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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of her early life.

Ingrid: We'll talk about daily life, okay. Maybe we shouldn't talk about daily life, let's just have a general conversation and talk about Metis life, or you could pick the questions that you want to talk about, things that you want to voice an opinion on. Just forget about this tape being here.

Violet: What do you call about daily living, growing up in your family? What words come to mind?

Ingrid: Family ties and family life. I'll ask you a question. Let's talk about community needs first. On the reserve there were, your family moved into a clearing and your family signed in, or your dad signed into the reserve, right? That was in the 1940s, was it?

Violet: Gee, I don't even remember that one. It must have

been, it must have been when my oldest brother was born, Freddy, around that time, I think.

Ingrid: In the 1920s.

Violet: He was born in... in the '20s sometime.

Ingrid: In the early 1920s. I wonder if that's when the treaties were signed in Waterhen.

Violet: I don't even know, I'm not really sure. I'd have to ask my dad like, you know, because these things to me didn't...

Ingrid: Okay, what did your father do for a living?

Violet: Well he was a laborer.

Ingrid: He was a laborer and he was also a gardener, and a rancher, and he had cattle.

Violet: Yeah, but, you know, these things I don't really remember because I was in a convent when, like, you know, right from when I have to start remembering things, eh. I was in a convent for ten months and then two months was, you know.

Ingrid: Where did you go for ten months?

Violet: Ten months, wherever they were living like, you know, most of the time it was where his job took him.

Ingrid: And that's how you guys moved around or...?

Violet: No, lots of time we were left alone. He went out to work and just mom was with us, you know. That was only for about two months and then we'd go back to the convent again.

Ingrid: Where was the convent? Was it up in Beauval or...?

Violet: Well, first I went to Delmas, that's west North Battleford.

Ingrid: How many years did you go there?

Violet: Let's see. I was seven years old when I first went to school. And I went there for about three years, I think.

Ingrid: Did they close the place down after those three years, or was it still standing when you left?

Violet: I think it was, but then it burnt down, I think. I don't know why I changed schools, I went to Beauval after that. Yeah, in the '40s I went to Beauval.

Ingrid: I think one time too you were telling me that your family went, your dad went to visit you? He travelled by team, by horse and buggy, wagon. Was your dad living up in Meadow Lake then or was he living in somewhere else?

Violet: We used to have a place where he had a hay lease up in the Beaver River area all the time.

Ingrid: While you were going to school he...

Violet: Yeah, yeah and this is where our home was, eh. But then sometimes we'd leave it to go on a job, eh, went and live in a tent.

Ingrid: Oh, you'd leave the boarding school?

Violet: No, no, we'd leave our home in the summertime, eh. You know, and go on jobs, but then those things aren't like, you know, when you're in a convent you don't remember all them what they did and, you know... But I suppose they did the same things and just, you know, went around, making the best living they could. But then we were mostly in one place that I know we had a garden all the time, and mom did a lot of canning and... I remember him always working for somebody at the Beaver River, because there was ranchers there all the time.

Ingrid: Oh, so he worked with... is that the kind of labor work that he did? Working with...

Violet: Yeah, he worked for these ranchers. Either, like in the wintertime he'd be feeding cattle, and like, you know, on days off or something he'd be trapping.

Ingrid: What was the salary that he got?

Violet: Oh gee, I don't remember. (laughs) I know the first job I got I was fourteen and on my first job I got \$18 a month, you know.

Ingrid: Oh yeah. How old were you then?

Violet: Fourteen. Yeah, I was cooking for about five men, I cooked for. But my dad, I used to walk with my dad to work and then he'd, like...

Ingrid: Was that... When you were getting this salary, was that the same place where your dad was working?

Violet: Yeah, he was working in there, and I was the cook. And he would come in and tell me what to do, like, you know, if I didn't do anything right because he was a pretty good cook himself.

Ingrid: And your family, where your dad was working your home was right there?

Violet: Yeah, right there, because this was when they were in the haying season, eh. Like, you know, there was, dad had this hay lease and then they would like, you know, make hay and he would get so much for whatever horses he had for feed in the

wintertime, and then he would sell the rest. Like, you know, they gave him so much.

Ingrid: And your dad, he had his own horses then too, eh?

Violet: Yeah, we always had horses.

Ingrid: So it was beneficial to him to have the hay so he could feed his horses?

Violet: But like, you know, I don't remember... I remember a couple cows we had or something, but not that much because I was away at that time, at the convent, eh. And I remember mom being sick like, you know. Most of the time she was sick and like, you know.

Ingrid: What year was that she had, when she was sick with T.B. and she was away for...?

Violet: Oh, that was later in the '50s, but this was in the early '40s. Like I came out of the convent say about 1944. I had to leave. I was like, you know, I was not quite fourteen yet, I was thirteen, and dad had to come and get me because there was nobody to take care of mom. He had to go to work, and she couldn't move around with him so I had to come home and take care of my younger brothers and sisters.

Ingrid: And you were the oldest one in your family, eh?

Violet: The oldest girl. Well, there had been one before, the first one they had was a girl but she died, eh, as a baby. And then I had three older brothers, and then myself.

Ingrid: Did you ever find the, or did your mom tell you why your sister died? Was it the weather, or the birth itself, did she die at birth?

Violet: No, she was... I think she had pneumonia or something. I don't really remember. See I don't remember these things like, you know. Well, that one, that was before I was born; but these other things like when I was in the convent I didn't... Like even if they wrote to me, like, you know, a little...

Ingrid: You still didn't know the whole thing of what was happening back there.

Violet: No, not what was happening like, you know, because I was raised there, a good part of the year, always in a convent.

Ingrid: So after Delmas you went the Beauval? And what grade did you go to then?

Violet: I was in... at thirteen, I was thirteen years old and I was in grade seven, but then I didn't finish it 'cause that's when he came to pick me up, in April.

Ingrid: He picked you up in Beauval?

Violet: Yeah, he came to get me. But before that he used to work at the school there. He worked for a year or two -- he was a fireman at the convent. And they lived right there like, you know.

Ingrid: Was this school just built when you started going to school, or was it standing there before?

Violet: Oh yeah, it was, because the first one burnt but I don't remember what year that burnt.

Ingrid: Oh, there was another residential school before this one that's standing up now?

Violet: Yeah, yeah. There was one before that. Mom said that there were kids that died in that fire like, you know. But I don't remember the year, I went last year to that class reunion and I read some of these things and I don't even remember.

Ingrid: Oh, they had the history of the school?

Violet: Well, they had a lot of pictures, they had, and dates of like, you know.

Ingrid: Did you see yourself in any of the pictures?

Violet: No, not in, not myself like, you know. I don't know if they didn't take pictures. But I don't know if they didn't have them or people didn't bring them, I think those pictures and things were brought by the people that had went to school there, eh. I don't know what records they have there. But anyway I remember this one school I went to over in Delmas. We were classed as Metis people. Like, you know, and these people, these other ones were all from reserves, eh, and they would call us as if we didn't belong there because we didn't have Indian names.

Ingrid: And you didn't look Indian, either.

Violet: Yeah. Like, you know, there was the Desrochers and the Martels, and Gladgees(?), and, you know, different names like that that didn't sound like...

Ingrid: They didn't sound Indian.

Violet: Yeah, like, you know, the Bears from Meadow Lake -- we come from all the same place but their name was Bear, so...

Ingrid: They fit in.

Violet: Yeah, they fit in because their name, because of their name, eh. (laughs) So, like, you know, the other kids from the reserve would call us halfbreeds -- that's what they,

you know. And how I hated it because I wanted to belong.
(laughs) Belong to their group, you know.

Ingrid: So even then they always had this class distinction, eh? They always put people on... different groups of people? How about the Chipewyan? Were they, were there any there or were they mostly Crees?

Violet: No, not in Delmas. Yeah, mostly Cree because they were from around North Battleford area only. But in Beauval, like I said, we couldn't speak Cree, we couldn't because of that, eh -- they were Chipewyan. We didn't understand them and they didn't understand us, and somebody would complain, "This one is saying things to me," you know. We didn't understand one another so we had to speak English all the time.

Ingrid: So everybody would understand and know what everybody else was saying?

Violet: Yeah, yeah, everybody would understand, you know. And a lot of that, too, that was like, you know, because of the sisters that were raised by nuns. But they had to understand what they were saying, eh.

Ingrid: But you never lost your language from there?

Violet: No, no, no. They even showed us how to read Cree there in Beauval. Like, you know, them little signs there I used to know how to read, now I don't. You know, I just never...

Ingrid: That's interesting, you know, that's something that you don't find in boarding schools.

Violet: Yeah, that's the only way my mother reads now. She still has them books and that's how she reads, eh. I think it was her father taught her how to read.

Ingrid: That's interesting. The one thing I don't know, I've asked a lot of people, asked a lot of old people where did those Crees syllabics come from? They must have been made up by Catholic priests, eh, do you think so?

Violet: I think so. So many of these things I read about and yet I don't remember, like I said, I've got such a short memory. I remember like, you know, in, like you know, it was kind of funny -- I don't know if I should say this. My mother was always, like, you know, a great one for saying, "Those Indians," you know, for some reason, eh, you know. Like, you know, they were differently I guess at that time already, eh.

Ingrid: I think maybe your mom, she..., like I know things for the tape, I know your mom a little bit and her dad was a Hudson's Bay storekeeper. He was the one that brought the Hudson's Bay into northern Saskatchewan. And her father, how would you say, he set a norm for the people and she was a

daughter (inaudible); so maybe that's why...

Violet: Yeah, but he was a buyer, you know, first he was a buyer for Hudson's Bay like, you know, he buys furs from all these Indians, eh. And this is where they really learn how to talk Cree, you know, he had to. 'Cause a lot of French was spoken all the time, you know, but he had to learn how to get along with them so he could buy furs, you know.

Ingrid: Do you still call people, "Those Indians?"

Violet: Yeah I know, like my mother, like you know, she'd say, "Those Indians." Well, lots of these things like, you know, it was the Indian way of living, you know, that they didn't live that way. I mean they...

Ingrid: The Metis people lived different from Indian people?

Violet: Yeah, differently like, you know. They didn't go into these, you know, these Indian, what the Indians believe, you know, like in religion because they were all Catholics like, you know. And the priest was really a person to be looked up to, you know. Every Sunday you had to go to church, you know.

Ingrid: He was really... How did the Indian people, did they look up to this Catholic priest too; or did they, or was it mostly Metis?

Violet: It was mostly Metis like, you know, because they had their own, like you know, their religion I guess, or whatever they call it.

Ingrid: There were sweat lodges and this, you know.

Violet: I guess only for them not for...

Ingrid: Not for Metis people.

Violet: Yeah. I don't remember any, anyway. I never remember my mom and dad, you know, going into one of them. I know we used to go to some Indian dances but that...

Ingrid: How about feasts?

Violet: No, we never went to them -- mom was scared of them. (laughs) She never did, you know, she didn't want to eat, you know.

Ingrid: Oh yeah, 'cause they ate different, or their way of cooking?

Violet: I guess so like, because she was quite a fussy person, you know. She wouldn't even drink from a cup that somebody else would use, you know, so we didn't really eat any,

just meat, she would eat just meat if it was boiled or something but that's all, you know. Most of the time I remember when I was, well, I remember from about six years old if we'd go to something we'd pack our own lunch so we could eat, you know, so she wouldn't have to eat their food. She was one person that was scared of picking up germs and stuff like that, and also Indian ways, you know. I don't know if she believed all these things they can do, or what, you know, but she was, she never liked to go to any of them things because she didn't believe in that.

Ingrid: Well, she taught you the some things, too? Like, she taught all her children to, not to disrespect but to respect their ways of living?

Violet: Yeah, their way of living we respected, but like, you know, we didn't have to live that way, we didn't have to follow their... just like them feasts they have where they feed spirits or something. That was, you know, that was something we, like you know, we never went to things like that. And then even then them Indians there like, you know, whenever there was a dance like, you know, there was violin, you know violins, and...

Ingrid: Fiddling music?

Violet: Yeah. Like, you know, it wasn't always just the powwow, you know.

Ingrid: Your community, like there was your, your grandpa signed into the reserve?

Violet: No, my dad.

Ingrid: I mean your dad, your dad signed into the reserve?

Violet: Yeah.

Ingrid: There weren't very many Indian people on that reserve eh, there's not too many full-blooded Indians?

Violet: No, they didn't have any... They didn't have that many. I think this is why they wanted people to sign in to make our community of some kind. I don't know how many people there had to be -- there wasn't that many people.

Ingrid: How many, do you remember how Indian families there were on the reserve?

Violet: Gees, there wasn't very many. The Larocques, too, weren't like, you know, they weren't Indian families like, you know, from there.

Ingrid: Oh, so they're not from there, the Larocque family?

Violet: Well yeah, they were like, you know, they signed in.

I think just about the same time as my dad, you know. And there was the Blackbird family they were...

Ingrid: They were full-blood Indians?

Violet: Yeah. And Mr. Cokatts(?) like, you know, those... I don't remember like, you know, that many. Of course they had families already like, you know, like the old man Blackbird had so many sons and already they had their own families, you know.

Ingrid: But that still wasn't enough for the Indian Agent?

Violet: Well, something like that, now I don't know what it was, but... But I remember, I don't remember any...

Ingrid: It wasn't a large community, eh?

Violet: No, no, it was just a small community. But like I said, like, you know, lots of these things I don't know because I was always away.

Ingrid: We were talking about your dad. He built the church on that, on the reserve?

Violet: Well yeah, him and the priest built the church.

Ingrid: What year was that? Do you remember what year that was?

Violet: This was early '50s or late '40s, '49-'48, I don't remember really. I knew I was there when they helped build the school, too, just about the same time. Like enough of the school and the church like, you know.

Ingrid: They came up together?

Violet: Yeah, kind of come up together. But my dad was living right beside where they had the school, you know, where they had the school. And I was there with my... my husband worked there too, at the school, built the school like, worked for this contractor. And we weren't living on the reserve, we were living just off the reserve. Well, you paid for, what do they call that, a lease? A lease, I think you leased some land like, you know. My husband was a Metis so he had to, it wasn't very much, it was only a few dollars for a year like, you know, so he built a little house just outside, you know.

Ingrid: Well, did he lease by the year?

Violet: Yeah, by the, I think it was by the year or... I'm not sure now. It seemed all these things didn't matter at that time.

Ingrid: How about scrip, like Metis were a lot of scrips, they were given land. This was in, I don't know, maybe in the early 1900s or... Was your husband given any land, or his

family, like your in-laws?

Violet: Well, gee I don't know. They lived in Dorintosh, but I don't even know what year they came to Dorintosh. And the old man had land there, my father-in-law had land. It was not in the settlement, not in the little hamlet or whatever you call it, it was away by the river somewhere. I don't know that was his or just living on somebody's land I don't know, I couldn't tell you that. But then after that he bought a lot in Dorintosh, that's where he built his house, you know.

Ingrid: And your husband, he wasn't given any...

Violet: No, he didn't take anything.

Ingrid: Did he sign the, did he have a lease anywhere else in northern Saskatchewan?

Violet: No, not that I remember.

Ingrid: Just that land outside of the reserve?

Violet: Yeah. Well, yeah, where we had our house because we couldn't live on the reserve. But my parents and brothers and sisters were all on the reserve but not, like, you know, because we couldn't live on the reserve at that time. But we were just outside of it.

Ingrid: And your husband worked from, what kind of work did your husband do? Was he a laborer too?

Violet: Yeah, he was a laborer, you know, in the springtime trapping and, you know, just a laborer.

Ingrid: Oh, here's an interesting one. What language was spoken in your parents' home when you were growing up?

Violet: Cree, it was Cree and French mixed.

Ingrid: And your mom, did she put the two together, did she put the two together to speak?

Violet: Yeah, it was Cree and French. All the things around the house like curtains, and knives and forks, and whatever -- that was all French. Everything had a name and we named it in French, eh. And then Cree, we spoke Cree, she'd speak Cree and then name something in French, you know. It didn't have, to her it didn't have an Indian name it only had a French name. (laughs) And dad spoke English; of course he was in the, he went to school too -- see mom didn't go to school. And dad spoke English quite a bit.

Ingrid: He read a lot and...?

Violet: Yeah, he read a lot and, you know. I remember he used to teach us alphabets, you know, we all knew our alphabets

when we started school.

Ingrid: And your... everybody spoke French and Cree?

Violet: Yeah, French and Cree. I remember on my father's side my grandfather always spoke French, but he could speak Cree too.

Ingrid: Your grandfather on your mom's side spoke French also?

Violet: Yeah, French and he didn't speak very English, I don't think that much, it was mostly, I remember him mostly as Cree and French, eh.

Ingrid: And your grandfather on your dad's side, he spoke French?

Violet: Yeah, he spoke French, yeah, mostly French.

Ingrid: So your family goes more to the French side than to the Cree side?

Violet: Yeah.

Ingrid: And your children, do they speak French and Cree?

Violet: Well, my children only speak English and Cree.

Ingrid: But your children, they know how to name everything in French?

Violet: Oh yeah, like, you know, they learned along with... Now we don't even use that anymore, like everything is in English, and my grandchildren don't even speak Cree now.

Ingrid: That's a Metis tradition for families to speak...

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INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES				
-Catholic	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	8
DISEASE AND ILLNESS				
-tuberculosis	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	5
EDUCATION				
-accounts of	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	5-7
METIS				
-Indian nations, relations with	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	8,9

METIS				
-attitudes toward	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	6,7
SCRIP				
-land	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	11
VALUES				
-respect	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	9
WORK				
-for wages	IH-SD.01	V. ARNAULT	145	4