that I listened to while I was doing my chores in the morning. And then in the evening there was always the western music. I always used to listen to Hank Williams, Hank Snow. Anyways, that particular day on that New Year's when Hank Williams died in the back seat of a car, I heard it on the radio. It was a shock to the community here and then to my family because my grandparents liked to listen to the western music. Like every one of us did. And we had a good Christmas that year. Good New Year's, New Year's dances. I didn't get a black eye that year, that New Year's day.

But it started again. These episodes that I was going into, running away, staying away from home. I was taken away again. For a couple of years I was put in a boarding school in Spanish. They used to call it Garner School. This is why I was put there. I was being punished by being put away there. And it was run by the, the school was run by the priests. There was a girls school across the way. It was run by the nuns and the school where I was, it was very strict. We didn't get that much to eat either when I was there. School would be out at four, all you'd get is a crump of cabbage or a carrot or

a turnip and then you didn't get your supper again until six o'clock. And then you'd get your supper. At supper time again if you'd done something during the day, you'd be doing the dishes again half of the night. Maybe two, three of you guys doing them, where there was about maybe three or four hundred boys. I was always, I always landed up doing the chores because this is how I was brought up, on a farm. I was close to the animals. I was always doing the chores in the evening at that school, feeding the cattle and the horses. The few horses that they had.

I got to know the big boys and I hear that they were making moonshine, homebrew, in a manure pile again. As I was doing the dishes sometimes in the evening right after supper, they'd get me to steal the sugar. I'd steal it. I don't know how I ever done it. I'd go in there with my rubber boots and I'd fill my rubber boots with sugar and I'd walk out just as slow as I can. As soon as I got over into the barnyard, there would be somebody there with a pail. And I'd pull my rubber boots off and they'd pour the sugar into that pail. There could be half a pail and then there'd be pretty near a pailful then. With two rubber boots that you have on. I don't know how they ever drank that but I drank it. It made us feel what we wanted to feel. Feel good, on the weekend, after we met up with our girl friends someplace in the bush.

Tony: How did you get out of the school on the weekends? I thought you weren't allowed out of that school.

Raymond: Yeah, well, we'd go for walks, long walks. Maybe for

two, three miles. The priest would be ahead. Or a priest would wait us at the end of a four mile walk and there would be a brother among us. He was pretty close to us. We'd have a rest period there, maybe for an hour, an hour and a half. And then there would be another bunch, the girls on another section of the road. They would be going to the same direction where we were going. This is where we'd meet up our girls then. The same thing happened over again. We'd put our homebrew into the ketchup bottles, maybe not as many ketchup bottles as we had at home because they used to buy their ketchup in cans or in pails at that boarding school. But we used to get it over there. Or at the dances, they used to have dances every two weeks. Or any special occasion that they'd have. And the priest would be all over us. I remember we got the priest drunk. That was the head of the barnyard.

Tony: How did you do that?

Raymond: Well, we'd talk him into, we did everything that he wanted us to do. We told him that we had some good stuff here for him. He says, "Well, okay, if you do this for me." And

we'd take something out of the barn. I don't know what he did with it, maybe he was selling it to somebody else. So we got him drunk and then we got away with everything for about a month or two months. Make as much homebrew as we wanted, spend as much time in the barnyard as we wanted to. And not doing half of the work that we were supposed to do. Only drinking our homebrew. Making it, and then we'd sell it someplace, to the outsiders who would come - the boys from Spanish, from the town of that school. They'd come and buy it. There would always be somebody at the barn there during the night. That would be Spanish and selling it. Or there would always be boys on the road, they'd come and buy it from us. We'd sell it for a package of cigarettes, maybe two or three packages of cigarettes. They were just coming out then, cigarettes, in 1950s. There was mostly the tobacco and the cigarette papers, like Vogue papers and ZigZag papers and stuff like that. I used them all. It's been a long time now since I rolled a cigarette. I started to land up in jail that same year, 1950, 1953 or 1954. That's where I started to roll cigarettes, in jail. I rolled my cigarettes when I wanted to smoke. If I couldn't roll one, I didn't smoke because they give you tobacco every week. Or you'd get it from somebody else if you did them a favor in jail because I was getting to be a jail big then, getting into jail.

Tony: Oh, this wasn't the time when you were in the school, eh? This was after you'd left the school?

Raymond: This was after I left the school, yeah.

Tony: But...

Raymond: On the summer holidays.

Tony: Ah yeah, but let's go back while you were at school.

You said you'd meet up with the girls. How did you get away from the priest to go and meet the girls?

Raymond: Well, like we'd have our rest period for an hour, eh. Maybe an hour and a half. Or else we'd pick an extra basket of berries for the priest for him to take back. And this is how he'd let us go and wander off someplace else where the girls were. Or picking apples or fruit, whatever fruit that we were able to pick that year.

Tony: Do you think they knew what you were going to do?

Raymond: Some of them, yeah. Some of them, yeah.

Tony: They just turned a blind eye to it?

Raymond: Yeah, yeah. They knew that we were meeting up with the girls.

Tony: So when you, when you'd go on vacation...

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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