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ALBERTA  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Allocation of large areas of land to interviewee's father-in-law.
- Subsequent sale of land by her husband.

I'm talking to Angela Testawits. She belongs to the Duncan Band at Brownvale. She is the oldest member of the band.

Richard: Where were you born?

Angela: Spirit River, I haven't been here that long only since the time I started raising children.

Richard: How old are you now?

Angela: I don't even know, my baptismal certificate was never located. They never found any for my relatives; papers either. That is what the priest told me after he searched everywhere. A church had burned down and the priest thought that they may have been destroyed there.

Richard: Where did the baptizing take place?

Angela: Over there at Spirit River. That is where we came from and we were raised there. Recently, I had my age marked as 80 years old.

Richard: That place where you were born was there a reserve

there or not?

Angela: It is a town nearby Dunvegan.

Richard: Were there Indians there?

Angela: It was all Indians, many of them. But now it's all white people. The Indian people left or died off.

Richard: Did reserves exist then?

Angela: Yes, we all had land, nobody was without some land. It was through agriculture we made a living.

Richard: Do you know what happened to those reserves?

Angela: I don't know, the land we had my mother sold. Although I was married, she sold my land. My husband never took land there although all his relatives did. Once he took land but he let it go and came back to his father's land.

Richard: This place where you now live on the Duncan band do you recall anything about treaties or when they came here to acquire land?

Angela: I don't remember myself but my mother told me everything as how it happened. An example of how unscrupulous the Indian in general is. My mother had much money but she died. The man I'm referring to is dead now, I forget his name. He took away two papers (documents?) saying that my mother and uncle would use them if they were going to make a living with agriculture. He took away two land papers.

Richard: Who is this man you are talking about?

Angela: He was an official, I forgot his name, I heard he died just recently. I used to coax my mother to get someone to help her and she would get her money. But she died before she did anything about it.

Richard: Are you talking about a non-Indian?

Angela: Yes, I am.

Richard: Was he an agent?

Angela: No, he used to work here and there and at times come and see the Indians. Apparently he was present at the first treaty payment talking to the Indians telling them what was happening.

Richard: At the first treaty payment, do you recall anything about that?

Angela: I was only small during that time and I can vaguely

remember. It was also the time my father died.

Richard: Did you ever hear how these people negotiated with Indians?

Angela: No, but I know my uncle and my brother took scrip in exchange of horses. That is one story which my mother told me. I know little about the lands during that time. All the people in the Spirit River areas sold their lands.

Richard: For the people who took scrip, did they misunderstand or were they purposely misled with dishonesty?

Angela: Yes, that is how it happened they were cheated. That is why they never received payment. My father used to say, "They are coming to give us scrip but do not ever accept it, that thing called scrip you will not get anything out of it. It's something like buying our land but they will take our land.

Don't take it, if you do you'll be sorry, anyway they're paying hardly anything." That is what happened to my father, they just talked him into taking scrip. They even talked him into taking treaty after because all the people here took it. My mother told me that they just made fools of the people.

Richard: I wonder if there were people just going around trying to convince the Indians to sell their lands?

Angela: Yes that is what happened, they went around seeing people, convincing them, making fools of them.

Richard: Do you have any recollection of the reserves that were sold here?

Angela: I was standing right there when they were sold because it was my old man who sold them. My son was already a big boy when my husband sold the reserves. We were living here already but the selling of reserves took place at Fairview. And I know exactly how many he sold. The one at Berwyn was sold and another one down below was sold (Peace River valley) the one we called Big Island. Also another very large one still down below, he sold that too. It was larger than the one here at Berwyn. There was a person by the name of (Chevier?) -- had a reserve. That one was not sold. That reserve land was leased. I've told our leaders many time that we should try and get something out of that land. There is one nearby Grouard, my husband said he was going to sell that for himself and would not put the money in the bank. We travelled there with horse and wagon to have a look at the reserve near Grouard. We walked all around the reserve to look at it. There was a small house on it. There is another one here called Bear Hill which I think is two acres big. My husband said he would sell it as well because we weren't getting our money from them.

Richard: Who was he referring to?

Angela: The government officials, because that is what they told us. That is why I think the Indian is so gullible. The officials told him there isn't a figure that we can count with in terms of money entitled to each individual with the amount of land you have sold, now what do you want to do? He replied, "As long as there is one of my people left, every fall and spring money should be given to them." His other request was that if someone wanted to farm, he should be provided with a tractor and implements, that was what he wanted, we never saw any of these things. We received \$200 in the fall and the same in the spring but since my husband died we didn't even get \$50. But we haven't received anything in a very long time.

Richard: What was your husband's name?

Angela: Joe Testawits.

Richard: How old was he when he died?

Angela: I don't know how old he was, but he was older than me. I would think he was over 80 years old.

Richard: As far as you know how many reserves were around there?

Angela: There were so many that I could never tell. We had papers, there wouldn't be any confusion, I could have given you the papers if it wasn't for the mice. My husband had a suitcase and every transaction which took place he would put the papers away in the suitcase. When he died we moved here and left the suitcase in our old house. This is why we are always lacking information. I had an argument with the agent last spring I told him that every agreement or document that my husband had, they had a copy of. Just check your files and you'll find them there,...

Richard: Do you recall the agent by the name of L'Heureux?

Angela: Yes, he is the one we were doing business with. When we travelled around looking at reserves, L'Heureux was with us.

Richard: How was his working relationships with the Indians?

Angela: For us he seemed to be fine, other people hated him. They said that he stole too much.

Richard: Did you notice anything about him yourself?

Angela: No, though I didn't observe him that closely. If I had to call upon him he seemed to be fair with whatever business I had. Since my husband died I just haven't bothered with the Indian agents. But they put me in a very difficult position, because I have a difficult time myself. I raised my granddaughter after her mother died when she was about 5 years old. Her mother was treaty, she never received any money. When she reached school age, her and my son Robert were attending school, he was 7 years old when my husband died. I

was only receiving \$25.00 a month. I used to go out and stook in the fall. I had other boys but they left when my husband died. They were roaming all over, they were lonesome. I had to try and provide for the youngsters. I had to work for the farmers in order to survive. I went around stooking when it

was harvest time. The \$25.00 assistance was never enough although everything was cheaper at the time. We had animals when my husband died such as horses, cows, pigs and turkeys, but gradually I sold cows and pigs until they were all gone. The grain we had to feed the pigs was all gone. Then I had to make it on my own. It is very hard to make a living. If I would have been smart I could have used them for our food.

Richard: When your husband was dealing with the reserves, how many years ago is that, do you remember?

Angela: I don't really know. If I could see the people who were there, three of them are still alive that were there.

Richard: What are their names?

Angela: One is my brother, his name is Francis Napolis. The other one is in Grouard or High Prairie, I really would like to see him. He is a white man who understands a bit of Cree, he would know exactly how much land we had. Maybe he is dead I haven't heard of him in a long time. I told John Spring (Testawich) to inquire about him, he would know everything. He was the one who led the surveyors. I don't remember his name. If I was in Grouard I would know his name by asking. The other man is Phillip Knot, he would know how many years ago it took place.

Richard: Are there any other reserves around here the people are missing or questioning?

Angela: You mean the reserves? This is the only reserve at the present time, except for the ones we own in different areas. There's one over at Bear Lake which was never sold. That is a small one, it was only surveyed for one person. That one is still ours.

Richard: It was never sold?

Angela: No, it was never sold, I'll swear to that because it was my husband who was selling. I was standing right there. It was surveyed for a man named Wee shos. The one at Grouard was surveyed for one called Susan. There is a large one nearby here. I don't know if this is a nickname but the reserve was surveyed for one called Chuk ee as so. That particualr one my boys have gone to see, it is a large one.

Richard: There is a reserve east of High Prairie called William McKenzie did that belong to you as well, and what happened there?

Angela: I don't know what happened, but we went out to look at it and my husband was ready to sell it. Before the deal was complete he died suddenly and the transaction had been started. That is one paper we lost. I saw that reserve myself because I was with them when I even know where the cabin is located.

Richard: Does that still belong to Duncan Band?

Angela: We still own that reserve. Another one there close by, it is still ours. Even the government officials realize it still belongs to us. Because he told my son that the beaver were being killed off on our reserve. They know it belongs to us. Bear Lake belongs to us but it is only small. And I'm sure the one at Berwyn still belongs to us because my husband was reluctant to give up the heavy bush area there.

Richard: The man you call your brother, where does he make his home?

Angela: I'm not sure but at the moment he is at Hines Creek.

Richard: Was there a reserve once where the town of Fairview is?

Angela: Yes, there was. It was sold too but they were on their own. They were called Beaver Indian and it was called Beaver land. That reserve was full of them. It was a large reserve and they sold it all.

Richard: Where did they originate from?

Angela: I don't know. They were always there as long as I can remember. I remember they had homes in Fairview but most of the Beaver Indians have died.

Richard: Do some of them belong at Horse Lake reserve?

Angela: No, I don't think many of them went there. All I know is the people there are also lax. The chief, who was my uncle, (my mother and him had different mothers) was very lax. But he said they were his people. But Horse Lake people are a separate reserve. They have their own reserve at Horse Lake. He just says that they are not his people at all. All the Beaver Indians here died off. There is only the son of Francis Napasis from here that I know of who stays at Horse Lake. He is unrealistic when he tells of them being his people. As long as I remember the Beaver Indians were always here (Fairview). Probably the only one would be Mary Mosquito, as we know her. She is probably the only elder living.

Richard: Would she belong to the Beaver Band?

Angela: Yes, because she is a Beaver Indian. She was related to the chief, she is still alive. She is at a great disadvantage, she is blind. It was suddenly that she became blind, I don't know why. Her daughter was here yesterday, there were a bunch of women here at the time. They had their own reserve, we had ours. Bear Lake, Berwyn with the heavy bush,

those are ours. The other one is Musgwatcheesik, that is ours too. The one at Grouard, that is also ours. I am positively certain those are ours. Another one here belongs to us, I'm certain of that. I told them I would discuss that yet. The man's name was Chevrier; it is still a separate piece of land. The time my husband was selling, he had already leased that to be farmed. Consequently, that one was never sold. Before he died he mentioned that he was glad he didn't sell that one because it was good and that one of his boy's could make a good living on it by farming. It is big, it is located by the road going down the hill here. It always grows a good crop. It is very big and is all cultivated. That is what my husband used to say.

Richard: You mentioned one at Grouard, and there is talk that a small reserve exists there. Does it belong to the people here?

Angela: I heard that too just recently. I don't know about that. The only one that belongs to us is near High Prairie.

Richard: Would that be William McKenzie?

Angela: Yes, that is it, that is the one I saw. The cabin that is built there looks like my son's barn here - exactly the same. It has the same type of shingles. It was a cabin like that which I saw there.

Ricahrd: And you are not sure of the one at Grouard?

Angela: No, I'm not certain of that one. I never heard my husband talk about that one. The people never talked about it. It is surprising, I never knew of that tiny reserve. But they should be able to tell who owns it. The ones that we surveyed here I know all of them. The one I never mentioned down below is also very small, maybe about one acre. It was surveyed for Chic wal ais, that was what he was known as. That is also...

But I saw a house there too. It must be the different agents that were being replaced that sold them. You would be surprised. But right here at Woman Lake where our own people

live close by, it is different for me, I'm a woman. But the people who live nearby there are also strawberries there. The houses there are on a reserve, they started building them when my husband died, the people live there. I'm certain because it was me and my husband's brother who cut an opening with axes for a roadway. I worked there. The white man uses that now for his driveway. He lives on a reserve. His driveway I myself cleared with an axe.

Richard: How did you go about getting reserves surveyed?

Angela: About the same as today. People walked ahead with lines, many of them went surveying.

Richard: What the Indians were given was that what they wanted?

Angela: Yes, my husband's father used to go around looking at the land.

Richard: What was his name?

Angela: His name was Duncan, he went around looking at land and this is the one he chose. Also at Big Island and Berwyn. He chose all those and were surveyed for him. Because he was important. He got all that land because there were very many people at the time. He had many people. But they have all died off. That is why he took so much land. When me and my husband came together, he asked us to come here. I never mentioned this to anyone before. My oldest son never received any assistance, he is getting to the age where he'll be getting old age pension soon. He is looking forward to it, he is talking about it. He never received any assistance and he has always been working every day to try and provide for himself. His grandfather had said, in Spirit River, "If I die, I want my grandson to own this land." But he is one that saw very little, I doubt if he'll ever own this land here. He doesn't even get any help.

Richard: Thank you.

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