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Judy: Today is April 17, 1984, and I'm talking to Mrs. Kay Mazer. Mrs. Mazer, could you describe to me the house that you grew up in?

Kay: The house that we lived the longest in I'll describe. We lived at 739 Weldon Avenue for 14 years. It was a two story house. The ground floor consisted of a front room, living room, and a kitchen. We used the front room as a bedroom, and the upstairs was all in one. Most of us children slept, all of us children slept in it. It was a peaked roof with... sloped down on the sides, and beds were like a dormitory out there. There was no basement, just a dugout where my parents kept vegetables and some canning. And there was a lean-to on the north side of the house where they kept their coal and wood, things like that in the summer. Mother also used that as a place where she washed clothes in the summer because it wasn't

heated for winter, and it was sort of a play house for us at the same time. We kept, we had cats, we kept our cats in there.

Judy: Did it have electricity and running water?

Kay: It had no water; it had electricity. That's the first house we ever lived in that had electricity.

Judy: Describe to me the furniture that you had in the house. Was it handmade or did you get it store-bought?

Kay: I can't remember it being store-bought. The kitchen was... our cupboards were apple and egg crates, although we did have one old cabinet that had a pull-out drawer where we kept the flour. And some pots were kept in the bottom of that and then some dishes at the top of it in two open-up cupboards, I call them, and there was no doors on that. Mother hung a curtain over that to keep the dust, whatever, off the dishes. Our table which was in the middle room, we used to call it the middle room, our table was a long wooden homemade table and we had two long benches. We had a big easy chair that was made of wood, my mother made cushions for on the seat, and usually my dad sat in that one. And then later he got another one for her and they set at either end of the table. But when we had company we also had... we sat on apple boxes. They were the firmist and they weren't as high as the orange crates. The bedrooms were, they were tin beds, whatever you call them, oh, I just can't remember, the old poster beds anyway with a spring and a mattress. There were no box springs those days. And then we had a small cot where my brother slept, the rest of us, the girls, used to sleep usually three in a bed, you know, sideways. And for dressers we had... there again we used apple crates nailed to the wall, or some were sat on the floor and we always had little curtains hung over them, or cloth of some kind. And we had no radio; there was no TVs in those days. That was about, that's about all the furniture I can remember ever having.

Judy: Did your father ever own the house?

Kay: No.

Judy: No, just rented?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Were most of the other places that you lived, were they in Saskatoon?

Kay: Yes. We always lived in Saskatoon except for when his work took him somewhere. Usually summer holidays we spent in a tent. He'd be out digging rocks somewhere. And then in the fall sometimes we'd have to come back to school, but when... before we started school I remember we were out somewhere out in the country. He was threshing and helping with the harvesting.

Judy: Do you remember the community around your home? Was it mostly white people or was there a general mix?

Kay: There was one large family of Metis people lived two doors from us, Portius lived there. Then I had a... my dad's brother lived just a block from us. I believe we were the only -- and they had a large family -- we were the only Metis people in the block of two blocks there.

Judy: When you were young did you ever hear of the saying road allowance people?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Do you remember what that means?

Kay: Yeah, because we lived there too. It was, it was the edge of a road anywhere, you know, might have been... I know we spent a lot of summers out by the Grand Trunk Bridge. It was along the road, and the reason they'd have something like that was, see, the river was close by and they always had horses, and horses could go to the river to drink. And I suppose they'd be travelling by wagons, and hay racks and stuff, and the population wasn't that great around the city -- nobody really bothered us there.

Judy: How do you remember your mother?

Kay: Pregnant. (laughs) Seems she was always having babies. She was a woman that never smoked, never drank and like I said, it seemed she was always looking after babies, because she had them about every two years, sometimes less, so she was...

Judy: So how large is your family then, how many children did she have?

Kay: Eight and then she also raised one of her grandchildren. So she was a hard worker. When I think back now of all the conveniences that we have, she worked very hard because a lot of times she was baking and cooking outside with very, very little. You know, making, sometimes food was pretty scarce as well, you know, during the depression years. And when she was, like I say, when she was pregnant she was forever washing clothes in the washboard. There were no diapers, I mean no Pampers those days, everything was diapers. And myself being one of the older ones always, you know, had to help with those things. And one of the things I hated washing most was handkerchiefs, because I never even heard of Kleenex in those days, and my dad always had to have a handkerchief. And he always wore fleece-lined underwear summer and winter, and we had to wash those by, on the board and they were so hard to wring. And it didn't matter where we camped, like I said, if it was near a road allowance they always put up a clothesline, you know, so that the washing could be done. Sometimes we had to wash by the river on rocks. (doorbell rings)

About my mother? And they were... she didn't go to church every Sunday but they taught us a lot of religion. We were taught religion in school when we did start school. But I know that they prayed, they say the rosary, and then they'd especially Easter was the most sacred time of the year to them, even more so than Christmas. They fasted on Good Friday and they went to church and communion on Easter Sunday. It was something that all the half-breeds had to do is make their Easter duties. And we never ate meat on a Friday any time of the year because that was part of the Catholic religion. And Christmas was good as well, I mean, but that was more of the time of celebrating, but it's... it's... I always had the... sort of had a sad feeling at Good Friday because they made you feel that Christ had died and it's, it almost made you feel as if somebody that you knew really well died then, because there was the fasting and there was the... Heavens, they never did no work. If she had any washing or anything to be done the day... you know, it was all done the day before, even the cooking. At supper time she would cook for us kids, like we'd have cereal and whatever in the morning, but at supper time it would fish and potatoes but they would fast for the whole day. (Inaudible) And we always were asked to give up something for Lent. All through Lent we had to give up candy, or we had... whatever chore we didn't like the most -- and I can remember mine was the diaper washing; I usually got stuck with the diaper washing -- we had to do something that we didn't like at that time and that was for the... sort of, I guess this was a penance, you know, for giving up something for Christ during the Lent season.

Judy: Did the priest ever visit your home?

Kay: Yeah.

Judy: What things did he talk about when he came?

Kay: Oh sometimes he'd... if there was a small baby that they weren't all... I remember two of my sisters were baptized at home and my little, my youngest brother that died, he was baptized at home and the priest came to bless the house and give us... give... he blessed us all when he was there. But because my mother didn't go to church that often -- and she, she didn't have proper clothes, she couldn't hire baby sitters and she didn't always think that we could look after all the little ones -- he'd come to the house sometimes and visit with her and talk to my dad, because my dad didn't go to church much till, oh, in later years. I mean, we were pretty well grown up was when he started going to church.

Judy: How would you describe your dad?

Kay: He was a kind and a firm gentleman. A hard-drinking one too. He drank an awful lot in his younger days, but he quit in his late 40s because, some reasons because of his health but maybe that he'd drank himself out, I don't know. He just came to realize that he was... you know, just had had

enough. But he wasn't violent when he was drinking, not with us, never with my mother or with us either, you know, we never got beatings or anything like that. If we, if we caught, but getting him to say this, we were going to catch, catch hell, and we got it, you know. He didn't ever do it while he was drinking.

Judy: What did your father do for a living?

Kay: Oh, mostly dig rocks, cut pickets, and Christmas trees -- he used to go for Christmas trees every Christmas, and, like I say, work digging basements. He worked for Jim Patrick and then after that he went to work on his own. And this was right till his health failed him. He had ulcers, he had emphysema, cancer, you know, in the last years of his life and could do very little really.

Judy: Did your parents have a garden?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: What sort of things did they have in there?

Kay: The first time we ever had a garden all we had was potatoes, potatoes and turnips. And then later on we had corn, green onions, radishes. I guess we had just about everything, you know, carrots, did I say that? We had just about everything. When we lived on Weldon Avenue there was a huge lot beside us. There was... oh, there was about 75 feet beside us, you know, an empty lot to the next house so we had a big garden there.

Judy: How old were you when you got your first paying job?

Kay: I was 7. I worked for a gardener who lived on the same block as us and I used to go and water his plants in the greenhouse after school, and I'd sweep up his house, and put the potatoes on and make supper for him, wash his dishes. But after... he didn't have running water and all he had was a well. So I watered the plants in the greenhouse and... he had beds, like, that had a cover over them. They were made of -- no, didn't have plastic then -- they were made of flour sacks and stuff that he'd cover the plants at night so that they wouldn't get chilled. He had this well. So when I emptied the barrels one night, I'd have to pull water from the well and fill them up again the next day so they'd be warm enough to water the next day. And in the spring we used to plant potatoes and hoe them, pick weeds all summer, and in the fall we also helped him dig up all his vegetables and bag them. But just for watering, watering and working on Saturdays I got 50 cents a week. That was my first paying job.

Judy: What other types of jobs have you had during your life?

Kay: Did I mention... most, well the first ones were mostly delivering, anyones that were for any length of time. I didn't like cafe work. I quit school when I was 14 and I went

to work at the Elite Cafe on 2nd Avenue on a Friday and I quit that job -- I was waiting on tables -- I quit that job Sunday night about 11 o'clock and went back to school Monday morning. I just didn't like waiting on tables. The only reason I waited on tables afterwards when we went to Shaunavon (?) was because the people were good friends of ours and I could more or less go, like when my husband was on shift work, eh, when he was on four to midnight, that's the time I'd go and help him out at supper time. But then when he was on days I'd go and help them at lunch time and it was more or less... I just went helping them for something to do because it was such a small town I was lonesome there. I didn't know anybody at first, and we'd made friends with them because I'd just go down to the cafe and talk with them and they sort of hired me to help them out at the busy meal times.

Judy: The last job that you've held here at the Metis Society has been for ten years, what do you think of that job? Has that taken up most of your life?

Kay: It can be very demanding. I do the court work and that involves a lot of evening work, weekends. I don't like to have an unlisted number so therefore people do phone me and sometimes they're drunk, I don't appreciate the drunks phoning me at all hours of the day or night, but if it's something legitimate I don't mind.

Judy: Have you been involved with the Metis Society for a great deal of your life, or is just these last recent years?

Kay: Well, I was... you might say I was involved with the first Metis Society in the '30s. In those days they used to... they didn't have a hall and they used to have bingos at different people's homes and I used to get to go with my mother and dad to those bingos wherever they were held. Sometimes they were held in our own home, so I went to a lot of their bingo games and went to the same... the meetings were held generally the same way in someone's home so I listened but I wasn't very interested really.

Judy: Do you remember hearing any of the names of the people that were involved in that, for instance Joe Ross?

Kay: I don't remember. I know some Rosses but I don't know whether it was... I remember Fred Ross; I don't know it was Joe or...

Judy: How about Joe LaRocque?

Kay: Oh, I knew Joe LaRocque, yes. He used to drink with my dad.

Judy: And he was quite involved with the Metis Society at that time?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Do you remember the name Tom Major?

Kay: No.

Judy: How about Joe McKenzie?

Kay: No.

Judy: How about Sol, or perhaps maybe you heard him called Sam Pritchard?

Kay: Yes I knew Sam Pritchard.

Judy: He was also active and involved in that?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Wat sort of things do you remember the meetings were about?

Kay: Like I said, I was quite young. I wasn't really into... I was interested in the bingos but I wasn't much interested in the meetings. They were... oh, they were forever trying to think up ways to raise funds to do one thing or another, but I can't really remember what they wanted to do.

Judy: Were there a lot of Metis people involved in that?

Kay: To my knowledge there was because they also held dances about oh probably twice a month, and there again they'd have dances at the different houses and there was always a real crowd of people, so I just assume there was a lot of Metis people involved in the Society at that time.

Judy: Do you remember ever wondering what the white people thought of that Society in the 1930s and '40s?

Kay: I don't know what the white people really thought because what they thought of us at school wasn't very good, so I don't imagine they thought much of our society. They probably thought we were just a bunch of dumb half-breeds, as they called us at school, so I can't imagine them ever thinking that we'd get anywhere politically.

Judy: What other things do you remember about school?

Kay: Oh, we had a very nice teacher, a nun. I had her twice. I had her in grade one and grade seven, Sister Gertrudine. And I know that I never... I went through school never owning a text book, the only text book I ever had was the speller and the reader that the school supplied. I never had a dictionary. And we were in grade four, I believe it was, we were supposed to have a science, geography book. I never did have any of those; I borrowed them. And I didn't like quitting school; it wasn't my choice that I quit school. My mother was sick. She had to have a hysterectomy and I was the oldest one left at home to look after the little ones.

Judy: How old were you then?

Kay: About 15. From 14 on I was... you know, she was sick I was missing a lot of, quite a bit of school, not lots. but I was keeping up with my homework. I'd get my sister to bring my homework home and I'd do it and I passed, like grade seven. I actually started into grade eight but I had to quit after just a little while.

Judy: What do you remember about the teachers in your school?

Kay: Generally I got along really well with all the teachers. We had one teacher in grade three who a lot of kids did not get along with, two of them actually, in grade two and in three, Miss Proll and Miss Gates. They were old maids: people thought they were then because they were probably in their 30s and, you know, they thought... well, kids all thought they were old at that time. I suppose I did too, but I got along okay with them. And the nuns, I always seemed to get along better with the nuns because I belonged in the choir, the church choir, and I was... actually, I was really religious, I had thoughts of becoming a nun myself at that time and my mother told me... just talked me out it. She said I wouldn't... it would be a hard life, that I wouldn't like it, so I just drifted away from it.

Judy: What were the children like in school? I remember you mentioning that they gave you a hard time. Do you remember ever fighting with them?

Kay: Yes, lots of times.

Judy: And the reason for it was...

Kay: Oh they call us... It was not only just the half-breeds at that time, it was the Catholic and the Protestant. We were from St. Mary's and there was King George. And we'd come down Avenue... we had to go up Avenue P to go to school, Come home, and they'd be calling us dirty black Catholic. This is what they'd say. But then because we're half-breed, they'd call us half-breeds too. They never called us Indian. I don't know, I guess it was because there were hardly any Indians in Saskatoon at that time. They were all living on the reservations and they very rarely saw an Indian come into the city. But I got along, you know, quite well. I had some white friends that were really good, but there was just... A lot of these were from a different school or there was just a few that, you know, you just didn't hit it off with, that's all.

Judy: What was the first language you learned at home?

Kay: English.

Judy: Was there any other languages spoken?

Kay: Cree, Cree and French mixed and I learnt that.

Judy: Were you ever allowed to speak that in school?

Kay: I didn't have no reason to because I didn't know who to speak to.

Judy: Did they ever teach you about Metis or Indian history in school?

Kay: I can't remember anything about Indian or Metis except for possibly the Riel Rebellion. I think that's all I can remember ever being taught about.

Judy: Looking back at your school years, do you thing that your experience there was good or bad?

Kay: It was good.

Judy: When do you remember first being aware of being Metis?

Kay: I guess when I was just a small child, because I didn't know what I was really but I think I asked my mother who we were because my grandma was quite dark. She had long hair, always wore it in a bun, and she... I never ever saw her in anything but a long black sateen skirt and a black sateen blouse with long sleeves. She wore those kinds of clothes and boots all her life. And I thought maybe Indians dressed that way, and I asked my mother and she said that we were Metis.

Judy: Do you think your parents were proud of being Metis?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Did your father ever wear a Metis sash?

Kay: No.

Judy: How about your grandfather, do you ever remember him...

Kay: I don't remember either of my grandfathers because they both... Well, one died before I was born and the other, I guess I was only 2 years old, so I don't remember my other grandfather.

Judy: Did the Metis families in your community or in Saskatoon, relatives or something, did they ever get together to celebrate special holidays?

Kay: Oh yes.

Judy: Which holidays were the ones?

Kay: Well, New Year's was the biggest celebration. I know my dad used to play a drum and sing Indian songs then. And

they'd go from house to house and they called at... The table was set from midnight on. Your table had to be set with loads of food. And that went on, the celebrations was on from say New Year's Eve right till the next night and with some it carried on even longer. And there was... You also gave a person that came to your house a drink of alcohol unless they were teetotallers, you gave them, naturally they had tea or coffee. And...

Judy: Do you remember who your parents voted for?

Kay: I believe they voted Liberal. That was in... that's way back in the olden days. (inaudible) In the old days they voted Liberal, and then when John Diefenbaker was in power they voted PC.

Judy: So they figured that those were the best people to represent the Metis people or just people in general?

Kay: I don't think they really knew. It's just that they liked the man. And yet there were, I know there were some Trotters that were strictly CCF at that time.

Judy: How did your family generally get along in the community? Were there ever moments of discrimination or perhaps even by unemployment or welfare?

Kay: I don't... They never associated that much with other people. They had their own little cliche friends and they... amongst the Metis people. I know we had families used to visit, the older people used to visit our home every Sunday. They were the Belcourts and Francois Trottier, they called him Mugward, he used to visit at our home every... Well, he came just about every day but the Belcourts were there every Sunday, and my grandma, and my aunts. So... and my mother didn't go out. They never went to movies or anything like that, so...

Judy: So it was mostly family oriented?

Kay: Yes.

Judy: Mostly inter-family (inaudible)

Kay: Yes. Although we got along, like, they always commented on us getting along so well with the neighbourhood, you know. We never argued with whatever neighbours we had. They were always good. They had large families and you just played, you know, together, so got along okay.

Judy: Could you tell me what Mugward means?

Kay: I don't think there's any name; it was just a nickname given to this... his real name was Francois Trottier, but they just gave him a nickname. So many old people had nicknames in those days.

Judy: Okay. I'd like to thank you for your cooperation and your time.

Kay: Thank you.