Margaret: Did you come from Norway House?

Ben: No, I was born here.

Margaret: Here in Fisher River?
Ben: Right in this place, (inaudible), that's where I was born.

Margaret: And what about your mother and father?

Ben: Well, I don't remember my father. I was so small when he died, you know. Mother died in 1907.

Margaret: And where did she come from?

Ben: She come from, they all come from Norway House.

Margaret: And what was her name before she married?

Ben: Oh, I don't know about that.

Margaret: Well, you yourself, what sort of thing were you doing when you were growing up and...?

Ben: Well, I went to school here for a while and then when I was 11 years old I went to Brandon school. You know, they used to call it industrial school them days, you know. That was in 1895 I went there. And I stayed there seven years, I never come home. And in 1902, the fall of 1902, I come home. I was 11 years when I went over there. I stayed there seven years. I never had a holiday, not like nowadays, you know. Them days you used to go to school year around. Of course, we didn't go to school all the time, we had to work half a day like, you know. Well, I'll say around four hours like, you know, from one till five. And the same in the morning. And you go to school in the morning and you worked in the afternoon and if you don't work in the morning, you go to school in the morning and you work in the afternoon. And if you go to school in the morning, well you work in the afternoon too. And so on like that, you know. Some folks go to school in the afternoon and work in the morning. Do chores in the morning, milked the animals in the morning and feed the chickens and so on, the pigs and everything, other things like, you know. That's what the boys were doing, you know, but the girls, they were inside the school cleaning up. So that is why when I grewed up I come home here and they didn't give me nothing when I left. I had the clothes on my back, that's all.

Margaret: Did you learn any trade or skill or...?

Ben: They learned us how to farm and so on like that, you know. But they didn't give you nothing, they didn't give you no help or anything at all.

Margaret: What did you do then when you came back?

Ben: Well, I worked around the sawmill and in the fall I used to go to the harvest. And after that I started fishing, you know. I fished till about six, seven years ago, I guess. I quit. I'm getting too old to fish. I'll be 82 October 15th.

Margaret: That's getting on.
Ben: Yeah.

Margaret: What fish did you catch mostly?

Ben: Oh, pickerel. In the summer, just like these fellows, what they are doing. I used to go whitefishing too. In the fall they fish pickerel, or whatever you catch you sell. But the price of fish wasn't very high that time, you know.

Margaret: Did you have your own boats?

Ben: Oh, we had our own skiffs, you know. But whitefishing you work on wages. Well, some fellows got the boat, you know, hired men and worked for wages. We didn't get very much wages too. The wages was low at that time. The most we would get was $45 a month. In 1918 that is the first time they raised the wages up to $90 a month. They just went up higher and higher. I don't know what they pay, around $350 or $400 a season now. That is for a little better than two months.

Margaret: Well then, in the wintertime did you go hunting?

Ben: No, I wasn't a hunter at all. I went fishing in the winter too.

Margaret: Through the ice?

Ben: Through the ice. And after I quit fishing, you know, them days they were using steam boats on the rivers and that in the spring of the year, you know. Chopping cord wood and mostly that was $2 a cord. And after quitting chopping cord wood we used to trap rats and so on like that, you know. You didn't get no help from the government them days. You fight your own battles or starve, that's all.

Margaret: What about in the fall, the ducks and geese?

Ben: Oh well, you can kill them any time you need to eat, you know. I didn't bother them very much, you know. Not when they are breeding, I don't bother them. And then them days all the old fellows used to go hunt moose and some of them would trap in the winter. But most of them were for fishing in the winter, you know. There was a lot of fish them days, you know. Not like what it is now.

Margaret: Did you go far away to go fishing?

Ben: No, fished right in the bay here. Sometimes you go further north for tulibees(?), you know. After they set the tulibees(?) they go to the States. Well, we didn't bother with tulibees(?) after that. When they closed the tulibees(?) over the States that winter, you know, we were supposed to get 5 a pound for tulibees(?). And I had two hundred and forty pounds of tulibees(?)... I didn't get five cents.

Margaret: Why not?
Ben: Well, they couldn't sell them. Oh it was a matter of fact, that. That winter I thought I could have made three, four thousand dollars but I didn't make nothing, that's all. Oh, there was piles and piles of boxes and huts all over these rivers and wherever the freighters run, there were fish. Of course the teamsters got their freight, you know, but the fisherman didn't get nothing. And lots of wages, we didn't get nothing.

Margaret: Well, the fishing isn't as good around here now, you have to go further away, don't you?

Ben: Well, they don't fish in the winter here now. In the bay there is no fish at all. Even they don't fish anyplace unless you go to Dauphin River, you know, to fish there. In the winter they don't fish; mostly they cut pulp whenever they get a chance, whatever job they can get now.

Margaret: Well, when you go out fishing, or when you did in the wintertime, you'd have to take quite a supply of food and so on?

Ben: Well, them days, you know, the company that you are going to fish for, they would furnish you with the outfit. That winter I lost on them fishes, I was fishing for Brady(?) was the man's name, through Captain Robinson at Selkirk, I think it was. That's where I got my stuff. Well, I got around about, say, four or five hundred dollars worth of grub and go out for the winter. That fall I was married too and I fished that fall there and I cleared six hundred dollars that fall. I left that to my family. I had my four or five kids that time. That winter I didn't get nothing, I didn't get nothing for my kids. I went to work, I took my axe and I went to Matheson Island and cut pulp wood there. I stayed there a month.

Margaret: Are there many people at Matheson Island?

Ben: Oh yes, there is quite a settlement there. You can drive right around from that Hudson line, you know. You follow that and when you get down you cross the river -- it is about maybe a mile from that river, what they call Washow Bay River. A mile from there there is a sign there. (inaudible) This other one there, that goes to the end of the road they call it, you know, across from Matheson Island. And it's about, oh, I would say about a mile and a half across, I guess, maybe not quite, from Matheson Island. Matheson Island is just an island but it's a big island, it's quite a settlement there. And there are some houses on this side, some of them settled on this side, at the end of the road.

Margaret: Do you know of any Settees there?

Ben: Oh yes, there are Settees there and oh, there is lots of them there.

Margaret: I want to go over and visit there too.
Ben: Well, you just follow that Hudson line there. Course you could go through here about... See that road that goes up there? You hit that Hudson road, you know. When you hit that Hudson road, you go east. It's eighteen miles from the river to that road. It's all gravelled. There is nobody out on that road, no housing or nothing till you come to quite a ways east there. Then you'll see some farmers and as you get closer to Riverton. I don't know about going north, I never went that road, you know. I just went to Matheson Island.

Margaret: Well, I must try that.

Ben: And there is another little settlement there, what they call Pine Dock but I don't know whether the road goes through there. That is just before you get to the end of the road. And there's, they say there's a summer resort there, somewhere along that road.

Margaret: Oh, that would be interesting.

Ben: I never been there but...

Margaret: Well, around Washow Bay, are there people from Norway House, who used to be at Norway House too? Or is just here?

Ben: No. It is a long time ago since I was at Washow Bay, you know. That was before there was any road there. Not so long ago they built that road.

Margaret: And you keep yourself busy now too?

Ben: Oh yes. I'm just waiting for my (inaudible) doesn't stay with me now. She stays at (name), she is married to an (inaudible) fellow. But they are up at Horse Island, you know. They should be in here for maybe Saturday or Sunday. And I have a grandson too staying with me here, but he's out in the Bay again. I don't know whether he'll be home. Maybe Sunday, maybe Monday, I don't know. But through the summer and through the winter and most of the time I stay at home.

(End of Interview)

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