Jamie: Your name is Hettie Sylvester?

Hettie: H-E-T-T-I-E.

Jamie: H-E-T-T-I-E.

Hettie: Yeah, that's my nickname, H-E-D-Y.

Jamie: What's, what's your proper name?

Hettie: Hettie, H-E-T-T-I-E.

Jamie: And the, the nickname is H-E-D-Y?

Hettie: Yeah. See, my younger sisters couldn't say my right name so that's how they called me.
Jamie: Yeah, I've seen it written as H-E-D-Y in various places.

Hettie: All over the place, all over the place. And even my bank accounts I have H-E-D-Y in brackets, because there's a lot of people will give me my cheques, it's Hedy Sylvester.

Jamie: And have you been married?

Hettie: Well, lived as common law.

Jamie: When did, did that start?

Hettie: Oh, God knows, I don't know. During the War, after the War, more or less. I was working in Toronto -- I came to Toronto in 1940, into Toronto. I was going on nineteen, I guess. I work as domestic because I wasn't trained for nothing else; went as far as grade eight. Before that I was in a, I was in a convent for seven and a half years, brought up by the Catholic nuns. I was, I left home when I was seven years old.

Jamie: Where was the convent that you attended?

Hettie: Cobourg, St. Joseph's Convent, Cobourg.

Jamie: And then you went to a high school?

Hettie: Well, I went partial in grade eight, and I figured... See I had a problem when I was young. I had polio and, and that meant that I was kept home, because I couldn't go to school in the winter months, so I was kept home. They were frightened that I would froze to death on the way to school; so I started late in school. So when I got to Cobourg, more or less, I had to start all over again, because I was a little behind and they put me behind. So I left school grade eight. I felt very uncomfortable with the, with the younger, younger kids and me so old, so I just quit grade eight, you know. So when I passed grade eight I thought, "That was it." Well, if I had my chance over again I think I'd do it differently this year, differently, you know.

Jamie: And have you ever gone to school, or taken any courses since then?

Hettie: No, I, you know, I'm sorry today I haven't did something about it, because I'm real sorry, in a lot of ways. But I made sure my children made something of themselves, because I've worked so hard in my life in the city of Toronto that I didn't want them to see what I've done, you know. I wanted, I wanted their home and their life better life than I did, so...

Jamie: You came to the city during the War?
Hettie: Just 1940 I came to Toronto. And I work as domestic, so you got... Especially when I had no trade of no kind, so I lived in till I learned, till I really more or less know the city and get around the city, the ropes of the city. And then I left that, I worked two years in the city. (knocking at the door)

Jamie: There's your door.

Unknown: Is all your money in there, Hettie?

Hettie: Yeah.

Unknown: Oh, okay. (door closes)

Jamie: So you worked as a domestic.

Hettie: As domestic for two years, and I worked in a factory after that. I worked in factories, different places and different factories. And I tried to work in an ammunition factory but they wouldn't take me, because I had, I had a problem on one side of me, because I had polio -- they wouldn't accept me to work in the ammunition factory or anything like that. So I had a problem there. So I was categorized in the unemployment, you know, because I only had my left hand good -- my right hand wasn't working properly. So I still have that same problem to this day, you know.

Jamie: What about after the factory? Did you work, have you worked in other places since then?

Hettie: Well, since, since... I worked different places for a long time, different factories, you know. Because at that time it was real hard to get a job still, you know. Then I was living in this place and somebody says to me, "Would you like a day work?" And I said, "What is day work?" And I didn't know what day work was. And this woman had put an ad in the paper and I didn't know what day work was. And she said, "Well, you go clean a house for one day." And I said, "What do you get for it?" And she told me what you get for it. And I said, "Well," I said, "I'll try," because I was out of work. So I tried and it was nice to get money at the end of the day. So they liked me so well and they kept giving me more jobs, and more jobs, and I really had a lot, I really found a lot of good people that was good to you. And I found one good man -- I worked for thirty-one years. And even though, even though I had my children between time, that I just went back to him and worked with him after, you know. I brought up his children when they were small; and he had four, let me see, four children. I brought up his babies right up, you know, they were gone and married. I was always, they always say I was like one of the family. I was with them for thirty-one years. They taught me how to cook and do everything.

Jamie: What was his name?
Hettie: Mr. Jack Batten, and he had, he had his own firm here -- Rapid, Grip & Batten(?) they called it. And I used to go up to the cottage with them, with the children, you know. This is before I had any children myself, then. I was still quite young when I start working for him. I was just like, more like one of his kids, really. So I used to go up to live the whole summer at the cottage.

Jamie: Where was that?

Hettie: Lake Simcoe and Big Bay Point. So, sometimes it was, sometimes it was tiresome work being up there, but, you know, to think of it now... I think back on my life now -- I must have had a good life, you know. You know, now, I don't go anywhere now, I, you know... You look back at your life now and you realize, "You had a good life!" you know. I'd go up for the summer and I did everything with, with the family -- I cooked, I did everything, I've learnt a lot with being with this family. And finally all, all the kids got married, and then I still looked after the Mr. and Mrs. But she died first and two years after he died. And I still worked for him as a cook, but not as a day worker. He... by that time he knew that I was getting older, and I couldn't do the heavy work I used to. All I did was cook for him then, that's all. I'd go up and cook for him. It's, it was amazing why... maybe he wanted company, I don't know. But... because I'd just go up there just for two hours and cook for him. You know, he could go out and eat cheaper than what he paid me, you know.

Jamie: So your wages were pretty good?

Hettie: Yeah, at the time my wages were very good. And I had the keys to his apartment and lock up when I'd leave, you know, or sometimes he had a... I had a good life with the whole family. Still the family phones me, how I am, and I still hear from them at Christmas time, they still remember me, the whole family does. And when the old man died he left me a will. And there was, it was surprisingly, but... And then we went to Hawaii with it, my daughter and I. And then, just this year, I finished the last part of it -- I went to Phoenix. (laughs) That was the gift that old man gave me. But he was always, he was always good to me in a lot of ways. Even when I was working for him that thirty-one years he would, he would send me... I said, I used to say, "Oh, I got to go to the dentist." "Well," he said, "you go to the dentist and I'll pay for it." Even when I had my children when I was living, when I was with him, he'd say, "Well, how much money do you want?" He would help me out very, you know. That man was good to me all through the time I was with him.

Jamie: And he was, does he, what was his profession?

Hettie: He owned Rapid, Grip & Batten; he was the president of Rapid, Grip & Batten, he owned it. His father owned it before, then he took over, his brother and him.
Jamie: And what did they make?

Hettie: He was the plating, printing place downtown, down Richmond Street. And now he's only... he's only got one son in the plant now. And then, he's got another son, Jack Batten, you might have, he's on, he's on radio quite a bit -- you might have heard him. He writes books, he writes in Maclean's Magazine and everything, he's quite well known -- Jack, I brought Jack up, you know. I don't know if anybody knows Jack Batten, but he's well known, he's a novelist, you know. But I brought him up.

Jamie: What, did you work for other people that long, or was it just this one family that you worked for for thirty-one years?

Hettie: I worked for a lot of other people, a lot of people.

Jamie: Was this through, this was through an agency?

Hettie: No, just by, through friends, through friends. And they would say, well like, you know, once they get to know you then they would refer you to other people, you know. Then I would... After that I sort of quit doing the heavy work, then. I just, after that I start looking after children while parents would go away; you would look after children for about two weeks, or one week, you know, because I, I was good with children. And now, now the kids like my cooking, I used to be the greatest cook, I guess, they used to say to me, you know.

Jamie: Did you work anywhere else after the day work?

Hettie: Well, I worked with a lot of interesting people in the city of Toronto, really. I didn't, I... Every new person was always interesting, you know, when you go and work for them.

Jamie: This was the day work?

Hettie: Yeah, it was the day work, yeah. Then I would... another place, I would just go up and do the cooking for them. If they would have a party, I would go and do the party, the party things, you know. Because day work got to be something that was too heavy for me later on, because I hadn't got a full use of my one side of me. So that's why I had to quit that heavy work. But I would admit I've worked hard work all my life.

Jamie: And you worked in the craft shop now?

Hettie: I work in a craft shop now by, well, 19--, 1963, 1962 the Indian Centre was formed. At Church Street, we had the first building on Church Street. Then the Auxiliary was formed 1963, the same, same year as the Indian Centre. The first Indian Centre was formed actually, then we formed the Ladies
Auxiliary. Then I... after five years -- there was another President first -- then I was elected after five years. The other lady had it first. And I was elected as a president: I was a president for going on fourteen years of the Ladies Auxiliary. So I asked to make it more, something to do in the Ladies Auxiliary and I said, "Let's get Indian craft." I, I always had in my mind... I was, I was an organizer. I wanted to do something more every day, every month I wanted to organize something different. When I got to be the president I was the busiest person. There was a project going on every month, fund raising, something.

So that was one thing, was buying craft, Indian craft. And we only sold it on special functions, because we didn't have the space on Beverley Street then -- this is where we started our craft. And we only took it out on... if we were asked to take it out; we didn't have no room then. So we came to Spadina, 16 Spadina Road. We still carried on the same way, just on special occasions till, till the director ask us if we would like to have that spare, the room that was empty. And at first, I was, I didn't take it right away, I didn't jump at it, because I didn't know what we were going into. I didn't know what, what was behind it, so I just waited, waited for a while till I was really sure that we weren't going to be taken, you know. So I said, I asked the girls again, "Are we going to take that room?" So they said, "Well, give us a try." So we tried, so we've been at it now two years -- I think it's two years in July, June -- it was two years in June, and I've been working at it since, as a volunteer.

I, I enjoy working there, and not only as salesperson there. A lot of people come to me as their, they take me as a mother, I think. They come talk to me, tell me about their problems. And it's really interesting to listen to them what they go through. I don't know why they -- there's a counselling unit at the back, but, maybe, I don't know, I'm the motherly type to be talked to, I don't know. But it's, it's good, I liked it. I enjoy talking to these people. As you may see, my, the craft shop is always open, somebody sitting there talking to me, you know, I'm quite busy really. I belong to a lot of organizations.

Jamie: Which ones?

Hettie: Well, first of all, I must admit, first of all, the very first one I ever joined was the North American Indian Club. That's the first organization in Toronto, that we had in Toronto. Then the, right now I'm on the board at the Indian Centre. Then I belong to Ontario Native Women; Southern Homemakers, and I belong to the Council of Women(? City of Toronto. And I belong to the Diabetic Society here, so it keeps me busy. And then I belong to the Local Two -- you're trying to get hostel for the men -- I belong to that group, too. And I'm on the board at Endyle(?) so that, that's lots.

Jamie: Very busy.
Hettie: Yeah.

Jamie: What about, do you practice a religion at all?

Hettie: Oh yes, I've been brought up as a very strict Catholic when I was small, because the Catholic nuns brought me up. But I found out later in my years, in fact in moving over here, that there is only one God, no matter which religion you follow, so I'm, I call myself as a Charismatic. I all, go to all churches now, because I believe there is only one God; and I pray every day.

Jamie: When did you discover that?

Hettie: Well I took sick quite, I took quite sick here one time, very sick. Until my friend came to me. She said to me, "I think we should go to church." And she was after me before that, and she said, "Oh, you should come and see what's going on over there." And I used to always sort of, I thought, "What's she trying to do to me?" I thought to myself, "Is she trying to change me?" Because, you know, I've been brought up as a good Catholic. And I said "Never, (name), I believe in good Catholic religion, you know. And I used to think often to myself, "What is she trying to do me?" you know. And I would never listen to her until I really took sick. Then I believed all religions are the same till I started going to this church and that church, and this church, you know.

And I believe in miracles, because I'm positive there's a miracle has happened to me. Because I had a big bump on my head one time -- maybe I've been blessed -- that, that bump went down. I told my doctor, "I said, that bump's gone down." I used to tell my doctor, I says, "Doctor, do you think that big bump is giving me those... a lot of headaches." He used to say, "No, that's just a cyst." But I've been going to a lot of miracles. I don't have to tell nobody my business when I go. I figure that's my business -- if I want to go to church, I go. I just start, you know. And that bump went! I could bless -- they would touch me on top of my head, and you had that... the surge of feeling, you just fall down, you know. And I know there's such a thing as miracles, you know, and I still keep going. And there's, there's a few people that's coming into Toronto I, I hope to go and see. I believe in Charismatic, you know. I still go to the Catholic church, you know, there's no harm in that, you know. I asked that of a Catholic priest one day. I says to him -- I was sitting right across from him -- he said, I said, "Father, I want to know something." I said, "I've been afraid to ask, I've been afraid to ask." I said, "What do you think of Charismatic?" He says, "You're looking at one." "Oh," I said, "perfect!" I said, "I was so afraid to ask anybody," I said, "maybe I was doing wrong." He said, "No, you're not doing wrong." So I've been very free not to talk about it now. Before I was a little bit of leery, you know, but I'm quite free to talk about it now.
Jamie: And, and the Catholic school you attended was in Cobourg?

Hettie: Yeah.

Jamie: And were you born in Cobourg?

Hettie: No, I was born on Christian Island, on the reserve, yeah.

Jamie: How long were you there before you were sent to Cobourg?

Hettie: I was seven years old when I left home. I went to Cobourg then.

Jamie: And that was specifically to attend school?

Hettie: Because my father was sick and three of us girls -- my two other sisters -- went to Cobourg, because my dad was quite sick. And we sent to Cobourg by, through Indian Affairs, because my father was sick so long, we were sent to Cobourg. And, and really, we didn't see, we didn't see our parents unless, every two years, because my parents had to save the money for us to get home every second summer. Other summers we had to stay there.

Jamie: What sort of jobs did your father hold?

Hettie: Well, any kind of labor. They were all fishermen up there, you know. Actually how my father met my mother... My mother, my father was a Metis, and there was a lumber camp there -- he met my mother there. And they just, he just stayed on the reserve and, and they put him on the reserve, on the band list; the four brothers were working on, in the camp.

Jamie: Your mother was from Christian Island?

Hettie: My mother was a status Indian. So we did, they did try to go back to my father's reserve, but my father's... where he used to live. You see, my father never lived on the reserve before -- that was in Pickerel. You see, there is a reserve across the bay from where he used to live. We did go back after. There was us, you know. But my, my mother never liked it up there, so we all came back to Christian Island, and naturally my father had to come back with us. So we all stayed in Christian Island and there was no place like Christian Island, you know. My mother wouldn't go any place else -- that was where she was brought up and that's where she's going to be, so that's where we were. So, so my father was, they put him on the band list. That's how we became to be what we are now, today.

Jamie: Do you remember much of the Island?

Hettie: Oh yes.
Jamie: How big a population would it have had when you were there?

Hettie: We didn't, there was not many then. Not, not long ago there was only five hundred people there, but... And now I go back, I don't know half the people now... Many years ago, you know. I don't know who it is, who comes here, come and goes now, you know.

But, but as far as learning my culture, it's a, I'm just learning now. You know, working through the craft shop I'm learning, because I have to know my back history when you sell Indian craft. And when I buy -- and I'm the buyer for the Native, for the Native Craft classes over there, and I really have to be able to know what's, what I'm buying, what I'm buying, you know. And it has to be true genuine Indian crafts. Especially when I go out and sell the craft at different organizations, people really ask a lot questions -- you really got to know. So I think I did pretty good in learning on my own, really. There is times I get stuck, but next time I know. I, I make my point to find out. I have a cousin over there that knows pretty near... quite a bit of the Indian culture, so I follow him, follow his ways, in a lot of ways. He was brought up on the reserve, which I wasn't. But you know, when you're an Indian, you're an Indian. And I've learned my language all over again since, since I moved to the Wigwamen. I've learned a lot, I can talk fluently Indian, too.

Jamie: Where did you learn from?

Hettie: From these native, these, these old ladies that live here, these old girls that lives here. I can sit and have conversation with them in Indian.

Jamie: Were these formal lessons, or did you just pick it up when they were talking?

Hettie: Just pick it up, just, just comes naturally, just comes back naturally. Because I used to, before I went to Cobourg, I used to talk Indian. And when I went to Cobourg --

we went there and I was only seven years old, and my other two sisters, too -- when we got there, oh, I don't know what they were talking about. Then, after staying on, staying in Cobourg for two years, then I went back home again to see my parents -- they sound like a bunch of bees to me when they were talking Indian. My little sister, that's younger than I am, two years younger than I am, she started to cry. Her parents didn't mean nothing to her then, because she was only five when she left. She wanted to go back to Cobourg, because being away from her parents when she left five years old, she didn't know my parents -- our parents, in other words. She started to cry, she wants to go back to Cobourg, you know.
Jamie: So they didn't allow you to speak native language in school?

Hettie: I don't remember that, I don't, to tell you the truth. But we were, see, the trouble was, we were kept different ages away from each other. And we could never talk our own language then, to be together to talk our own language.

Jamie: So you, most of these people at the school were not native people?

Hettie: No, they're all white people.

Jamie: How was it decided that they'd send you to Cobourg, then?

Hettie: I don't know.

Jamie: Was that the closest place?

Hettie: Most likely. There was, there was a school up north, but, way up north. But I don't know why they sent us to Cobourg. I think, I don't know, I just, that I can not tell you, but that's where they took us and that's where we were. But, you know, a lot of times I used to feel sorry, "Why did they send us here?" you know. But, as I said, looking back on my life now, I'm glad I went to Cobourg. It give me a good start in life in a lot of ways, you know. Maybe I wouldn't have that if I had been brought up on the reserve, especially isolated island like where I came from. I could see the people that lives on the mainland had more advanced in life than, than what we had -- I can see that now. But, us, being on the reserve, on a island, which you can't go across when you feel like it, then. But now, they can communicate quite often now. Now they just... It's different. In my time it was hard.

Jamie: How long did it take to make the crossing then, when you were a child?

Hettie: Well, everybody had small boats. We'd row across, yeah, we'd row across. Now, they have a great big boat now. If that boat is on schedule you can get on any... you can just... know the time when the boat's going to cross. We don't have to pay -- the native people do not, do not pay nothing. The non-natives pay something, but we don't have to pay. But I remember going across back and forth there just on, just a small rowboat, and the waves sometimes used to be big. The times were hard then. And at that time -- now there is a grocery store on the mainland right across the reserve from us -- but then we had to go right into Penetang and get our groceries; but now, they just go across the bay now, and get their groceries. And there was a small store on the island, but the stuff was quite expensive. There was just a small store, you know. I went home this summer and I see there's a
small store again, there. But when you're not brought up on
the reserve it looks nice, but my heart's in Toronto, you know.
Everybody's here -- the doctor's here -- if you want to do
something it's here. I don't want to be some place where I'm
isolated. I don't know why; something like you're closed up in
a cupboard somewhere. (laughs)

Jamie: Most of the people on the Island were fishermen when
you were a child?

Hettie: Everybody fished when I was a child, everybody. I
remember the days when my mother used to put the fish away in a
great big barrel, wooden barrel. She used to clean it and fish
it down with salt, and we'd have fish all winter. Then I
remember putting -- she used to have, she used to buy a couple
of pigs for the winter, you know, and in the wintertime we'd
kill a pig for the winter. I remember doing that, my mother
doing that, and we'd have a basement of potatoes, because we
used to have a big batch of... a potato field, you know.

Jamie: And those were grown right on your own farm?

Hettie: Yeah. My dad, when he was working, he was a good
supporter, really. But he took so sick so early. He died when
he was only forty years old. So my mother was left with the
bunch of us. There was four girls and two boys when my father
died. We were all small then; my sister was only sixteen and I
was fourteen when he died. But you know my... I was in Cobourg
then when my father died. They didn't even have any money to
send us, for us to go home to see my father's funeral. So, to
this day, I haven't even missed my father, because we didn't go
home to see our father when he died. There was no money for us
to go home.

Jamie: How long had you been away when he died?

Hettie: Well, I lived there for seven years. You see, I left
home when I was seven, and I was fourteen when he died. And
then I was just going on eighteen when I left Cobourg, so I'd
been away from home for quite a long time.

Jamie: So what did you do for the four years that you were
out of school?

Hettie: Who, me?

Jamie: While you were in Cobourg, yeah.

Hettie: I just go to school.

Jamie: But you said, did you say you left Cobourg at
eighteen?

Hettie: Oh, I came, I went, I left going on eighteen -- I
went to my mother's. But my mother did not know me. I didn't,
you know, and she's, I didn't know her either, being away from
a mother that long, we didn't know each other. So I figured the best thing was for me to leave her, and I came to Toronto and tried to look for work.

Jamie: And where was your mother living while she was, while you were...?

Hettie: On the reserve, Christian Island. We all tried to live with my mother, but we all couldn't get along, because I guess we're all strangers to her. She was a stranger to us, too.

Jamie: Did people on the reserve work at anything other than fishing? Did they used to work for wages anywhere else?

Hettie: Oh, they were lumber, lumber, and then there used to be a saw mill there, and they were bringing in logs from the bushes.

Jamie: On the Island itself?

Hettie: Yeah, and building homes. Right now, since lately that they're building homes. And I remember we used to get what you call treaty money. And we used to get, every six months, a little bit of money -- not a heck of a lot. And it used to be always a great big day for all of us. I remember as a child getting five cents, ten cents payday. I remember those days. And we used to get those nickel candy, I guess it was. And that's the only time we did see, more or less see money -- at those big paydays. I think each, each head got six dollars, but it was a big day for us all. Then all of a sudden our treaty money stopped, and then... I happened to go to Ottawa one time, and after I got to Toronto, as a group of ladies from Toronto here, as I joined the Ladies Auxiliary in Toronto. We had, we made a trip, a trip to Ottawa and we visited Indian Affairs, and visited everything about Indian Affairs and they told us this and that. But, I said, and then as we, they want us to ask questions. I said, "Okay," I said, "it wasn't me that said, "Okay, what happened to our treaty money that we're supposed to get every year?" So they said to me, "It all went to your housing." And I said, "I beg your pardon!" "It all went to the houses that's been built on your reserve. I said, "Well, how is that I didn't get a house?" I said, "I still don't get my treaty money," I said. But, you know, he had no answer for me. To this day, or just lately, we got, I think twice, I've got ten dollars lately. I don't know what happened to the rest, I don't know. We just have to go by what they... I don't know what really happens, I just can't tell you. That's the answer they gave me in Ottawa -- it all went to the money of building the houses. I said, "I haven't got a house, I still have to go without," I said.

Jamie: Did you see any houses being built?

Hettie: Oh yes, everybody go a new house built up there.
Jamie: So most people did get houses?

Hettie: Oh yeah. You see, I have a mother living there, I think she's eighty-five now. I'd love to go and see my mother, but there is no place for me now. I can enjoy go and visit my mother, but it's just impossible to go and visit my mother. And we've asked her to come and live here. She doesn't want to live in the city. We had, the head one here had a place for her here, but she didn't want to come in the city. She's used to living on that island, she's never been off that island, you know. She was born there. Even though I was born, but I left, I left home when I was seven. I've been brought up by the non-Indians. I guess I got the non-Indian way, I don't know.

Jamie: Were there any churches on the reserve?

Hettie: Yeah, we had a Catholic church, we had a Methodist church. We had a priest come every so often, but the priest never did stay there that long.

Jamie: Why is that?

Hettie: Well, I don't know. We had a Jesuit priest.

Jamie: So did a lot of people attend the churches then?

Hettie: Well actually, I, our island is divided in half. As you get off the boat there's a road goes up right, right up on the dock, right across. One side is the Protestant people, the other side is the Catholic people. I don't know how it happened, but that's the way they are. We're on one side and the Protestants live on the other side. I don't know.

Jamie: And everybody follows that, that arrangement?

Hettie: Well, lately it's been changing, because the Catholic side had the better side (laughs) and the beach is on that side, you know. So most of, some of them have living on our side now. And the big school has been built there on our side. Everything has changed, though, everything has changed. It's not the way we had to live. When I went to school there as a child, we only had one big classroom, one big classroom. No matter which grade you're in, you're in this one big classroom; so I remember that.

Jamie: Was that the only school on the reserve?

Hettie: That was the only school on the reserve in my days, yeah, till I left to go to Cobourg.

Jamie: What ages did they teach school?

Hettie: Now?

Jamie: Well, then. Children from...?
Hettie: I don't know, I guess it depends if you want to go to school, you can keep going to school. I don't remember.

Jamie: But did they have everybody in the same, you know, the younger children in there with the older children?

Hettie: Yeah. Then we didn't have no books, we only had to hold slates. I remember that.

Jamie: Did they have Indian people to teach you?

Hettie: No, they had white people. At that time it was all white people. Now, I think... There's a lot of Indian teachers now, though. I think by then the people were getting to be educated and by then, you know. Now there's a lot of native people are teachers now.

Jamie: Did you ever attend either of the churches before you were sent away?

Hettie: The church down there?

Jamie: No, the churches on the reserve. Did you attend the Catholic church?

Hettie: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You see we had this traditional thing on Christian Island that, like, on Christmas Eve, all the Protestants would come to our church for Christmas Eve. And New Year's Eve -- New Year's Eve in the Protestant church they would call it 'watch night.' I don't know what, what that means, but we'd all go to the Protestant church New Year's Eve. I don't know what's the traditional for, I don't know, but that used to be. But they don't carry that way any more. And we'd all have -- in the community hall -- a small little thing, and we'd all have a big feast New Year's Day. Everybody brings the grub in. Everybody already cooked and we all eat together, have a little, have a little small do there for the evening, maybe have a dance after.

Jamie: And this went on when you were a child on the reserve?

Hettie: Yeah. Oh, Christmas day, Christmas day we would have a big, two great big trees in each side of the building. And everybody would bring their Christmas presents under those great big trees, and they were distributed, the presents, after. But this was Christmas day and New Year's Eve we'd have a big feast, you know. We never celebrate after midnight mass, never. But after midnight New Year's Eve, like they do here in the white man's world, you know. They just celebrate twelve o'clock midnight. We'd go to church at twelve o'clock midnight. It was traditional. We never carried on like they carry on here. It was always the church, you know. Then the next day, this is when we'd have big do. But I don't remember
anybody drinking then, you know. Everybody would all get together, have a great big party, and eating and dancing, you know. There would be somebody with a violin, or a mouth organ, something like that. That was in my smaller days when, before I was seven. I remember that, those days. And we used to go in a, we used to go on a horse, a horse used to usually take us up there. (tape is interrupted).

Jamie: You were telling me about Christmas, I think, and the dancing, and the music.

Hettie: Yeah, that's New Year's Eve, New Year's Day we would do that. And then, then the sixth of January, Indians, I think, they got their traditionally by the Jesiuts. Sixth of January has always been called the little Christmas, so we used to celebrate another big feast on the sixth of January. And that is the day that the Indian children would get their Indian name. That... There would be some older, an elder would give the babies, or whoever wants an Indian name, that day. And they would do the dancing around, the drumming, that day, after the feast. It's always been traditional that day, the only day in the year that the children would get their Indian names. But they haven't carried that through -- I haven't seen that done lately.

Jamie: Did you have that done?

Hettie: Yes. To tell you the truth, I don't even remember my name, you know that. I have to write to my mother, she could tell me in English and then I... I really don't know how to say it in Indian. I have an Indian name and that was done to me, too.

Jamie: Do you remember any of your sister's or brother's names?

Hettie: No, I don't.

Jamie: What about Hettie, where does that come from?

Hettie: Actually my right name is Marietta. That's my real name. How I found that out is when I applied for my birth certificate from the Catholic church -- I was never registered as at the Parliament Buildings. When I went to get my birth certificate in Parliament Buildings they couldn't find my, my birth certificate. So they told me I have to go to the priest that baptized me, so I went to him and that's what my name is -- Marietta. They call it Yetta and they formed it into Hettie. I don't know, you know, it's sort of a long name.

Jamie: And did you have a different name before you were baptized?

Hettie: No. That was my name, Marietta Audrey. This is how, when I asked for my baptismal note, this is how he had it on
the paper. Then I said -- and so naturally I took that to Parliament Buildings. We... those Parliament Buildings changed it to Hettie, what I've been called all my life. And I didn't want that Marietta, whatever the name is, you know. That was a horrible name.

Jamie: Did it come from any other people in the family?

Hettie: My mother said it was a woman that she used to... When she was, she was carrying me, she used to dream about this person -- a woman she used to know. And she named me after her. I don't know what person it was.

Jamie: What about the school? Was this a, this is, is this a day school or a residential school that you went to in Cobourg?

Hettie: I went to residential school in Cobourg, and it's run by the St. Joseph's from Peterborough. Then there used to be a school right in the building, and after you passed that certain grade, then you had to go to downtown school. So we used to walk a mile and a quarter in the morning, and then we used to come home for lunch, then go back again and walk another mile and a quarter back to school again, come back at four o'clock. We had strict rules there. But as I said, looking back, my life in that school, I'm better I was there.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Jamie: You were telling me about the residential school in Cobourg.

Hettie: Yeah, but... Residential school was, it was a very good thing I've gone there, because, as I say, it was a good start in my life for me, being seven years old, leaving my parents, you know. And same as my sister, and she was only five when she left. I was seven, she was five, and my other sister was nine -- three of us left to go over there.

Jamie: What would your day at school have been like? What time did you get up in the mornings?

Hettie: We used to have, let me see now, about six-thirty we had to get up. First thing was you had to pray as soon as you got up. Then we would put the lights on. We had to pray first thing in the morning. And then you had to go and make your bed and get washed. And then we all had to get in a line and go downstairs and say more prayers downstairs before the priest would come -- we had our own chapel downstairs. Then if, if we were going to school in the same building... We weren't in a hurry to go, to be running out down the street to walk a mile and a quarter. Because, if we were going to school later on in our years, we had to get out the... sometimes the priest doesn't come on time, so we had to get out of the chapel about eight o'clock, because by the time we eat our breakfast, we
have to leave the house by eight-thirty to be at school by nine o'clock. Then we'd come home again twelve o'clock, leave the school at twelve o'clock, be at the house by twelve-thirty, and have half an hour for lunch, then leave the house again at one o'clock, be at school by one-thirty. So we were busy. No loitering on the way, either.

Jamie: Were there both boys and girls at the school?

Hettie: No, just girls. The boys were in Peterborough and the girls were in Cobourg.

Jamie: What sort of things did they teach you there?

Hettie: I often wonder what they taught us, because the majority of them were quite young, you know. They were all young children, very young. We had to do all our chores and they took turns working in the kitchen, they took turns, and we all took turns in doing things every month. We took turns at doing something every month. But me I was put in sewing. I had to mend everything -- nobody taught me how to sew, but I just had to go, I just picked it up. How, I, they knew that I could sew, I don't know how I begin to sew. I start, I start making dolls' clothes and when they found out I was making dolls' clothes, I was put in the sewing room, and that was easy. I was never put anywhere... I was, where I could work hard on account of I had polio, you know.

Jamie: When did you contract that?

Hettie: I was two years old when I was with my mother. In fact, my mother said, I was nine months old when I walked and she said in two years old I had polio. It came from this leg right up to my shoulder. So I can't move this arm unless I lift it up, see. So there's, so there's a lot of things I could not do, so there's not a lot of jobs I couldn't, they didn't put me... I was never put in the kitchen, never in the kitchen; I was never put in the laundry, you know. There's a lot of things I could do because I couldn't do that kind of work. So sewing was the best place for me. But nobody taught me how to sew, nobody taught me how to mend. They just said to me, "You mend this." So I went ahead and mended it the way I see fit, you know. I learned the hard way.

Jamie: Did they ever give you any classwork to do? Did you do any written work in the school?

Hettie: What do you mean?

Jamie: I mean, like, did you learn grammar, or...?

Hettie: Oh yes, we had all that. That was, naturally, we, we, we went to ordinary school. We took everything that any person did, just ordinary. We went to St. Michael's School downtown. We went starting right down, you know, went as far as grade eight downtown, you know.
Jamie: So it was the classwork that you had to walk to every day?

Hettie: Yeah.

Jamie: Do you remember much of the town? Did you get to see much of the town at all?

Hettie: Oh, periodically the theatre downtown used to invite us down when the Shirley Temple pictures would come down there. We used to be able to go and see them, and something like that, somebody... Then there'd be a big picnic down in the park. They used to invite us down there; we used to go down. Or else -- this is when the mail wasn't delivered, somebody had to pick it up downtown, so two -- there's always two of us -- never one was sent out; either two nuns, or two girls were sent down to go and pick up the mail downtown, you know. So, the mail was never delivered to house to house. That delivering mail to house to house is just lately, you know. There, anyhow.

Jamie: And your sleeping quarters, were they separate houses, or were they dormitories

Hettie: No, it was a dormitory. Bunch of us in... different ages we were in, you know.

Jamie: So how many people would there be in a room?

Hettie: Approximately about ten of us in one room -- that's smaller ones. Then, as you grow older, there was smaller rooms -- maybe about four, four older people in the bigger rooms, you know. And I don't think that place was really meant for, for a bunch of kids, really, because we only had one washroom. No, not, no one to get wash in the one tub, we only had one tub, you know. We have about three bathrooms. The majority of the time there's only, there's sometimes, at the most we had thirty-five kids there. So that's not too many. And quite a lot of nuns there. It, it was by the lake, on Lake Ontario. I remember that steep hill. The Lake Ontario used to be so cold.

Jamie: You went swimming there in the summertime?

Hettie: We tried -- it was freezing, freezing there.

Jamie: What other things did you do outside the school?

Hettie: Well, I used to look after the chapel. I used to look after all, all the vestments for the church, put the vestments out for the priest to come to mass the next day. So I mean, every night, we used to have to put the purple cloth over the altar and that, you know. I used to look after all
that. And they used to, we used to -- those white gowns, we
used to have to put the creases in and wrap them up, you know.
I used to do all that. Get the wine ready, you know, I'd do
all that as well.

Jamie: Did you ever have any time out from school just to
amuse yourselves?

Hettie: Oh yes, we had a lot of time there, too.

Jamie: What did you spend it at?

Hettie: We used be out on the front lawn just playing around.
We had swings down there, and we used to have our lunch out
there, our supper out there. And then they had chickens, but I
never looked after anything like that, as I have said. I was
exempt from a lot of things, because, on account of me having
polio. My mother often says, said to me, "You'd be a strong
woman if you didn't have polio." Because this side of me is
very strong.

Jamie: What about Toronto, what...?

Hettie: Well, Toronto is a, is a big world. I've had my up
and downs in Toronto. I've had up and downs with my children,
with the Children's Aid. I've, they gave me so much heck --
Children's Aid -- at the time then, and I was having my
children. I'd given two of my children away, because they were
giving me so much hell. But I see those kids now, but they do
not recognize me as their mother, because the lady that took

them is their mother, you know. Because the Children's Aid was
after me terrible. I used to just cry at their office, "What
are you going to do with this thing, what are...? Nowadays
people have children now, no problem at all, you know, they
have no problem. But in my days -- it was during the War --
and I was having problems with the Children's Aid, you know. I
thought to myself, "Why is it always me that is having so much
problems?" I was interviewed like this before, too. Somebody
interviewed me once on another summer program. "What problem
did you have?" I said, "The Children's Aid," I said. I said,
"I could throw that organization so far," I said. "I could
have my two children, which I gave away, now with me, if the
Children's Aid wasn't so harsh on me.

Jamie: What were they complaining about?

Hettie: "Who's going to help you bring up your children?"
You know. "What are you going to do with them? Who's going to
support you?" You know, they were so hard on me, they were
real hard on me. Now, these two children, I think they resent
me now. I see them -- they see me, because my daughter goes
and sees them. They know, the girl, the two girls know each
other -- they're sisters. But the other girl that I, I gave up
doesn't want to recognize that she's sister to Susan. But they
look alike, you know. Even someone told them one day, "Are you
two sisters?" You know Susan says, the other one says, "No, we're not," you know. She didn't want to admit it, you know. And Susan says, "I don't know what's the matter with Bonnie," she said. Susan would come and tell me that, you know, "I don't know what's the matter with Bonnie. We do look alike," she said. "What's the matter with her?" That Children's Aid really got me.

Jamie: How did you manage when you first came to the city? Were you doing domestic work right at the start?

Hettie: I had a hard time to find a job. I'd live in a hotel -- I had my own money to live in a hotel for a while. (laughs) And I went to the central Y, and I didn't know the city and I lived in a hotel down Yonge Street. Well, finally, somebody suggest to me in the hotel... I was looking in the papers, you know. It's hard to be alone all by yourself downtown hotel -- oh God. And I went to the washroom and all of a sudden I went to the washroom but who was in the toilet bowl but a rat! I thought, "Holy God." And I thought of my bedroom, a rat in the toilet, in my room. I was frightened to death. But the next day I went and bought the paper and looked at everything. Phoned here and there. So somebody suggest to me, "Why don't you go the Y just up the, just up the street," he says to me. I just said, "The central Y.W.C.A.?" And I went there and asked for a job as... I said, "I'm ready to live in," I said. Because I'm... by this time my money was running out, you know. Because the only way I can get a bed and my meals. I said, "I'm willing to take anything in the house, wash."

So, anyhow, they got me this job on, way up Laurence Avenue. And these people have come from out west and they just moved into Toronto, and they had a little child and they wanted help. So I lived there and I got twelve dollars a month. That's how much I got, and I was nineteen years old. Well, things were cheaper then, too, you know, quite cheap then. I was able to go home the following summer; went to see my, my mother. I had lived with my mother for one year and, and I went home to see her. By this time I was able to, to buy new clothes, you know. Things were a bit cheaper as far as bus fare, you know, was cheaper -- not like today. Then, then I thought to myself, "Well, my cousin had got a job in the city, too." And she said, "Do you want a better job?" I said, "Sure!" Three dollars more -- I got fifteen dollars a month, then. So I took that job and there was more leisure more there. I was able to go out more. I wasn't tied down; got to know the city a bit more.

Jamie: Where was that?

Hettie: On the west end. She was from England, she was a very nice person. That's the only two domestics I lived in was those two people, that one and that one. But by that time I knew the city and I was more established, and then I started getting, working in the factory after that, after you know the
place. At least you had a roof over your head, and you had a bed, you had meals, you know.

Hettie: What factories did you start at?

Hettie: I worked at Christie Biscuits -- I worked there for a long time. Then I worked at Henry Distant Saws, I used to saw the (inaudible) bits. See, I did apply at other jobs but they wouldn't take me, because I had disability in my arm. And then I start working at the housework. Then, and that, and I started working by the day, and this woman said to me, "Would you like to come up to the cottage with us?" No -- I had gone to another place before that, way up on Muskoka and I used to go up to Muskoka, too. Did the work up there in the summertime. So I said to myself, "I'm never going to go back to summer cottage again," I said, "because I am always having a hard time to go back to Toronto and find a place to live." So this woman says to me, I said, "No, I'm not going to no cottage this year." I've been working for her all winter. So she says to me, "Would you like to come up to the cottage with us?" I said, "No, I'm not going to, I'm not going to leave my apartment, my room this time." By this time, there was only rooms, then, there's no apartments then, you know. And she says to me, "Oh, I'll pay for your room all, all summer while you come with me." "Oh," I said, "if you want to pay for my room I'll go up, then." And she said, "I'll give you every second weekend off," she said. And she said, "And I'll pay for your room." I said, "Oh, that sounds good." So I was, I was able to go up with her. I wasn't living in with her in the city here, I was just going... I was going to her at maybe three days a week. That's the old man that gave, left me the will. But, you know, I spent it all. And I brought all her children up. She taught me a lot of things. She taught me how to cook a lot of ways. She taught me a lot of things; but she took sick for a long time. She used to tell everybody that I was just like one of the children, like one of them in the family.

Jamie: What about, do you know any of your father's history? Where he came from, and what his people did?

Hettie: All I know, my father is from Pickerel, Pickerel. I don't know much about him. As I said, I left when I was seven. And I did not know... I knew, I, my grandmother came to live with us. I know she used to get mad at us, and she used to talk in French to us all the time, you know. She used to get mad at us in French. And I remember seeing my grandfather once -- my father's father -- and he was, he was a Metis too. That's all I know of it, but we did go up to where he was, he, where he got raised from, you know. That's the only I could know of him. And that's all I know.

But my mother, my mother's mother was a McGregor before she was married to somebody from Christian Island. So there's quite a mix-up in my family. See, she married into Christian Island, like -- my grandmother married into Christian Island. Her name
was McGregor before she married and came to Christian Island. So they were part Scottish, Scottish, I guess, eh.

Jamie: Would it have been your grandmother's husband who was, who was Scottish?

Hettie: Yeah. And my grandfather was brought up right on the reserve though, his name was (Indian name). I don't know where that came from -- that's an Indian name, I think. And my grandmother's name before she was married to (Indian name) was McGregor.

Jamie: And where was she from?

Hettie: She was from around, from around Owen Sound and Cape Croker area, that's where they were from.

Jamie: And you mentioned your grandmother used to get mad at you in French. Did you ever learn anything French from her?

Hettie: That's on my father's side, that's my father's side, that was father's, that was my father's, my father's grandmother. Yeah, that was my father's grandmother. They had no place for her, so they put her, they sent her down to us.

Jamie: And did you learn any French from her?

Hettie: No, we were small then. She was slightly blind and she used to try and hit us with her cane. (laughs) That's all I can remember of her.

Jamie: Do you know any of the travel history of the people on the Christian Island?

Hettie: Not really. My mother would talk to you lots, but she, she only talks Indian, she knows pretty good Indian. You see, when you don't live on your reserve it's pretty hard, you know. I don't know anything about it. I could hear my mother talking, and talking, and talking about a lot of things, but sometimes it's pretty hard for me to listen to her, you know. And then she'd try, she knows quite a lot of Indian medicine, too. And it's going to be hard if, some day when my mother passes away, she's not leaving this thing to, this thing to somebody. She has fixed a lot of people, but...

Jamie: Where did she learn this?

Hettie: Off her relatives on the, on the Island. And she'd go out in the bushes and pick that herself, you know. A good many times she's fixed us when we were small.

Jamie: Did she ever sell anything, or did she just do this for friends and family?

Hettie: She used to, this is what she used to do -- she would never show anybody what kind of roots she would use. She would
cook the stuff and give you the broth of them, because that means, that's means that she's selling her roots, in other words. And then if she sells her roots, other people are going to see what you're using, see. But she would cook the broth of it and just gives you the broth. And she has fixed a good many people, I remember that.

Jamie: Were they friends and relatives, or were they people that she would know, that would have just heard about her?

Hettie: Well, there was a lot of people like me on the Island. Thought they had TB and she fixed them up, even my sister.

Jamie: Do you remember any other things that she might have told you when you were young, any stories, or anything?

Hettie: She talked about everything -- I don't remember. As I said, I don't live up there that much. When I go up I only go for the day. I just can't stay there any longer. And it's too bad, you know, because when you're not brought up there, how can you stay up there? A lot of time I wish I had a house like the rest of them. There's only one problem there.

Jamie: What's that?

Hettie: Drinking. And I don't, and I don't, I'm against that.

Jamie: You mentioned that at the New Year's celebrations, when you were a child, there was no drinking.

Hettie: No.

Jamie: Is there a lot now?

Hettie: Yeah. Everybody was... It was nice to have a good party when nobody was drinking. That celebration was nice. You know I, I can't... I remember the days nobody drank. See, a long time ago, the Indians never got no, no booze.

Jamie: What did people do for their amusement?

Hettie: Oh, we always had a lot of dances, and we had, and people enjoyed themselves just as much as if they had drank a lot, something, you know. We had always had, we've always had some kind of function to amuse us all.

Jamie: Were these usually organized by the church or were they...?

Hettie: Organized by the community, by the council, you know.

Jamie: So what sort of role did the council play?
Hettie: Well, they would... The council would donate money for the New Year's Day, and the children's Christmas party. They would donate candies to the, all the Indian children, you know. They have quite a priority of the, in the reserve, the council, really. I, I've been to the one meeting, after... This is when, after I've been away for so many years, I went to one of their meetings, and that's all I've gone. As I said, I don't stay up there that much, that long. The only time I've gone up is just when my children were born, I was up there for a while, you know. Get away from the city for a while. Things weren't that bad then, either. But now I have no desire, I'm contented here.

Jamie: Well, thanks very much for talking to me. Is there some time do you think when I could back and have another session with you?

Hettie: When?

Jamie: Well, any time that, any time that would be convenient for you.

Hettie: Not next week, I'm going to be busy next week.

Jamie: You're going away...?

Hettie: You'll be finished soon, won't you?

Jamie: We'll be finished, yeah, probably by the end of next week, or the week after. But you're going to Curve Lake this week?

Hettie: Yeah, so you heard that, eh?

Jamie: Yeah. I'll just shut this off.

(END OF SIDE B)

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