So I am getting out of the car and I tripped and I fell right on my side there. Boy, I couldn't stand on my leg and they took me right to the hospital from there. It was part of the Hudson's Bay there, you know. They operated on it right there, right away. That was eleven o'clock that morning. And they brought me up here that night at half past eleven. Operate in the morning here. They don't know nothing, they don't know what they done to me.
Dave: You are apparently going to be all right there. You are good for another fifteen, twenty years.

Alfred: Yeah (laughs), I don't know, Dave. I felt very down. The idea of getting hurt at this age, Dave, you know, that's the way you take it, you see. I shouldn't of course, you know, but I am getting around fine, improving slowly.

Dave: Have you got any pain?

Alfred: Just a little here if I move my hip a little, you know. Otherwise a little in my foot too, you know. Not bad, I don't mind it, you know, but it's here. It's not very sore in here yet.

Dave: Alfred, this lady is from the Historical Society. She is making a record. She'll play some of it back for you to hear after. And we want to get a record of the experiences of some of the old people and their speech and everything. Do you know where you were born?

Alfred: In Selkirk.

Dave: You were born in Selkirk?

Alfred: Yes, as far as I know. But now somebody (inaudible) I was picked up at Sandy River, but that's not true.

Dave: But that is the story, you see.

Alfred: Yes, that's the story. That's the time they had the smallpox.

Dave: Yes, but you are of Icelandic origin?

Alfred: Oh yes.

Dave: Yes, you are Icelandic. But you never knew your parents?

Alfred: No, I never knew them, no. I was taken when I was quite young, I guess. That's what I know.

Dave: That's the time they got the smallpox, wasn't it?

Alfred: Yes, yes.

Dave: Well, Gilbert Dennis told me that that's where you were born, at Sandy River, at the time they had the smallpox.

Alfred: He told you that?

Dave: Yeah, the Icelanders settled on the east side first, you see.
Alfred: Oh yes. Well, as far as I know, I was born in Selkirk like, you know. And I come there (inaudible) that's how I know, you see.

Dave: You have no idea of your birthday, eh?

Alfred: No. But I have it, my birthday.

Dave: No, you have your grandfather's wedding certificate, I know that. Marriage certificate.

Alfred: Yes, yes.

Dave: Do you have your own birth certificate?

Alfred: Yes. In 1876 I was born.

Dave: 1876 -- that makes you 79. [Mr. Thomas is actually 89]

Alfred: Not quite. Maybe it do.

Dave: When did you go to Grand Marais?

Alfred: I don't remember the year but that's, oh, it's all of 65 years ago. It's all of that.

Dave: Who was there then?

Alfred: Well, Dave Birk and Owen George and them fellows. You know them, of course.

Dave: Oh yes, yes.

Alfred: Old Andrew Lewis.

Dave: Oh, Andy was there then?

Alfred: Oh yes, he was there, yes. He was on that island there.

Dave: And John George Kennedy, he didn't come till later, eh?

Alfred: No, no. Not him at all. That other Kennedy you are referring to.

Dave: Oh, Maggie's husband?

Alfred: Yes, he was there. He was there that time. Right on that other point.

Dave: But your wife, she was A Knott, wasn't she?

Alfred: Oh yes, she was Knott.

Dave: Well, her grandfather was the first man that ever settled there.
Alfred: Yes, that was John Knott. She told me that, the old Mrs. Knott told me that, you know. I remember, I know her. It was about two years before she passed away. I knew her well, you know.

Dave: And James, you know, Galbraith?

Alfred: Oh yes. Well, I don't really. She was there then too. The old Albert (inaudible).

Dave: Oh, Albert was there, eh?

Alfred: Yes, they had a shack behind the community hall there, at that time. And then she moved to the bank of the lake. You know that.

Dave: Next door to our place. Yeah. And then John Knott lived down where the flats are.

Alfred: The Red River flats, yes. That was the first settler in Grand Marais.

Dave: The first settler, yeah. And he told John George, when John George went there as a boy, which would be just about a hundred years ago, he said to John George that, "If my house was here today, it would be 200 yards under the lake."

Alfred: Yes, it would've because it was washing out all the time, you know. You see, my wife's grandfather, they were from Albany. They were Hudson's Bay people, retired, and they were let go there, you see, and they drift around then.

Dave: They paid them a pension?

Alfred: Then they come there. He died before I seen him, you know, but I seen the old wife before. She used to be making nets all the time. Sometimes she would have it tied to her big toe, you know, and I would go like this you know. (laughs)

Dave: I was telling the lady, Mrs. Stobie, about "chicome(?)."

Alfred: Oh, "chicome." Oh yes, that's louse, the louse.

Dave: Well, "patick" is a flea, eh?

Alfred: Yes.

Dave: So she... How old was she, how old was "chicome?"

Alfred: I never heard. She was pretty old all right.

Dave: Very, very old, oh yes.

Alfred: She was an old woman, "chicome." Well, you know, I lived with the Ojibway Indians. Boy, they are a nice class of people.
Dave: Yeah, sure, we know them.

Alfred: I fell for every darn one of them. I used to go with the old Indians and go hunting moose sometimes. Boy, talk about anybody... I was only about 17 years old then, you know. Before we left the Fort, you see. Boy, I liked them people. I like the old people in Scanterbury, all them old Indians there. I was there two years.

Dave: You didn't need to lock you door at night.

Alfred: No, no. And I'll tell you one thing, if you dropped anything on the road, they would put it on the side of road. Stick it up on a willow. I seen that in Scanterbury. You know where Scanterbury is?

Dave: Oh yes.

Alfred: They had that system, you know, custom, you know, that they wouldn't steal. They wouldn't steal from nobody.

Dave: Did you know Okimawase, that old Indian at Fort Alexander? Okimawase?

Alfred: Well, I knew them all at Fort Alexander. All the Indians and the chief and David (name), his name, you know. (Inaudible) Everlasting Bird. They all had Indian names, you see, though they were Christian, you see. Even the kids, they had all Indian names, you know.

Dave: An old fellow in Kenora used to be pilot on the Kenora. Mukadevenis(?). What they call a crow's nest high up so he could see coming through in the night in the rock. So that's the black bird -- mukadevenis(?). So you've seen some great changes Alfie, eh?

Alfred: Well, you know Dave, I did in a way, you know. Of course I can't just remember everything but I can't forget the Indian days. Boy, you know, that was a fine class of people to live with. Well, the first time they was at Fort Alexander they had a timid way, like. They wanted you to talk first. They wanted to know you first, you know. And that was right, you know.

Dave: Once they know you, they would talk to you.

Alfred: That's it, that's it. And they don't forget you. Many is the moose meat I had up there, boy. Them Indians would go and kill a moose and bring a quarter to the old man, you know, the hind quarter. Don't want anything, but the old man would pay them, you know. That was their custom.

Dave: He told me, your father told me, that he had gone down as far south as St. Louis, Missouri, buying buffalo hides and there was Sioux riding all over on the warpath and they never bothered him at all. And he... Did you know Gilbert Dennis's
father?

Alfred: Oh yes. I just seen him, oh, very little, when he come to Grand Marais. He was stationed at Jackhead.

Dave: He was a lay reader in the church, wasn't he?

Alfred: Lay reader, yes. Well, he come to Grand Marais there and he built a house there. He had before I was there but he come after I seen him, you see. He didn't live long after he come there.

Dave: No, he was an old man then.
Alfred: Oh yes, he was getting to be a pretty old man.

Dave: Did you ever hear that he used to go down south with the Sioux?

Alfred: No, I never heard.

Dave: Oh yes, he used to go in the south, ride off south every spring and meet the Sioux and then work with them and go back up when he was done. And he was lay reader in the church. But your father was an ordained minister.

Alfred: Yeah, he was, yes.

Dave: They buried Mr. Tessler two weeks ago.

Alfred: My gosh, my old great friend Tessler passed away too. Did you know that?

Dave: Yeah, I was there...

Alfred: Talk about a person and people that was so good to me, is Tessler and his wife. Gee whiz, they were good to me, real friends. And I'm sorry I couldn't go to the burial. That man and wife would do anything for me! And what I'm telling you, that's not a lie. I used to sell them milk, you know -- I was selling them milk at the time, you know.

Dave: There were some great characters around at that time. (Inaudible) Do you remember the time he bought your horse for five dollars? And he neglected to make any paymens and I think it was about six months after you said to him, "Andrew, when are you going to pay me for my horse?" He says, "Oh, for God's sakes, give me time, boy."

Alfred: Oh yes, he said that, yes. I never bothered him, you know, never.

Dave: You never figured you would get it?

Alfred: I never bothered him and he never paid me, you know. He was a poor man, you know. Oh yes. I'll never forget that.

Margaret: Did you ever know a Herbie Sinclair at Scanterbury?
He used to play the fiddle for the dances?

Alfred: Well, there was a man there by the name of Herbie Sinclair. He used to play the fiddle but he wasn't much of a fiddler, you know.

Dave: Andrew was the fiddler.

Alfred: Oh boy, him and Tommy Knott.

Dave: Yeah. Did you know what the Indians called Andrew?

Alfred: Oh yes.

(Inaudible)

Dave: The Indians would purposely talk about a dance so this fellow would be crazy to go to dances.

Alfred: Him and Tommy Knott were the greatest fiddlers in Grand Marais. Of course, old Alec Knott...

Dave: That is your brother-in-law.

Alfred: Yes, yes. No, my brother-in-law.

Dave: That's what I say, yeah.

Alfred: Of course, Andrew, he was up the river at St. Andrews, you know, And he held all the tunes up there. He knew everybody that could play it, you see. But he was a good fiddler, you know. Long as he didn't have too much drink, then he was no good.

Dave: Do you have any idea where your father was born?

Alfred: Oh no, I don't know. He came to Hudson's Bay, you know, with his father. I seen a letter of that when they retired. No, I don't know. I think he was born in the north -- not here anyway. That's so far back, you know.

Dave: Yeah. Well, your memory is very keen yet.

Alfred: Not bad, you know.

Dave: For if you were born in 1876, you are 89 years old. You are in your 89th year rather.

Alfred: Yes, that's the year I was born because I have my certificate. And I was baptized in St. Peter's church.

Dave: Oh, on the east side of the river there?

Alfred: Yes, yeah, I was baptized in that church.

Dave: Was that Malcolm Scott who was the preacher there?

Alfred: No, it was... I just forget his name there, I just forget. I can't remember his name just now.
Dave: Well, you know, it is a shame that some of the experiences of the early people have never been recorded and their speech has never been recorded and this is, you'll hear, Mrs. Stobie will play a little of it back for you. You can hear yourself talking.

Alfred: Oh?

Dave: Yes. They did this with an Indian up north one time and after they played it back to him a couple of days after and they said, "Do you know who that is speaking?" "No," he says, "I don't know but boy he speaks good Indian." (laughs) He was listening to himself.

Alfred: Oh, is that so?

Dave: Yeah.

Alfred: My, my.

Dave: And in the early days, what was your principal food? Fish? Potatoes?

Alfred: Well, I always had cattle and we had our cream and butter, milk. We always had five or six cows. And I had the fever, you know, before that, you know. I wasn't very well for quite a while. Then I started getting up again but I wasn't very strong so I had these six, seven cows and I had to try and sell milk. I had to find a horse, you know, and I got and bought a couple of them little democrats, you know. So I fixed it up and nailed the screen door on and finally we got started. Well, we went (inaudible). You know Dave, I couldn't go out very long unless my wife come with me?

Dave: Oh? why? Oh, after you had the fever?

Alfred: Yes, I was weak. And I thought I wouldn't make it, you know. So she come down with me. After that I was all right.

Dave: About when would that be? What year would that be?

Alfred: Oh, I just forget. I never put it down, you know. That is quite a few years ago now.

Dave: I remember.

Alfred: And I used to get up half past four every morning to round up my cows in the morning, get them in the barn. I had ice, you know. I would leave the house there at seven o'clock sharp every morning, going driving down that river high road there. When I would get to my last customer, my milk would still be cold just from being outside. I never lost a customer.

Dave: Never had it go sour on you?

Alfred: No, never. Well, it wasn't my fault if it was sour,
they wouldn't keep it. You have got to keep that milk, you know. I know a couple of cases where they didn't put it away. They left it lying on the table and the sun got on it, I suppose. And she told me about it. "Well," I says, "you bought it good and iced up. It couldn't get sour in that little while." They have their little fridges, you know.

Dave: Yes, nowadays, yes. You told me of an incident one time, I think it was you out on the lake in a sailboat, and a sudden gust of wind caught hold, it was a sudden gust of wind or something that came along. Do you remember that?

Alfred: That was me and John George that time. We were coming from Selkirk, we were coming up the river and we were coming sailing on a fair south wind and was it nice, you know. All at once the boat is starting to go around like this and John George says, "What's the matter?" and I says, "I don't know." We was heading that way and we were supposed to be heading this way. And he couldn't make out what that was. Well, when the wind went down then, we were going to Grand Marais. Me and John George were there that time.

Dave: You recall, I thought it was you that told me.

Alfred: It was a funny thing, you know. We couldn't make out what done that. The weather was clear.

Dave: Anything like that is hard to understand.

Alfred: Poor John George, he never was a sailor, you know, and he couldn't make it out at all.

Dave: You know what the Indian would say it was?

Alfred: Motchimaniko(?)

Dave: Motchimaniko(?). Well, now, we seen that (inaudible).

Alfred: Well, at Grand Marais point, at the beach, we have a little...

Dave: You have quite a write-up about that. When they told us about that point there, everybody don't know that. I know it.

Dave: Because your father told you.

Alfred: I know what the Indians call it. They call it Manitou, certainly.

Dave: They call it Superstition Rock, but Manitou is God and is housed in this rock.

Alfred: There is no Indian that will pass that rock unless they put something on that rock. No sir. Old Alec Kennedy was right there and that's where he brought his tobacco.

Dave: Yes, I think that that was the... I'll try to find out the legend, what started it, but the only conclusion I could
think of was that old Alec Kennedy started this story and
telling the Indians there was a...

Alfred: He might have too, you know, because I know, I only
lived, say, about a mile from there, you know, the point. Not
that far even. We used to go to Kennedy's quite often. If he
heard of anybody rowing or sailing back, he would go up to that
rock and get his tobacco. I seen him. Yeah. He never bought
his tobacco. He never leave anything at all. He never leave
anything tore or worn out. It was all new pants or new coat or
new shoes that's put on there. They knew, yeah. And then
their guns again. I guess there were many a gun washed off of
there, you know.

Dave: Well, they couldn't take a chance of letting (inaudible).

Alfred: Oh no, no, it's covered, it's really covered, you know.

Dave: The water is the highest it's ever been at this time of
the year, Alfred?

Alfred: Yes. It is high today.

Dave: The highest I've ever seen it. You see, it's the lowest
in May and the highest in about August 15 when the big
Saskatchewan water comes south, you see. But then it reaches
the river and starts to go down. The highest water is in
September and October, due to northerly winds, you see. But
being that the level of the lake is the highest I've ever seen
it. I got gum tree(?) at home last year and it is growing over
the top of it now. They figure they will lose the greater part
of the Frasier(?) beaches this fall.

Alfred: They lost a little last summer at Grand Beach I see
there. They were going to build landings there and then the
water came up.

Dave: Well, you know the parking space behind? That's been
flooded, part of it. This fall it will be all flooded. By
Labour Day it will all be under water.

Alfred: Oh, (inaudible). When the water is high, they roll
through the woods, you know. I used to be a good duck hunter,
you know. I was pretty hard to beat.

Dave: I was jus telling Mrs. Stobie that I hunted ducks with
Oliver Grizzly 50 years ago.

Alfred: Oliver, I know him, yes.

(End of Side A)
(Side B)

Dave: Fifty years ago.

Alfred: Is that so?
Dave: But goldenheads...

Alfred: You know, at Scanterbury, I was there two years. I was only there two years and I didn't have a job. I was about 15, 16 years old then, you know, and I used to see them Indians coming in the evenings with their little boats about twelve feet long, you know. Paddle on this end and paddle on this end.

Dave: Yeah, you couldn't keep them straight.

Alfred: No, these little boats would be drifting in and it was getting too late, you see. Oh, I used to like to see that.

Dave: This was a great country, eh?

Alfred: Oh boy, I went through that marsh several times, you know. The Indians from there going up to Devil's Creek into Selkirk.

Dave: They would go from Scanterbury right up to Devil's Creek.

Alfred: Yeah, through that marsh. And if you didn't know it, well, you would get lost, that's all.

Dave: Oh yes, you had to know it.

Alfred: It's a big marsh, you know.

Dave: The delta of the Red River, it reaches from the west channel over to Brokenhead and it must be fifteen miles wide and it extends right up in kind of a 'V' up to (name) Creek. It's five miles from (name) Creek up the river. So it's a big marsh.

Alfred: Oh, it's a big marsh because it extends from the east side of the river as well as the marsh out there, you know.

Dave: Panima(?)? They call it in Indian fonima(?). It's Panima(?) that you are after.

Alfred: Me and my brother-in-law went hunting ducks there one fall, along the river. There was fine ducks them days.

Dave: Yes, I remember.

Alfred: We took a little skiff with us, one of them twelve foot skiffs, you know. And Tommy took us up on a sailboat and we went down the surface, the surface there. Oh, I've done some good shooting there.

Dave: Well, a friend of mine, he had a boat called the Ega. And he come in one trip, he had 2200 ducks on.

Alfred: He bought them?

Dave: Teal were two for a quarter. I think mallards were 20 each.
Alfred: I know. That's what I would have got if I was selling the ducks I shot. But I just wanted them for sport. I (inaudible). I bought that gun and went on the (inaudible) I forget what year that was. I bought the gun from Jim Bodie. You know him?

Dave: Selkirk?

Alfred: A $25 gun, give me for $22 because he had had it chicken shooting that fall. And I've still got that gun yet.

Dave: Have you? A hammer gun?

Alfred: No, I've never seen a gun like that yet. A breech-loader. I seen quite a few guns but I never seen one like that yet. The lock is just as good as the day I bought the gun. Today you would pay more than $100 for that now.

Dave: Well, they are of Damascus steel. You can't use them now. The load is too heavy. They put too much powder in for them. They blow up, you see.

Alfred: Well, every fall we are eating duck right up until freeze-up.

Dave: Did you ever use a muzzleloader?

Alfred: I did on the start before I got that gun. A single barrel. Oh, that's all right. The Indians could go out and kill a moose with a single barrel muzzleloader. I seen that. You know what I would do? I went out with them. The Indians went out to hunt moose one day and he come back and he said, "I got a moose and I had four dogs. I wanted to go for my meat tomorrow and I'll hunt the same time," he says. "So if you share yours, I'll share mine," he says, "to save time." so, I went out that evening and I just took a little bit of a blanket, you know. And make a fire, you know, make a little brush about this high all along and it's open at the east side, never close it at the east, the campfire. So I went to bed that night and this, oh boy, the next morning there was an awful storm. Snowing to beat the band. I says to this old Indian, (inaudible).

Dave: Not worried then.

Alfred: Well, I thought I'd never see a moose in this storm. I thought, you know, I thought they were stupid, they didn't know any better. (Inaudible) You know how they got these moose?

Dave: How?

Alfred: They will catch them sleeping early in the morning and then shoot them while they are laying down. They will never follow a moose. No sir, they will let that moose go. They will never exert themselves. No, they will never run after a moose. They will get them as easy as they can or they won't
Dave: Do you ever know a fellow, (inaudible) there, Tommy Thomas?

Alfred: Tommy Thomas? Where from?

Dave: Well, he was from, he was a boy came out here from England, a Barnardo boy. Dr. Barnardo was the name? And he separated and got off the train at the old CNR station on Main Street and he walked down the Assiniboine River and he saw Indian tents. He was a gypsy in the old country, you see, one of these gypsy boys. And he went down with the Indians and he never left them and he married an old woman by the name of...

Alfred: I know that man. And he wound up at (inaudible).

Dave: He is a Bisset(?).

Alfred: That's after he was there. But I knew that fellow.

Dave: He had long black curly hair down to here.

Alfred: And his name was John Robert Smith. Yeah, John Robert Thomas. Yes. And I know the Indian that brought him up.

Dave: Gilbert Gunn, one of the Gunns, wasn't it?

Alfred: No, it was Bunias, John Bunias.

Dave: Did you know the old lady he married, the old Indian woman?

Alfred: I know her too.

Dave: Yeah, Sarah.

Alfred: Yeah, Sarah. She died here about a year ago. I knew her too.

Dave: Well, he went there. She was way older than he was, and he would leave her in September to go up to his tralines and then he would come back home for Christmas and then he would go back and stay until the break-up in the spring. Well, do you know that old woman, when she was 65 years old, she walked from (inaudible), nine miles from there to Port Alexander for Easter Service on Sunday, and she carried a fifty pound sack of flour home. They were living on Birch Point, then they moved (inaudible).

Alfred: I know a person that lived there and she was all around at Point (inaudible). And she stayed there all alone facing that Lake Winnipeg. You know, that's all she could see. (Inaudible) She was working for Walter Thomas this Easter there, you know, in a wood camp, and I would see her up and going.
Dave: Well, she would never speak English. She'd speak Indian, Cree all the time. Walter Thomas went over there. He used to bring her things when he was taking out logs for the dock at Grand Marais, and he would ask her what she wanted. So he went this time, and she had been boiling the tea for the third time, you know. So he said, "What do you want from Victoria Beach? What do you want from the Store?" So he said, "I'll be back on Tuesday." She says, "What day is this anyway?" Spoke perfect English, but never would speak it.

Alfred: I knew her well, David, and I never heard her to talk one word of English.

Dave: No, no, she wouldn't. And I knew her quite well, of course, in Selkirk there. She was up in the morning, your socks would be darned or your moccasins or something, you know. She was a regular old angel.

Alfred: Oh yes, and as long as you could talk her language. She would never talk English. She used to come to the mission there quite often, you know.

Dave: Did you know what they called Johnny, her husband?

Alfred: I knew him, yes.

Dave: No, but in Indian?

Alfred: I never heard his name.

Dave: Metingunn(?).

Alfred: Metingunn(?).

Dave: Yeah.

Alfred: Oh, yes. Ahin-gunn(?), oh yes. That's how you got to pronounce it. That means wolf, yes. He had some money, you know, from his trapping and he was up there. He had some money, yeah.

Dave: He won the trapping prize every year for many years.

Alfred: Oh, he was (inaudible). Of course, he was quite a young man when he picked them up.

Dave: Just a boy.

Alfred: That's right. That's what they used to call (inaudible).

Dave: Yeah. And, well, he's up there now.

Alfred: I don't know whether he's living or not.

Dave: I heard, the last I heard. I'm going up there this summer.
Alfred: I never heard if he passed away or not, you know. Oh, they say he had some money. He was a great trapper, you know.

Dave: Yeah, well he got his old age pension.

Alfred: And he bought some bonds too. I heard, you know.

Dave: Well, he did a little prospecting too, but he had the old age pension and if you live up in that country, you can live on $75 a month, you see.

When do you expect to get out, Alfred? Out of the hospital?

Alfred: Gee whiz, I wish I could get out now! I've been improving all the time, you know. They have to see how I'm getting around. I was up there walking, walked down there. I don't know where they took me.

Dave: Downstairs you mean?

Alfred: I'm doing pretty good, you know. But my leg is weak and you dasn't put that foot on the floor, with weight. No sir.

Dave: Well, do you have your... They don't give you crutches yet, eh?

Alfred: Not yet. I can walk good along the bars they used to have. I remember the bar...

(Technician testing tape, at 7 )

Dave: ...is very interested in it. He was an Icelander who could speak both Cree and Saulteaux but I said, "You don't know one word of Icelandic." But he's interested in the story, because he... The Icelanders, there are certain things missing in their story of... They don't know too much about where they settled on Sandy River first, you see. But you can go over there to this day and see where they... some traces.

(Inaudible)

Dave: ...along the west side of the village. No, at that time, no. The river they came into -- they had no harbor at Gimli, you see. That's a man-made harbor and at Sandy River you could come in and out with small boats, you see. And that's what they wanted to get in, so they could disembark their sheep. And there's some land way up the Sandy that you could graze sheep on, if you could get rid of the bear and wolves, you know. You'd have to have somebody with them there all the time.

Alfred: Oh well, I'm improving slowly, you know. Oh yes.

Dave: Well, we'll see you back at Grand Marais this summer!
Alfred: I hope so.

(End of Interview)

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