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INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: 37 BEVERLEY STREET  
TORONTO, ONTARIO  
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TORONTO, ONTARIO  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General account of his life.  
Evelyn: The following is an interview with Norman Nashkawa of  
Manitoulin Island. The interview is being conducted in the  
Goulding Room on 315 Dundas Street East on June 30, 1983, by  
Evelyn Sit.

Evelyn: When and where were you born?

Norman: Where? On Manitoulin Island.

Evelyn: And when?

Norman: December 14, 1921.

Evelyn: What is the origin of your name?

Norman: My name?

Evelyn: Yeah, your name is Norman Nashkawa. What does that  
mean?

Norman: I don't know, just a name I guess.

Evelyn: So your parents just gave it to you.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Do you have an Indian name?

Norman: (Indian name).

Evelyn: And what does that mean?

Norman: Mermaid.

Evelyn: Mermaid?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And how was that given to you?

Norman: Oh, I don't know how I got it.

Evelyn: Was there any sort of ceremony or anything?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: And what was it, a name giving ceremony?

Norman: Well, it's a (inaudible) name, call me (Indian) (inaudible). People around where I live, you know, they call me (Indian name).

Evelyn: You said there was a ceremony, right?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: What is the name of the ceremony, is there a name?

Norman: Oh, I don't know.

Evelyn: Do you know what took place during the ceremony? I mean there was some sort of ceremony for giving you a name. I mean do you know, describe to me the ceremony. Or you don't know?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: How big was your family?

Norman: Seven.

Evelyn: And what were their names.

Norman: The oldest, a boy, his name is Hamulous(?), and then Johnny, and there's two girls, Elizabeth, Claire, and Thomas, Rebecca, I think that's it.

Evelyn: What was your home like?

Norman: I bought when I first married, you know, and after a year I got married then I bought a house.

Evelyn: I mean like as a child, how was your home life?

Norman: I was raised on the farm.

Evelyn: On the reserve?

Norman: Yeah. When I was staying with my dad.

Evelyn: Oh, I mean did you have any brothers and sisters?

Norman: Oh yeah, I had four. Two boys and a girl.

Evelyn: So could you describe how your home functioned?

Norman: Home function?

Evelyn: I mean what were the roles of men, women and children on the farm?

Norman: Yeah, I was the, well my brother is the oldest, and I'm second, then my brother, then my sister. There is four of us in the family.

Evelyn: Did you have any sort of chores or anything?

Norman: What's that?

Evelyn: Chores are like work around the house.

Norman: Oh yeah, we had to milk the cows, cut wood, cut pulp wood and working on the farm way up north, up around Kapuskasing.

Evelyn: How were you treated as a child?

Norman: Pretty fair.

Evelyn: What do you mean?

Norman: Fair.

Evelyn: Were you treated, would you say, just like most children in native families?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: What did you do on a typical day? What did you do in the daytime? In the morning you would wake up, what did you do after that?

Norman: Working.

Evelyn: Did you make any trips outside of the reserve at all?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: None at all. Did you go to school?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Was it on the reserve?

Norman: No, it was Spanish, Spanish, Ontario, it's up further north where I lived.

Evelyn: And how were the teachers like?

Norman: I don't know.

Evelyn: Do you remember anything about your school days, your experiences?

Norman: Oh, I work on the... I would milk the cows. Where I went to school there they raise cattle, you know. We'd milk the cows every morning and evening. I don't know how many cattle they raised, about fifteen cows I guess, maybe more. I stayed there by the year.

Evelyn: You stayed there by the year?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And then during the summertime did you go home?

Norman: Yeah, I went home in summertime.

Evelyn: So when you were very young you went to that school.

Norman: Yeah. I was there five years too, then I got sick.

Evelyn: And you had to drop out of school?

Norman: Yeah, I had to quit school when I got sick. Then I was fifteen at the time I think, around fifteen.

Evelyn: So is this school a mixture of natives and non-natives?

Norman: Yeah, it's all mixed.

Evelyn: An all mixed school?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So what were you taught?

Norman: It's hard to say.

Evelyn: Were you able to maintain your language?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: So, if there was a mixture of children you were still able to speak Ojibway?

Norman: Oh yeah, they were all mixed in there.

Evelyn: So you talked Ojibway there?

Norman: Yeah, a little bit, not very much. Well, mostly the (inaudible).

Evelyn: What were the other students like?

Norman: What's that?

Evelyn: What were the other students like? How were they like, how did they treat you?

Norman: Not very nice. We never bothered them, paid much attention, you know.

Evelyn: You said there were some non-natives in the school.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: How did they treat you?

Norman: Oh, fair.

Evelyn: Did you ever play any games?

Norman: (Inaudible) with the school. I just play, learned how to, they were playing hockey, but I didn't join in.

Evelyn: Did you learn any native games when you were a child?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: Or did you ever sing any native songs?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: You weren't taught any of that?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: What is your ancestral history? The previous generations, were they all farmers?

Norman: I don't understand.

Evelyn: I mean your ancestral history, the previous generation, your great-grandfather, your great-great-

grandfather. Do you know anything about that?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: What do you know?

Norman: They were all farmers, they worked on the farm year round. Ever since I know they were farmers. My great-grandfather, my dad was a farmer and then after we all grown up, you know, then we all go into farming, got married.

Evelyn: So, as far as you can remember your great-great-great-grandfather was a farmer.

Norman: A farmer, yeah, farmer.

Evelyn: So it's passed generation to generation.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: What is the name of your tribe?

Norman: That would be Ojibway.

Evelyn: And the name of your reserve?

Norman: It's Wikwemikong.

Evelyn: How do you say it?

Norman: Wikwemikong.

Evelyn: Oh. Do you know what it means?

Norman: (chuckles) No.

Evelyn: How big was the community of the way of number of people?

Norman: I'll say about 1,400.

Evelyn: One thousand four hundred?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And can you describe the reservation?

Norman: Well, you look at the map, there's (inaduable).

Evelyn: Oh, I mean as a way of what was inside the reservation.

Norman: Inside?

Evelyn: Yeah, what was on the reservation?

Norman: Well, I don't...

Evelyn: Did you have a chief?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: What was his name?

Norman: Johnny Okahishik(?).

Evelyn: Were there any other important people that existed on the reserve besides the chief?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: There weren't any councillors?

Norman: Oh yeah, but I've never met them.

Evelyn: You didn't...

Norman: I was working on my own way, you know, looking after my family. Work everything.

Evelyn: But did you have a Medicine Man on your reserve? So you didn't have any sort of pipe carriers or Medicine Men or anything?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So if someone got ill who would they go to?

Norman: The doctor.

Evelyn: What were some of the ways one could make a living on the reserve?

Norman: Cutting pulp. Well, I was guiding in the summertime, guiding and go painting around there, around the whole town. I had that good job, I had a year around job.

Evelyn: And what were some of the other ways you could make a living?

Norman: Oh, just as I told you, cutting pulp wood, guiding.

Evelyn: You mean no one made baskets, or went hunting?

Norman: No, no, no. I never made anything like that.

Evelyn: Oh I mean, but, other people on the reserve.

Norman: Oh well my wife did make canoes, little handcraft.

Evelyn: She made canoes?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: How do you make one?

Norman: Get birch bark. I sell them to her, they have them where I was working.

Evelyn: And where were you working?

Norman: At Manitoulin Lodge. I worked for Robbie Commix(?), he's dead now.

Evelyn: So, you said your wife made handcrafts.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Canoes, right? And do you know the process of making them?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So she never showed you how to make them?

Norman: Oh yeah, she did once.

Evelyn: Can you describe the process that you did it?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: But do you know how to do it? What kind of modern conveniences did one have? I mean did you have plumbing?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: Did you have a Ford T car?

Norman: Oh yeah, we had cars. Well, my old friend from there came out...

Evelyn: Your grandfather has it?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Were your grandparents farmers too?

Norman: Grandparents, oh yeah.

Evelyn: So what was the economy like on the reserve?

Norman: What's that?

Evelyn: What were the main sort of ways, I mean was your reserve rich, or was it poor?

Norman: Well, nobody was rich in them days, my home town we just kept on working.

Evelyn: So did you celebrate any kind of festivals?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: No, you didn't celebrate Christmas, or...

Norman: Oh yeah, we did.

Evelyn: But you didn't celebrate any sort of Indian festivals at all, eh?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: No Indian holidays? So how did you spend a Christmas in your family?

Norman: Well, we all went to the church. Lot of food that we bring from home. And by morning, you know, time for play with toys and things when we were kids.

Evelyn: Did you have any, you didn't celebrate anything with traditional practices, did you?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: Did your family have any traditional practices? What kind of foods did you eat?

Norman: Pork I guess, pork, vegetables, cake.

Evelyn: Was there any sort of Indian cake?

Norman: Scone.

Evelyn: Oh.

Norman: Do you know what scone is?

Evelyn: Yeah, something like a tea biscuit.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Did you have any wild game, or anything? Wild animals to eat?

Norman: Oh yeah, we had deer, rabbits.

Evelyn: Anything else?

Norman: We had all kinds of meat, pork, beef.

Evelyn: So did you have any sort of Indian kind of foods like besides scone?

Norman: Oh yeah, we had (inaudible). We make our own pies,

home made bread.

Evelyn: Did you have anything like bannock?

Norman: What?

Evelyn: That's an Indian food, or corn soup or something?

Norman: Maybe you call it corn soup, I don't know, we ate it, you know. I don't know the name.

Evelyn: Did you have any sort of community get-togethers?

Norman: Well, sometimes.

Evelyn: And what were the purposes for these?

Norman: I don't know.

Evelyn: Did you ever find out what the purpose was? And did you have any sort of powwows or anything on the reserve?

Norman: Yeah, I guess they did have.

Evelyn: Do you know what went on during the powwows?

Norman: No, I never went.

Evelyn: You never went to one? Did people talk about heroes or people from other tribes?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: No? Did you ever go to other reserves to visit?

Norman: Oh, I don't remember.

Evelyn: When was your first encounter of non-natives?

Norman: I don't know.

Evelyn: What made you move to Toronto?

Norman: Well, Sudbury, through my wife.

Evelyn: So what were the stories of Toronto before you came? That you heard about Toronto before you came here?

Norman: What?

Evelyn: What were the kind of stories you heard about Toronto before you came here?

Norman: Stories?

Evelyn: Yeah, maybe you heard Toronto was a good city so you

decided to come.

Norman: Well, I had a cousin here, so I used to go Sault Ste. Marie, up around that way you know, when we first have, we got into Toronto. I used to go to Sault Ste. Marie, worked there

for a while, and then come home again. Then one (inaudible), my wife and then I came to Toronto (inaudible), then I stay here ever since.

Evelyn: What was your first impression of Toronto when you came?

Norman: My first job?

Evelyn: What was your first impression, what did you think of Toronto when you got here?

Norman: Tired a couple of years, I didn't like it.

Evelyn: Why was that?

Norman: I'm (inaudible), I wasn't used to living in the city. I never lived in the city before that.

Evelyn: So what made you come to Toronto, mainly your cousin right?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Otherwise you never heard anything about Toronto before this?

Norman: Well, I went by here one time in 1948 or '49. I was in a Canadian and North American Sportsman Show up in Cleveland, Ohio. I was there two weeks.

Evelyn: What happened at this sportsman show?

Norman: Well, we put a show, well, we sell handicrafts, you know, what we had on the, where I was working. It was like a gift shop for the tourists, you know.

Evelyn: And did you, what kind of things did you sell?

Norman: Whatever we had.

Evelyn: Were there Indians from all over, or just your reserve?

Norman: Well, people all over.

Evelyn: So, it was the native...

Norman: Yeah, you have Eskimos, from all over in the States,

all around the world.

Evelyn: So how was your interaction with the natives in the U.S.?

Norman: Well, they were pretty good.

Evelyn: So did this kind of event take place every year?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Is it still taking place now?

Norman: Well, no, I don't think so.

Evelyn: So what happened? People just come in and look around.

Norman: Yeah. All the same thing what they had here in C.N.E., something like that. That's what they had in Cleveland; people from all over the world putting up the show.

Evelyn: Was there any sort of dances, native dances?

Norman: Oh yeah, they are like the powwow dance. Well, how people from the States dance.

Evelyn: And what did other Indians from other places do?

Norman: They did the same thing, sell whatever job they got.

Evelyn: How did you base your prices on the kind of crafts that you were selling?

Norman: I don't know.

Evelyn: Did you ever make anything yourself?

Norman: Yeah, I made a few totem poles.

Evelyn: You made totem poles?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: How high were they?

Norman: Oh, they were little wee ones.

Evelyn: So they are about eight, ten inches high?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: How did you make them?

Norman: With a knife. With cedar and dry wood.

Evelyn: So you just took any dry wood to make...

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So you took any dry wood just to make... So there was no really good kind of wood?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So what other sorts? Cedar...

Norman: Cedar, oh, not any kind of wood, it's only cedar we used.

Evelyn: So you wouldn't use birch?

Norman: Well, my wife made canoes.

Evelyn: And you made totem poles.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: The little tiny ones, did you ever make any big ones?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So what sort of things did you make on your totem poles?

Norman: What do you mean by that?

Evelyn: Well, did you carve out, you must have had some sort of a picture in mind of making a whole totem pole.

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: What sort of things?

Norman: Haven't you seen a totem pole?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Norman: Well, just look, look at them, you figure it out yourself.

Evelyn: I mean did you have any sort of images that came into your mind that you'd use?

Norman: Yeah, no, no, yeah, yeah.

Evelyn: Was it things like ravens and...?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So what did you mainly carve out on your own totem poles?

Norman: Well, little animals.

Evelyn: Did your grandfather teach you this craft, or your father?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So you just...

Norman: Yes, learned that myself.

Evelyn: So you picked up the hobby and just...

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And you sold them. When you were doing this, when you first did it, making tiny totem poles, what kind of equipment did you use?

Norman: Knife.

Evelyn: A what?

Norman: Knife.

Evelyn: Just any sort of knife?

Norman: Yeah, (inaudible).

Evelyn: So you just taught yourself to make it?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: You just looked around and you just made it?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So none of your animals on your totem poles symbolized anything, or meant anything to you?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So you just thought, "Well, I'll do a fox and a wolf, and whatever."

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Did you ever do any sort of masks or anything, man on your totem poles?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So they're all animal images?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Is there a reason for this?

Norman: (inaudible) Make a little bit of money, sell them.

Evelyn: Oh I see. Did you make anything else in the craft show?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So your specialty was totem poles.

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: Was there any sort of bartering system on the reserve?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So did you collectively with other farmers during harvesting time go to each farm, or you mainly stayed alone?

Norman: Yeah, stayed alone.

Evelyn: So you didn't help any other farmers?

Norman: Well, sometimes we go and help them and they help us, you know. (inaudible).

Evelyn: And in return would you give him a meal or...

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: So who prepared this meal?

Norman: Mother.

Evelyn: Your mother would prepare this meal. And do you go to other farms and help them?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And they prepare a meal for you?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: So there was no sort of giving you money to help each other?

Norman: No. Lots of times they want to work by so much for whatever it costs.

Evelyn: Did you find that you gave them beans or anything, like trading?

Norman: Oh yeah.

Evelyn: So you traded around?

Norman: Yeah.

Evelyn: And what sort of things did you trade?

Norman: Well, potatoes.

Evelyn: Potatoes. Anything else?

Norman: Oh, whatever we had, but whatever they want, see.

Evelyn: So, did anyone tell you of any legends?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: So none of your parents told you any stories from the past?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: Did your parents ever tell you a story about their own lives?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: No experiences?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: How did a girl and a guy meet? How would a girl and a guy meet?

Norman: I don't know.

Evelyn: If you wanted to marry off the reserve did your parents let you?

Norman: Well, I suppose.

Evelyn: And you wouldn't lose your status? Was there a reason why women would lose their status if they married off the reserve?

Norman: Well, today... Well them days they did too, they had lost their status.

Evelyn: Do you know what the reason behind this was?

Norman: No.

Evelyn: Okay.

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