Ranald: Tape number RT 82.5. This is Ranald Thurgood and I am interviewing Mrs. Elmira McLeod at her apartment in Mississauga, Ontario, on July 22, 1982.

Ranald: Mrs. McLeod, you were just starting to tell a story about (inaudible).

Elmira: About the old man?

Ranald: You said that you had a story you wanted to tell me.

Elmira: Oh yes. Well, I told you before I one time worked in a greenhouse and they used to hire extra help. And there was a strange old gent came in. He was quite old, and he was funny, but he was watering plants and stuff. So, after he was there about a week, we got talking about our reserves, reservations. So he asked me a few questions, mostly silly, like was there any riddles, and old names, and so forth, trying to kid me
along. So I said, "Well, what about your reserve?" I says, "Any witches? Do they practice witchcraft?" "Oh yes," he said. And I thought, "Oh, here it comes." So I says, "Well, tell me something." He says, "Well, one night," he says, "I stayed too long. I was calling on people and had supper. So we talked and looked at pictures, and it got real late. So I started up this long stretch of a road." And he said, "I could imagine there was someone following me. And I'd walk fast and it would walk fast. So I'd slow down and it would slow down, and I was afraid to look back. So," he says, "I thought 'I'll go awfully fast and then I'll jump aside quick, and it'll pass by me.' So," he said, "I got my speed up and went real fast. And sure enough," he said, "swish, it went right by me." "What did it look like?" I said. He said, "It was a woman." I said, "What did she look like and what did you do?" "Well," he said, "she was naked, had no clothes on." "Oh," I said, "so what did you do?" "Well," he said, "I took her home with me." So I didn't bother asking questions, I guess that was enough to set me up, you know. So I never asked him anymore about witchcraft. (inaudible). Did you watch the T.V. the other...

Ranald: I saw that show one other time.

Elmira: That's kind of scary, you know. A lot of people didn't like that being shown. It was revealing a lot of things that really are scary.

Ranald: What was the name of that movie?

Elmira: Something about a hawk. The Hawk of... I don't know, I couldn't tell you.

Ranald: Do you react more strongly to a movie like that than you would to, say, a vampire, or something like that? Or to (inaudible)?

Elmira: Yes, I do because it reveals a lot of things, that's true and not true. And it kind of, I think, casts a shadow on it that you'd like to forget. These stories I'm telling you are just, you know, they're not bad stories, they're certainly not a story you would believe. But that story (inaudible). People might think we're all like that, I don't know. They generally judge you by someone else. And there was another one, scary. There was a book written that we never liked -- I think -- it was written and we never liked that but it was published, you know. However, nothing we could do about it.

You just take it that people are, don't believe too much other than the more or less (inaudible).

Ranald: Do you think that (inaudible) was bad for the Indian people? (Inaudible)

Elmira: No, not actually for us, but it's kind of bad if people started to be afraid of us again, like... something like we might harm someone. The way we could do that, you know.
But I think was a little far, like building a wall with magic, and starting fires. That was more like a magic than, more like a magician than, you know, someone who's using tricks rather than witchcraft. There was another one brought out, it was a real nice story. It was called I Heard The Owl Call My Name, something like that.

Ranald: Yeah, I've read the book.

Elmira: Well, that was on the movie and it was really, really nice. But they believed if you heard that certain owl it was death. Whoever heard it first, or something.

Ranald: I Heard the Owl Call My Name.

Elmira: Yes.

Ranald: If he calls your name then you're going to die.

Elmira: I have that book, Donald Smith gave me one. That's the nice lad that I told you about, he gave me one. Jack's got it. That was a better story, because it was different, you know, just a sad story I think. I remember my sister and I were out fishing with an old man, we called him our grandfather, and we used to go out at night to catch catfish. And everything got boring and we weren't catching very many. All of a sudden we heard an owl. We heard two owls. And we started to go like the owl, you know, mock the owl. And he said, "Now you've done it." And we said, "Why?" He said, "You've got to give the last hoot or you'll die." So we were over there hooting for two or three hours and he finally heard us. I don't whether we did it last or the owl did, but anyway we're still living. I don't know why he'd say that -- he could have believed it, you know, he's an old man. He says, "Never fool with an owl." He said, "They are bad birds."

Ranald: How long would you have been there?

Elmira: It was only two hours maybe. We just went out fishing one night to get some catfish. They were playing, you know, how owls are calling, are mating, the mating calls. And it's kind of a little different than the hoot, you know, the "hoo hoo," or "hoo hoo, hoo hoo," like that. Something different, it's almost like two people.

Ranald: Did your grandfather say anything else about owls?

Elmira: That's all he said was never fool around with owls. He said, "Stay away from their nests," or, "don't try to catch them." It was just the way he put it, that they were an evil bird. Now as I've grown up and got older, I never give it a second thought, it's just there. And I kind of love to hear an owl -- we used to hear them where we lived, there was a big bush. It was kind of nice to lay there and listen to them. We were down to the reserve and my brother-in-law was building
a house, and we slept in a tent. And a big owl was right over our bed, right over our tent. So in the morning John said to his uncle, "What was that owl saying, Uncle Bill? What did it sound like?" "Oh, John," he says, "it went 'hoo hoo hoo ahoo.' Well," he says, no that, he says, "(Indian words) and John McLeod." "What does that mean, Uncle Bill?" "That means to keep your hands clean, John McLeod." So I guess he has no evil thoughts about an owl. But I never thought that John would be scared of animals, or... When he was just a kid, about ten years old, at our cottage there, he'd go way up in the hills there, at night. I'd have to shout and shout for him to come home. He liked to go out and see the eyes of those little coons, you know, even little skunks. You see they would go travel at night, and the owl, their eyes are (inaudible). But he was never afraid. It's all what you tell anyone there -- you could make them scared or you could make them like the animals.

Ranald: When was John born?


Ranald: And when was Morley born?

Elmira: May 19, 1936.

Ranald: Do you remember any more stories that people had about animals? Large animals or anything like that?

Elmira: Not (inaudible). And there's that time about the bears, they never shoot a bear, there's something about a bear. They are good to eat, you know. One time, I don't know if it was black bear or a brown bear, it only eats fruit, and... He hibernates all winter you see. He comes out, he will eat ants. Down in the bush was (inaudible), big wood allowance, there was an orchard right in the centre, a wild orchard. You see the birds drop the seeds and it grows into a tree. So I said to my sister, "Let's go look for apples down in there; see what they are like." She says, "There might be worms, eh." "Well, I want to go in there anyway." So all the little kids followed us; hers and John, you know, and we couldn't make them stay home. We got right there and the grass was all trampled underneath, it was wild, and the weeds were long. And it had a funny smell, animal. "Well," I said, "Let's get out of here, there's a bear around here someplace." She was quite a big woman and she couldn't go very fast, she was heavy. And going through the bushes, she's not very agile. I said, "Let's go faster." So I got hold of her by the arm and tried to walk, and I said to those kids, "Go on fast and get home." So after we got out of the bush we were all right, we just crossed the field. So my husband and my brother-in-law went down there just to see. And they said it could be a bear because the trees were scratched and the apples were usually as high as they could reach them. The ground was all (inaudible) eat the apples. But they didn't want us to go in there -- they had
cubs, and that's when the (inaudible). You know, just don't, there's enough apples around, but we just wanted to see what was in there. I said, "The next time we go we'll take a gun." He says, "You will get them mad if you shoot at them."

But I had an uncle, a great big huge man, and he took my brother away back in the northern bush, way... He was hunting game back in there. And when they got to his little shack in the bush there was a bear in there and it was chasing all the... He used to hang flour on a string, and supplies to keep mice from getting at it -- he hung it from a wire. And this bear had got those down and ripped the flour open, and he ate the sugar; and he got into the fat, you know. And he only had one shell -- the shells were in that cabin. So he said my brother, he was just a kid, he said, "Now you stand right there and when he comes out you'll hold that rifle and you give it to him in the throat, right across here," he said, "or up in here. And he'll fall." And he says, "When he falls you can run if you want." So my uncle went to the shack, and the door was open, and he give the door a loud rap, a knock. And the bear came out and he hit him a sack on the forehead, and he fell. But he was mad, you see. Otherwise they could have let him go but he was real mad, he was squealing. But if they didn't get rid of him he would have attacked them.

Ranald: This was before they...?

Elmira: Yeah, he was an old fellow who knew all about... But he said, "He was real mad because there was nothing he really wanted in there and he could have tore us up." So my brother was sick, you know, from seeing that, the shock, he'd never seen it before. So they... my uncle took the pelt off of him, you know, and he buried the carcass -- it was summertime. And they brought it home and I don't know what they done with it, maybe somebody made a rug, I guess, a bear skin rig. But we didn't use any of the meat. It was a great big bear, what is it called, a male bear? That's why he was cross. It wasn't the mother bear.

Ranald: Did your brother skin him?

Elmira: No, my uncle come over and got it and skinned it for him. And they had bedding, all that stuff thrown around, and the bunk all tore up. And they had this... whenever they lay down, there was straw all over the place, and he got that flour and just shook it. Couldn't eat it, you see. My brother was so nervous he couldn't sleep, he was afraid of another one coming. But my brother was quite young and I don't think he should trap away in there. He called it Tipperary, it was so far back in the north. But I was always scared of bears, you know. I suppose we could have picked the apples there and tasted them and no bear would have come near us. He could have been looking at us. But I don't think I trust them. I never heard tell a bear, really... I have heard in... Algonquin Park
I heard of a couple of people being killed there but they bothered them, you see. They might only have one treat and there isn't enough for them all, and then there's a fight and they don't know enough to get out. But I never heard tell, really. But I guess this old man knew that that bear was mad, and he'd stop and scream. You've heard the bear on the television, he lets out those terrible yells and scares the man. But my brother never took after him. He said, "The bear came out, and he looked each way, and then he headed... But my uncle says, "Always give them a warning that you're our there." He said, "Don't murder him." Same way with my boy when he goes duck shooting, he never shoots the ducks swimming, he always... What is that?

Ranald: I don't know. It might have the plumbing, I'm not sure. [it sounded like a boat horn].

Elmira: What?

Ranald: It might have been the plumbing, or something? I'm not sure. It's not a bear, is it?

Elmira: Is it coming out of there?

Ranald: No, no it's coming...

Elmira: Oh, it's likely a horn. There's all kind of car horns. It might be the garbage man, you know. Sometimes there's a car in somebody's place out there and they want them to get out of the way.

Ranald: So you were talking about bears.

Elmira: No, I was telling you about my Morley, when he shoots...

Ranald: He doesn't shoot the ducks.

Elmira: In the water, he said, "That's not sportsman." The only duck John ever shot was when Eli give it to him, brought it in. And he never shot another one. He just, he's not a hunter. He's more of a, he could sit in the bush and read instead of shooting, in the boat and read instead of fishing.

Ranald: When you were talking about fishing for the catfish, how would you fish -- with rod and reel?

Elmira: No, you have your bamboo poles for fishing like that, you know. And just a common wire and we put worms, lots of worms on the hook, because these catfish they don't really bite, they just hang on and then when their tail touches the boat they let go. But some of them will and then you got to fight to get that hook off. They got big long... did you ever see them? They're about that long. They are quite nice to cook.
Ranald: How would you cook them?

Elmira: Well, you can cook them in the oven. My son went away down around (inaudible) area there, and he said, "I'll bring you an old (inaudible)." Do you eat (inaudible)? About that long. I could eat of them.

Ranald: Did you use lights when you fished at night?

Elmira: No, no. Just, you know... You can take a light with you, but when you use lights that's illegal, like, you know. Our boys down there they used to put a flashlight in one of these Mason jars. Light it and tighten it up, and tie it to a stick and set it down in the water. And it would show them the bottom of the lake. And another one thought it was great, he got a car battery and a car light, headlight, and he fastened it someway, so he could plug it in like plugging that in a battery. Great big light, and he'd go out with that, but the Game Warden caught him.

Ranald: How long ago was that?

Elmira: Not too long ago. They couldn't throw it overboard, because the light would float with the battery. But with that, well, they used to just play, you know, because they used to be able to fish if they wanted to. But with that light on fish were more tame than... but still it is illegal to be spearing, you know, you got that little spear.

Ranald: Did people have ways of predicting the weather, that sort of thing?

Elmira: Yeah, they did. But whether they... it seems everything seemed to change around, eh. I remember they used to say, "There's lots of nuts, wild nuts," you know, "butternuts, hickory, and filberts," whatever grows wild in the... "There's plenty of them. It's going to be a long bad winter. There's lots of food they can store for the winter." It gives the wild animals a chance to put away a lot of nuts. So then they fill a hollow tree and then they have lots to eat all winter. And then they used to say they measured the depth of the snow -- that was with a tree. You forget some of that, but they could count how many... four feet of snow, or whatever. But you see nowadays we're not getting the snow we used to get. And then there was such a thing about bees making a nest on the ground, under the ground, there wouldn't be much snow. If there were the nests hung up, the round nests, then there would be a lot of snow (inaudible). I used to hear a lot of that stuff, you know. And there was something about the moss on the trees. I might have heard other things too, but I do forget them, you know.

Ranald: Do you remember any more of George Beaver's stories?

Elmira: Oh, George Beaver! He was continually telling stories. No, I suppose I do but, you know there's...
Ranald: What kind of work and chores, that kind of thing, did you have when you were a child?

Elmira: Well, I was going to school, if I'd did enough, I'd go and pull weeds in the garden. And get that done we were promised we could go somewheres after and play. And then there was... always had to do the supper dishes before we were allowed to go out and play ball. We used to always gather in the schoolyard or someplace, play ball, and play around, you know. And there always used to be fight between my sister and I, washing the dishes at night. But sometimes we would get away; we'd come back and the dishes would be all there, my father wouldn't let my mother do them. And pick wild berries in the wild berry season for my mother to can, and some to eat, you know. There seemed to be a lot of wild red raspberries. I was talking to my cousin last night from down there. She said they was picking them along the fences or in the bush, you know, wherever they grow. She said there's an awful lot of the red raspberries, and there's a black, black patch. And then there's the saskatoon berry they call it. We call it blueberry, but it's really saskatoon berry. She said her little girl brought her in a bowl, so she said, "I'm going to make a pie." They used to can for the wintertime. Like, I suppose we never went to the store and bought a can of jam, or... My mother made it all... jelly, even juice to drink, you know, just out of wild grapes. And then you could make real good wine, my dad and them with their wild grapes. Like the juice, the wine you buy at the store, it ferments, you know, they could ferment it. And there was always corn for the bread and pies in the falltime. And we used to have a great -- in the fall -- a celebration in the church. It was called the Harvest Home. I think we had it in these places, in Toronto and all that, eh, in October, around Thanksgiving time. And then they'd come around in the wild hawthorn, you know what they are -- little round red berry, grow on the trees. They have to go out into the fields and gather that. Sit down and string them like beads.

And we'd decorate our church beautiful with spruce, you know, that's (inaudible). And we'd have corn, you know, cut it up and stand it in the corner. We'd have sheaves of wheat and there would be a board there with some apples, whatever you could bring in... flowers. And then we'd have fowl suppers, and then we went to grab a toy. The church was decorated... we'd have colored leaves, you know. That's what they depended on us to do, too. And then they'd have different ministers... But it's just...

The Longhouse do that in a different way. I went to one Longhouse, went to visit friends and they said, "We're just going to the Longhouse. Would you like to go?" So as I was saying, I was brought up to be... high percentage of Indians do, you know. So there was a lot of young people and I says, "You stay here, John." We didn't take him, and you know, I
hate myself for that now. Because I didn't want him coming back telling the Sisters, you know, his teachers, what we were doing, and what we seen. Because the first thing this Sister would say is, "Don't tell me you're going to see stuff like that!" So I didn't tell him where we were going, and he stayed there with the young people and old... they were telling stories about this and that, and... When we got in there it was a big long building and the ladies come through one door, and the men come through another -- just built up like that, you know. And we sat down in there and there was a great big container of strawberry drink. You could go and get a nice drink with ice in it, you know, you could get a glass of it, strawberries floating around. And two men straddled a bench and they chanted, and beat with turtles, a brown turtle full of beads or something, stones...

Ranald: Were they beating it on something or just shaking it in their hands?

Elmira: On the bench, they were facing each other. And when they finished an old fellow got up and he talked. I guess he was a preacher, he talked, in their own language, you know. So when he was through they started to do that again and everyone got up and danced around. And there was some white people in that ring. I guess they used to go there anyway for fun, and join in. When it was all over, they knew we were strangers, so they give us some special plates and they had all the food that they cooked themselves (Indian words). It was a thing we call Indian cooking. Took that around, and fed the chief, you know. And we had that, and we had bannock. You've had bannock haven't you? We had lots of bannock. And they brought a great big kettle out of the cook pit. They had it on a spit and two men brought it out on their shoulders. And if you had a container you could take some home. It was some kind of a mush made with corn and strawberries in it. You could take it home and put sugar on it, or whatever you wanted to do. That's they way they gave thanks for the strawberries. The Lord God provided strawberries for them, and I think that's a sacred berry to them. It's for the crop, and pray for a crop next year, which... I guess ordinary -- like us, we take that for granted, the berry -- we don't need to give thanks for it. And I think they have another one, like, when we have what I call Harvest Home, and I think they have one for fall and they eat all the vegetables that they have grown, I think they have a big stew. And the vegetables they grew, you know how the stew is made, with potatoes and carrots... And they drum and dance for that, the way they have when they're giving thanks. But I really hated myself after that, that I didn't take John down there. But he sees it all now, you know. But he would delight in going to tell that to these Sisters, and they would right away say, "Does your mother believe in that?" (inaudible). (Tape is cut off).

Ranald: Someone was vacuuming in the hallway of the apartment building. We turned the tape recorder off for two or three minutes until the vacuuming had stopped.
Elmira: You know when the men went to the moon, that the men went up to the moon, certain of us... different tribes worshipped different things. Some worshipped the sun, some worshipped the moon; and this old fellow, one of the old fellows up there was quite sad about going to the moon. He said, "Now we're going to have trouble." He said, "They walked on that moon, that's our light, gives us light and guides us where we go at night. Tells us the weather." And he says, "They're going to destroy it." However, it didn't happen, you know, but maybe something might in the future. And we should have believed it's a bad thing. So it could be as time goes on maybe they'll start to do things up there that they shouldn't.

Ranald: Is he from Six Nations?

Elmira: Yes. I forget his name, but we get this all from the paper, just what they told him, because he was so sad. I guess he (inaudible) up there.

Ranald: How did your parents teach you things when you were a child?

Elmira: Oh, just the same way as your parents taught you. About the work we had, we didn't have great big homes with all hydro, and we were told to keep the lamps filled with oil, keep the kindling (inaudible), and you know the globe(?). How to scrub floors, and wash the keg(?) -- we had an old keg(?), we didn't have (inaudible). And how to fix clothes, put things together, how to knit, how to make things. Pass on them Indian crafts there was, too, you know.

Ranald: Would they sit you down and say, "I want you to learn this?"

Elmira: I don't know, it seems we just fall into it, like my mother's making baskets, we sit down and start building one, little wee ones and it goes on for... (inaudible). I do a lot of crocheting that I used to... to do. I quit for years and then I started again. Three years ago I made five afghans and gave them away. Well, I gave one to the Ladies' Auxiliary and I said, "It's to use for a raffle." Then I gave one to my friend, Corinne. I'm going to start a white one now, I know a little girl getting married, I'm going to make her a white afghan. But it's a little hot right now, but we'll see if we can manage.

Ranald: If you were doing something that your parents didn't like, how did they deal with that?

Elmira: Most of the child's... there wasn't much where we lived on, the reserves at that time, that you really couldn't do. We were told what was wrong and don't do that again. They promised you a good licking, which some of us never got a licking. But they'd say, "You'll get licking you'll never forget." But I couldn't really tell you what they would do.
Ranald: Did they hit children sometimes?

Elmira: No, your mother, our mothers used to get a little whip, you know, and whip us, a branch off the lilac tree. But it really hurts me to see a kid get a punishment now. I had a family having dinner with Jack and I, and she puts too much in their plates and makes them eat it. And I really hate that. So after it was over I said, "You know, you could put half of what you give on them children's plates, and if they want more they'll ask for it, and then you give it to them. And you had two pieces of bread for a sandwich," and I said, "you should have just divided that. Because," I said, "any doctor will tell you that they'll eat when they want to eat." I said, "When I was a kid the people believed in fat babies. If you really weren't fat, they weren't a perfect baby. But," I said, "now they don't go for fat babies." She says, "I'll remember that." I said, "I hope you're not hurt. And if you've got to throw a potato away or something, let it go." I said, "That's how the diabetes..." And I said, "Overweight leads to heart trouble." And I said, "I really (inaudible)." I seen her forcing the food, I said, "My mother done that to John and I had a terrible time, John was overweight. But," I said, "I couldn't hurt my mother." She was old and John was all she had, you know. She'd take him around with her and love him up. I think if I'd have cut John I would have had to cut her too. Because she cried if he cried. I don't know how many fly swatters... I'd get a fly swatter and I used to ram(?) him with that and I wouldn't see it again, so I don't know.

But Jack was never a bad child, wasn't hard to handle. But he was home an awful lot. That's why... Did I tell you he went to the Lands and Forests? Got him away from home that way, you know. The first time I -- he went in the Lorne Scott Militia, we went to get on the bus -- he had to go to Oakville, to Central Command up there, that's where they started from. He'd come home and he'd say, "I'm not going back." I said, "You are going back." He says, "I'm not." So the next day -- I used to go to work -- we were going to work and got off at the highway. Morley went on to work and we got off at the highway and hailed a day coach. While we were waiting he said, "You know, I'm going to keep going." I said, "You just keep going, you'll come back some day." So I gave him $5. I said, "They're going to reimburse you, you know," I said. "So this is $5. you owe me." So he stuck it in here, in his pocket. "So," he says, "how far will $5. take me?" "It will take you to Niagara Falls. Uncle Ron will take you fruit picking or maybe on the farms over there, there is farm," I said. "It will take you this way to Uncle Bill's, and he'll take you on tobacco. Or trimming Christmas trees." And I said, "You cannot compare with the boys in Alderville, you couldn't keep up with them." And I said, "If you go home, all right, you can stay home, but I'm going to put a padlock on the recreation room. You're not
going in there and play records all day, and read." And I said, "I'm going to put you on Harry's farm. You're going to work for about $.45 an hour picking beans, and pulling weeds, and thinning out apples and you're going to work, and they're going to have men watching you all the time. You're going to have Oliver Beaver watching you. You wouldn't take the job I got you at Steinberg's..." I had him there like, he could work in the vegetable department. So I said, "Goodbye, here's the bus." I jumped onto it. And he wouldn't sit with me. He went way to the back. So I got off, I was kind of worried. I was putting on the supper, he walks in. "Oh," I said, "you put in your day?" He says, "Yes. I'm going to stay in now," he says, "it's all right." "Oh," I said, "well, all right. Do what you want to do, you know."

So I found out what was the trouble. There was map reading and he couldn't... sit at home reading a map, it was pretty well upside down. So my husband was through that class. He went and got a couple. He got some from his job, a couple of road maps. He worked for the O.P.P., you know, so... Well, he sat down with him. And then decided if he'd return then. Taught him how to read those maps, and then he was all right. But that was the trouble. And John didn't realize that he was an Indian. Our home was run so... off of the... I don't know what you would say. He remembers me bringing him here to Port Credit. And I said to him, "We're going on holidays." I wanted to really stash up good, you know. So I says, "We're going to Rice Lake." He says, "Is it safe?" He says, "Oh, you be careful. There's lots of Indians in Rice Lake." I says, "There's going to be three more." "There is?" "Sure," I said, "we're Ojibway." And oh, he just laughed, you know. He says, "My own mother!" And I says, "You wouldn't say anything bad." So when he come out, Jack says, "We are Indians, aren't we?" I said, "Sure." So we drove by car, but the next time we took a bus my mother and him -- my sister was moved home down there and we'd go visit her. As we got along Newtonville(?), an old Indian man got off and we knew him -- they had settled there. And his hair was long and he wore a felt(?!) hat, and he had a feather, just a little feather in it -- I suppose he picked it up and put it in his hat. And Jack called him Indian John. And I said, "Just sit with him, that's Mr. Sunday." So Jack went and sat down, and he got over, and he said, "My mother says you're Mr. Sunday." And he talked, and anyway Jack (inaudible) I don't know whether he jacknifed(?) or something. He recognized my mother and he shook hands. And he remembered me as a little girl. But John, that's the first man that John ever realized was an Indian.

Ranald: How old was he then?

Elmira: Oh, maybe ten years old. And he used to laugh playing cowboys and Indians -- he'd be a cowboy and his little friends would be the Indians. He wrote a story, I have it somewhere. The (inaudible), you've heard of the (inaudible) group. He'd call them (inaudible) it was something like the Indian/Eskimo Association.
Ranald: (inaudible).

Elmira: They were up right where you got offices, down in the Centre there. And he wrote a story and they published it in a magazine. And he told all about that, that he never knew he was an Indian until he grew older. And that's what happened to me, by listening to these old people, you know.

Ranald: That was something you didn't want to talk about?

Elmira: Well, I grew up that way, and I just didn't realize what I was doing. And he was brought up here amongst... and we used to go up where they were picking berries, or picking beans and talk to them. But I don't think he realized that he was talking to Indians.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Ranald: Tape number 82.5 side B. This is a continuation of an interview with Mrs. Elmira McLeod, in her apartment in Mississauga, on July 22, 1982. I am Ranald Thurgood.

Ranald: You were talking about dolls.

Elmira: And when I thought he shouldn't be having a doll anymore -- he would have a party there, you know, with stuffed dolls, or something -- but I didn't want him to have a doll. So I said to him -- I was working out pulling beans. I used to work on the farm the odd day, it's what I could do, you know. So I came in and I said, "There's a little Indian girl out there, John, and she's got nothing to play with. She's all alone, and she just walks around to see what she can find." I said, "Let's take her a couple of old comics." And I says, "Not the worst ones. If you're going to give something, give something that you like." And I just give her old Jackie Gordon, and put a little blanket, got a little blanket there around her. And I says, "We'll take her a bag of cookies." So we, his grandmother and me, we went out and called her over. She was awfully shy. Jack gave her the doll and her eyes brightened up, you know, and she held it this way, and he said, "You can take it home." And we gave her the cookies -- it was in the afternoon, she was hungry, you know -- the comic books. And she was so happy and we got rid of the doll, too. I don't think Jack would likely tell you that but...

Ranald: Where did the name Jackie Gordon come from?

Elmira: Oh, from the story books, you know, that he'd been reading. Maybe his father told him to... Well, we called him Jackie, because he had the same name as his father. And I don't like "Junior." I said, "We won't put Junior on him, so we called him Jackie. And the teachers called him Jackie.
They put Malcolm John and then in brackets was Jackie. So we got Jackie and we named the doll after him, and I suppose somebody he played with was called Gordon. And my mother made a little boy out of it by putting little trousers on him, and little sweaters, so he was a little boy.

Ranald: Was it a rag doll?

Elmira: No, no we bought it from the store. I think I got it in a rummage sale or something, you know, he wanted it... Morley never liked him to have a doll, and I said, "Oh, he'll get rid of it some day."

Ranald: When did you leave Alderville?

Elmira: We came up here in 1939, I think, and we never went back.

Ranald: You came with other people?

Elmira: We come up to pick strawberries. Trucks used to go round and bring you up. And if you wanted to go back, they'd take you back to where they got you, you see. A lot of them more for a holiday and earned a few cents, and go out to the shows, you know, and Eaton's and stuff. And the War was just breaking out then and we decided to stay.

Ranald: So, who are "we"?

Elmira: My mother. And that's when we had... we took this little Morley and never... We still have him. And we gradually brought things and I just got married, I went and bought that table and that buffet. They're my mother's, they're old family stuff, you know. And some old chairs... I got rid of a lot of this stuff. When I started to keep house we got that...

Ranald: Why did you and your mother decide to stay here?

Elmira: Well, my father was gone and I had not brothers anymore, and we thought it would be easier to work up here, to make our living. So I went into a canning factory in the fall. You work on the farms right up till the farms were finished, and then you went up to (inaudible) and worked in the Canadian Canners, right up till all the pears and... It would be December when we would finish. And we just got rooms and stayed around till spring and then we'd come back to Clarkson. We'd save a lot of money. Then we'd come back to Clarkson. I wrote to one of the men who had berries growing, and I asked him to come and get us. So he came up with the car and brought us back down here again and stayed around with friends.

Ranald: When you picked berries, where did you stay?

Elmira: Oh, they always got them little... they called them
Indian houses, you know, they're little houses with partitions and two families, or one family... They got old beds in there, and you usually bring your own, what you're going to use. Some people, boys generally would just crawl in there. But my mother and I always had a couple, a big trunk and another thing. We always had our own things.

Ranald: Did they any cooking facilities or anything?

Elmira: Well, they had a stove, and old pieces of dishes that some people would carry some away and use them.

Ranald: What kind of stove?

Elmira: Oh, a wood stove. There'd be a pile of wood at the back. And they'd work there right up till apples was finished if they wanted to. Then we took this little boy in, and he played around while we worked, you know, and played with things. We bought him a little trike when he was a little older -- it was hard to get at that time; it was wartime, you know. But we managed to buy one and he kept busy with that.

Ranald: Where would you get water and that kind of thing?

Elmira: Oh, they got you well fixed, there was a well right there, you know. They had to because these places were inspected to see if they were fit to live in or not. Sometimes the R.C.M.P. would come through, when they were looking after the native people, to see where we were living. The shacks were good, but it was up to us to keep them, keep them, look after ourselves, you know.

Ranald: Were there native people from other areas living there too?

Elmira: Oh, from all over. That's how I know them from all the reserves. I lived here for so long that I knew them from all over.

Ranald: Did the native people from different areas get along well when they were strawberry picking?

Elmira: They don't usually mix them. One farmer might get people from Alderville; another one'd go to Curve Lake; another one up around Six Nations; some from Cape Croker, and some just come on their own, and wherever they fitted in, they'd get a job. Christian Island, they used to come too... And that's how I know Hettie and Lily. I mean once we were (inaudible) here I guess. Hettie is in the craft shop you know.

Ranald: How many days of work did you... a week did you work? How many days?

Elmira: Every day but Sunday. And sometimes if the berries were crowding we'd work on Sundays. But you see the more you
work (inaudible). We went one year up to St. Catherines and we were working on (inaudible). And picked grapes; that was nice, you know, those grapevines, you know. (Inaudible) Concord grapes -- they were grapes for the winery. As far as you can see the rows of grapes, you know. So in the spring I had an old uncle come and live right near us. We were in a little cabin... Do you remember when the service stations had little cabins on the side, and you could get an overnight room? Well, we rented those and put a little stove, that little stove in there. I had an uncle -- we called him uncle, actually he was just another Beaver, a distant relative of my dad. He was from Hamilton and he came and lived near us. And he started to prune fruit trees, and he stayed all winter. And he pruned the grapes. So I got a job tying grapevines. My mother couldn't come out in the cold with this little boy, (inaudible).

And they give you a fruit basket; you tied it around your waist, and there's little wires about four or five inches long. And there's a ball of cord and a little knife. And them grapes, there's just (inaudible) left after they (inaudible) about that long. And they twist it. You need to twist them around and you don't... there's a little bud, that's why they like women and girls, we were careful, don't touch that bud. Put your finger there and wrap that wire. That gives it a chance to grow. And each one of green things are clusters of grapes. You wouldn't realize that, eh? And the ball of, the string was, where that big knot is, sometimes it breaks away and we'd tie it with a string. That was all strange to me but I must have done that... So my mother came out when it got warm, eh, and we'd bring this little boy in a blanket, and he'd make a tent and play, you know, and talk to himself. Sometimes there would be another little boy around and they'd build those sand things, but if it was cold...

Ranald: How old was Morley at that time?

Elmira: About four. And my mother and I tied and tied and we finished at $.25 an hour.

Ranald: Were you given meals when you were working?

Elmira: Oh no, no.

Ranald: You brought your own along with you?

Elmira: You know what they call corned beef -- I can't eat that now because going home there was a service station, had bread and necessities, you know. And I'd go and get a can of that corned beef, and you know it was about $.10 a can. Take one home, we'd get the fire going and make tea, and cut this up, and whatever we had to eat with it. And we ate so much of it that now I can't stand it. It wasn't because we had to eat it, it was quick. (Inaudible), I think what was left of it we took it for lunch.
Ranald: How did you find your first job, your first factory job or whatever, it wasn't a family (inaudible)?

Elmira: I never worked in... only the canning factory.

Ranald: And how did you get your first job there?

Elmira: It was, we went with another family, and it was kind of scary for me. You go into the canning factory in the office, and you'd sign in and they gave you a ticket. And you, they give you a brand new thing that looks like a mattress cover, they called it ticks, whether you've heard that name or not. And you'd go to the barn and there was clean hay -- a bale of hay. You fill those ticks up with clean hay; that was your bed. And you went, there was... the bed, it was all on the floor, the mattress -- had legs on it -- and you made your bed. We didn't have blankets, you couldn't go in and ask for blankets; but my mother and I, as I said, we always had what we needed. And my mother and I went in one, and our aunt came in with us.

And every time you left that door to go to the... and there's four or five huts and then there's a long kitchen. A long row of stoves over there, and there's a long row of sinks. Every so many spaces, and it's the same upstairs. Every time we went there you had to lock your door, to go and cook. And you had to stand there and watch the cooking or it was gone when you turned your back. When you're cooking potatoes, frying hamburger, or whatever, sausages. And I was first there, I was there, they said, "You start the fire and we'll get the vegetables going." I went out, I didn't see much wood, I said, "What are we going to burn?" There was heap of (inaudible) as high as a house, from the year before -- they were dry. My aunt says, "You got a lot to learn." She took an ax and got some fine kindling -- there's a pile of old dried boards there. And she says, "Now get that basket full of them chips." She started a big fire and you throw them chips on there, you know, and it's a nice red heat. I said, "I wonder what they're going to do with them big (inaudible)?" Trucks bring them in and you see it takes the (inaudible) out of the (inaudible), and they dump them there. So I remember writing home to my sister and I told her about the big high... like a mountain of (inaudible). So we didn't stay there very long, we went out on a... We didn't want to keep Morley there, because somebody had to stay home with him, either me or my mother. And then they said there was epidemics going around among children. And they said the year before that there was infantile paralysis. So we got out of there and we went down to Vinelands and we went working on the peaches. A couple of young boys went with us, they were Beaver boys, you know. And they picked too, worked on the peach grader. And you'd stand there until every peach is graded; they roll down the little, you know. Then we went to the grapes, we picked grapes for the wineries. That wound up the season.
Ranald: At that time were there a lot of native people working there?

Elmira: Natives and foreigners. Like Polish and... mostly Polish and... is it Ukrainian? Something like that.

Ranald: At this point we ended the interview early when a neighbor came to visit.