MAIL:

One man walked from Ile-a-la-Crosse, camped at Bull's House (north end of Peter Pond Lake). Next day ate at West La Loche and continued to Ft. McMurray via Clearwater R. He pulled a toboggan loaded with mail. Later Fred Daniels walked with mail to meet the train at 4:30p.m. in Alberta. He made trip in one day from West La Loche to Cheecham, Alberta. The mailman from Ft. McMurray to Ft. Chipewyan used dog team but Ile-a-la-Crosse man thought dogs too much trouble, walking was faster.

Baptiste Herman from Christina, Alberta hauled freight from Cheecham by horse. He was always on time. Made two trips a month. Pay $72/month out of which he bought hay, oats, etc. Mail in summer from Ile-a-la-Crosse by canoe because there was no road.
Cafe owner in Ft. McMurray, when poor, walked all over looking for jobs. Walked from McMurray to Prince Albert once and wore out nine pairs of moccasins on the trip.

LAND:

West of La Loche to the railroad track and north to Clearwater R. is muskeg, muskrat country (Garson Lake area). La Loche is squirrel country and north of La Loche is all high ground.

While checking for fires from plane, Arsene could see how far they used to walk when trapping and wonders how he ever did it. They went north to McParlane R., Cree Lake or Pond-du-Lac to trap. Sometimes by snowshoes, running in front to break trail for dog teams. Sometimes the people had no food.

CARIBOU:

One time (1951) lots of caribou were on Lac La Loche and in the excitement many were killed although the Resources officers tried to take guns away. Arsene thinks caribou don't come south any more because fires have burned the country and caribou won't cross a prairie.

Caribou Hunting Story:

Arsene went to check bear hole, found no bear but saw caribou and shot seven. Brought back tongues in bag but no one would believe that's what was in his bag.

Lloyd Lake fire is reason why caribou don't go past there any more, Arsene figures. Now that gov't goes after fires, there's too many fires.

LAC LA LOCHE FIRE:

(pre 1936) Hay stack caught fire, burnt trees up to West La Loche all around lake. People took belongings to shore and got boats ready. When the big spruce were burning it was like fire was on top of you. On lake only safe place. Smoke could have killed everyone but luckily wind changed.

At time of first war five men came from U.S.A. to avoid the war. One named White stayed at Garson Lake three years. Jonas Clarke found him in spring. He was really nervous so they brought him by canoe to La Loche and sent him out. Heard he was okay again. Doctor said he was too long in bush alone. One summer the people saw his dog and noticed fish taken from their nets and knew someone was in the bush. In winter
Arsene's dad told him to come to their place, so he came and made a spruce tipi house.

Some of those men went north of Clearwater R., made a house inside the ground. Dug with shovel, sticks put over with mud on top, didn't need fire to be warm. Arsene's grandpa gave them a net. They caught suckers and learned to keep fish for winter and how to trap.

John Nicholson and Jack trapped all their lives. Ed Park's mother married Jack. John, in spring, after trapping, would paddle around the lakes breaking rocks. On the other side Descharme Lake he found something. Went to Ft. McMurray and sent it south. That was gold! So he hired a plane and made daily trips to and from that place. Made quite a bit of money but found no other claims. He died in Uranium City where he lived for a long while.

Pierre Lemaigre (George Lemaigre's dad) found a white man up the Clearwater River who went crazy and cut his wrists. Pierre stopped the blood and took him out south.

One white trapper, a former cowboy, came north to escape others who were after him. At his cabin on the Clearwater he became sick. On hearing people nearby he fired a shot but scared the people away. He died and was eaten by a bear. Later Joe Bag (of Turnor Lake) and an RCMP officer found his remains and a letter he'd written.

Once there were three Frenchmen up north trapping. One got sick and died so the other two kept trapping until one of them weakened and died. After that the third man snowshoed all the way from north through deep snow without any grub and eventually made it to Turnor Lake. He froze one foot entirely. When he arrived the RCMP officer was more concerned with the accusation that the men had been using dope to trap with than with the health of the remaining man. After a month in Ile-a-la-Crosse hospital the man recovered only to be charged in court with using dope. He was furious with the court and was released. He stayed two weeks at Arsene's in West La Loche before leaving for the south via the train in Alberta.

Arsene: I met (?) when he left Ile-a-la-Crosse when everything is ready and let's go. And he just told me that, that little toboggan just had a rope right here. And he's so fast and he camped in Bull's House that night. You know the Bull's House?

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: And he camped there and sometime before daylight he come to here like that. And he slept there and just come through here. And then soon as when he had something to eat, you know, they left. And that same day they hit McMurray.
Ray: From here?

Arsene: From here.

Ray: In one day?

Arsene: By the river. In one day from Bull's House.

Ray: Did he got out by the portage way, or did he go...?

Arsene: Yeah, by portage and then he just went by the river.

Ray: He didn't go over to Garson Lake?

Arsene: Sometimes with his snowshoes. Just by the river from here. He just goes down there and...

Ray: Did he come all the way from Ile-a-la-Crosse to the Bull's House in one day?

Arsene: Yeah, yeah in one day. Half a day I guess. It's not far there. It's just like half a day.

Ray: Pulling, pulling his toboggan.

Arsene: Yeah, pulling his toboggan.

Ray: With the mail in?

Arsene: With the mail and (inaudible) and go to (?). Boy, that guy he must be fast, eh. My dad used to say that, "Oh he must be fast." And he just left here maybe (inaudible) down to McMurray that same day. Took that mail. The next morning he'll come back with it. He left there -- McMurray to here. Camp here. Next day to Ile-a-la-Crosse. Just by walking. Sometimes a little bit snow on his route, you know, you got to have snowshoes. Snowshoes and without snowshoes, the same travel.

Ray: And he brought all the mail to the people, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. Oh some people they used to be fast, you know, even that my wife (inaudible). At one place she found me there, he gave it to me (inaudible). He took the water from me and (inaudible). (laughing) So that old man he come here, he took the mail from La Crosse in the summertime. And then that same start of the day at about four thirty or something passed down to McMurray, you know, that passenger train. He's got to get there before that train passed there. Sometimes that he'd get there at the wrong time. He goes there just by walking.

Ray: From here over to the train station?

Arsene: From West La Loche.

Ray: From West La Loche.
Arsene: Just by walking in the summertime.

Ray: Over to Cheecham, eh?

Arsene: Over to Cheecham. Must be fast, eh? Yeah. He's a good walking old man that (?)

Ray: That was Fred, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. I don't know his name, Fred Daniels or something. I don't know why (inaudible) and that woman's got no name now. (laughing) Just (?) a lot of time.

Ray: Did that man that was pulling the mail, did he get paid to do that?

Arsene: Oh yeah.

Ray: Who paid him to do that? The government?

Arsene: For the money, government I guess.

Ray: And he always picked it up at Ile-a-la-Cross, eh?

Arsene: Yeah, goes and picks it up.

Ray: Didn't go to Big River, eh?

Arsene: No.

Ray: Was there a road...?

Arsene: Somebody take it there, I guess. (Inaudible) I guess, drop the mail there and he got to get it from there. You know, he's got to go down to McMurray.

Ray: Did somebody take it from McMurray up to Fort Chipewyan?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: Another person, eh?

Arsene: Another person from the other side, they used dogs there.

Ray: I wonder why that man didn't use dogs.

Arsene: Well, he don't like dogs. He's faster than a dog; he knows it. He don't want to carry the dog feed and things like that, my dad said that. Why he don't use the dogs, he said, "Dogs are too much trouble. Wherever I camp, well, I have trouble with the dogs and things like that, and when I walk I don't have no trouble. And then when I get there I just (inaudible) in it and I finish, have a good rest." That's what he said.
Ray:      Yeah.  Doesn't have to worry about...

Arsene:   Yeah.  But I forgot his name.  I forgot it, but I'll find it for you.

Ray:      Maybe Charlie will remember.

Arsene:   Maybe Charlie remembered that.

Ray:      Yeah, I have to go talk to Charlie.

Arsene:   Yeah.

Ray:      But I need somebody to translate for me.

Arsene:   Yeah.

Ray:      I need a translator.

Arsene:   And there's one old man is here; Baptiste Herman they used to call him.  He's from Alberta.  He used to haul up freight with a horse from Cheecham, you know.  Once a month, he's got about three or four horse.  Lots of parcels and things like that, you know.  Got to bring everything, but he never missed one hour that old man, all the time he doing that job.

Ray:      Always on time?

Arsene:   Always on time.  In the summertime he had a hell of a time getting through the muskeg with the horse, but still when time when the road goes there, you know, from West La Loche (inaudible); so he went there, you know, that old Indian road.  So soon as when he get there that old man still, he's right there all the time.  Never miss one.  Rain, heavy rain, don't matter.  It all was just the same.  And he get $72 a month that old man; made two trips in a month.  Of course he's got about four or five horses, you know; he's got lots of horses.  But when there's lot of parcels, well, you got to take more horses, sometimes six horses.  Got one man with him, that's all.

Ray:      Did he have a place to stop on the way?  Did he have a building to keep the horses in?

Arsene:   Well, he just, no just like...

Ray:      Did he stop at Garson Lake?

Arsene:   When he left the Cheecham, well have to stay in Christina.  That's his place, you know.  That's where he's living.  So from there he's got to stop at Garson Lake overnight, and the next morning he's got to be at West La Loche.

Ray:      Never put his horses inside though?
Arsene: No.

Ray: Always outside?

Arsene: In the wintertime (inaudible) sometimes he used to go there like this, when he don't keep the horse well (inaudible), but he's got to pay for the hay and things like that. And the oats, things like that. Seventy-two dollars a month, that's what he get. Just like $700 for a rate today, all right, but...

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: Of course at the time even a package of tobacco like this, maybe could get that for 10, you know. Oh yeah. Even a pound of lard you get that for 10 a pound. Just like he get $700 there just like right now. (inaudible) charging a dollar. That's a low price, the rest I would owe a $1.25, see.

Ray: It used to be 10?

Arsene: Yeah, it used to be 10.

Ray: How did the man bring the mail in the summertime to Ile-a-la-Crosse? Did they walk too?

Arsene: No. Just by canoe, I guess.

Ray: Not by horse, eh?

Arsene: No. Couldn't be by horses because can't get across all the lakes there, you know.

Ray: And there was no road, eh?

Arsene: There was no road. The one guy got cafe there, McMurray, last time I went there. Jerry, I forgot his last name but Jerry, he's a great guy that. He said... he's got a good cafe there, you know. And he said, "I'm just like rich right now," he says, "I used to be poor. I know all the places. Buffalo Narrows, and (inaudible). summertime I stayed there I was looking for jobs. And one time I couldn't get a job; so I had a little bit of money I wanted to go back to P.A. They said there was a road that was about that wide," he said, "the road from there. And I got to go back by walking. So I told one old lady to make me a moccasin to walk with." Nine pair of moccasins that what he bought, and he paid about a $1 that time, you know, for a pair of moccasin. So he made that with the moose hide, he said. And then he left there in Buffalo all the way to P.A. That nine pair of moccasins, he spoil everything. All the big holes on it. "So I can't do nothing," he says. "So I have to rub something under that, could hardly make that without a moccasin, P.A." he said. Just by walking. "Boy, that's a long walk," he said. He said, "It was hard time that time," he said.
Ray: Was that a long time ago?

Arsene: Quite a long time ago, I guess. He's kind of an old man, that guy. And after that he's find a good job or something and then he's got a cafe there. He bought one cafe, so he stayed there. I told him he's just like a millionaire, joking, you know. And so he give me a story. "I used to be not a millionaire like that. We used to walk lots of times from..." And he says he knows a lot of places. He says, "I been a lot of places looking for job. Sometime I fish with the guys, we bought rope. So we get a few dollars and just keep that money, and I went back to P.A."

Ray: There must have been trails, eh?

Arsene: Oh yeah.

Ray: All the way from here to P.A.?

Arsene: Oh yeah. That's what he said.

Ray: Bush trail, eh?

Arsene: Bush trail. There's only one bush trail, he said.

Ray: And then there's lots of muskeg, eh, to go around?

Arsene: Yeah. But I don't think there was muskeg, not very much.

Ray: No?

Arsene: From Buffalo to south is not muskeg much. Not like Garson Lake country. From the Garson right up to on the Alberta side, mostly all the muskeg country.

Ray: Yeah?

Arsene: Yeah. That's a poor country. You can trap there too in the springtime. Nothing but muskeg. No dry place, dry land, that's why I don't like that place.

Ray: Lots of muskrats there?

Arsene: From Garson Lake right up to Clearwater there's all the muskeg, that same muskeg. On this side of Garson Lake, you know, and you can't cross it in the summertime, but muskeg, soft. That same muskeg right up from that river, you know, from Garson River.

Ray: Garson River?

Arsene: And then right up to that Clearwater on this side of Clearwater. There's about five miles or something right at the end there, that muskeg. All around in that Alberta.
Ray: Over to the train track?

Arsene: Yeah. Boy, is there ever muskeg. On this side too. Wherever you go there's muskeg.

Ray: Is it good for trapping?

Arsene: Oh...

Ray: For muskrat?

Arsene: Yeah. Muskrat country, you know, in Garson country. But around here now nothing for rats. No rat country in this place.

Ray: Squirrel country, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. They're good squirrels. From here you go out north, well, it's all high land, you know. Wherever you go there's muskeg -- just about this -- that's all.

Ray: Yeah. It's pretty dry.

Arsene: One time in the summertime I went up north to the plane, you know, took it to the fire, you know, patrol. Boy I figure, you know, that's McFarlane River, you know, right up to there. Sometimes I find house, check them, you know. Oh I figured, boy, that's a long ways. And I used to walk lots of times there with snowshoes. Lots of people went like that, you know.

Ray: From here to...?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: To where?

Arsene: To McFarlane River sometimes. Jonas Clark used to trap from here right up to Cree Lake sometimes. By walking in the wintertime. Lots of guys that way. Some of the guys go to Fond-du-Lac, come back with the snowshoes.

Ray: All that way?

Arsene: Yeah. And then my brother-in-law, and one winter I was trapping with him. Oh boy, that's a long walk.

Ray: What brother was that?

Arsene: Edward. Robbie is my brother.

Ray: Yeah, Edward too, eh?

Arsene: Edward is my brother-in-law.

Ray: Oh, your brother-in-law.
Arsene: Boy, it's a long walk. And then my brother-in-law was sick. He got a mumps in here, you know. Balls about that big, couldn't walk. Four team of dogs, but I got a good dog, you know. It was behind me when I walk.

Ray: You walked in front of the dogs?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: To break the trail, eh?

Arsene: Yeah, to break the trail, but lots of snow, boy. All the way through from there to here. Oh it's a long walk, boy. But I just don't care about it, you know. I just figure it's not far. But now when I go there with the plane, when I could see there, oh, I wonder how I make that. I wonder how the people were walking that far. Sometimes no grub, you know, peoples. And the lakes were (inaudible), you don't kill a moose, you don't kill the caribou, things like that. Sometimes there's a herd of caribou comes just too close and then the people like that, because they could trail them, you know. Used to have that and...

Ray: Did they used to come a lot?

Arsene: What?

Ray: The caribou.

Arsene: Oh yeah. Sometimes...

Ray: People follow them? Did they used to go after them?

Arsene: Yeah. One time with the sleigh, RCMP (inaudible) chased them over here, take all their guns.

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: Sometimes we see lots of caribou on the lake, you know.

Ray: But you can't shoot them, eh?

Arsene: And the boys can't stand it, you know, can't hold themselves. So they just grab their gun -- and some old men too. Just chase that caribou and oh, they kill some, but (inaudible) or something. Just go after, then this guy just go after him and took all their guns. Because they don't want... They can kill them as much as they want for using. But when there's lots of guys like that, you know, and they just shoot 'em, shoot 'em, and they wounded and they die in the bush like that, so the police don't like that. That's why. It's all right. You can kill four or five anytime. (inaudible) lots of people who go after that caribou, you know, guys that run after
them. Get out that gun and chase them back. (laughs)

Ray: Was it easy to, can you shoot them easy?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: Just by, on your snowshoes or what? Running after them?

Arsene: No. Went on to land like this. Easy for killing, you know.

Ray: And they're not afraid, eh?

Arsene: Even that little lake, you know, you just kill them when you seen them on the lake coming this way. You just go around shore and sit down there by the shore, just come close to you and shoot right there, you know, and it's easy to kill them. But when there's lots on the lake, you know, even right now when you see lots of caribou what's the boys going to do? I know damn well that every skidoo they have they just run after them. They didn't care about RCMP. They'd chase them. Of course that's the way it is, you know, everybody got (inaudible) rifle. Just sneak them there and just go there when the RCMP (inaudible) well just have to chase them. You don't stop them and kill them too much, you know. So when he gets there he's got to take all that gun and come back. We used to do that.

Ray: But they haven't come for a long time, eh?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: When was the last time the caribou came?

Arsene: Oh I don't know. Maybe my wife would remember, not too long ago.

Ray: She said 1950.

Arsene: 1950.

Ray: Yeah. But before then they used to come, eh?

Arsene: Not right up to here.

Ray: No.

Arsene: But sometime there's lots of them in Descharme, inside, you know, all over; but they never come to here very often.

Ray: Did the people used to go from here up there?

Arsene: It's only two winters. And the last time he come here, he went right into Alberta right close to Cheecham
railroads. That's where he passed. Grand Prairie, you know, you can (?) Grand Prairie that chart, you know. That's the people that kill them there too. From around there too. And the last time they come this way, they never come after that. But I figure it's the burn the country too much, you know. You know when the...

Ray: Too many forest fires?

Arsene: Yeah. When the land no stick on it. Some places it was thick bush, you know, and just like prairie some place, you know. He can't cross there. They don't want to cross there, just stay there and he stop there. One time, I know that one time we went to for trapping in the fall time, my wife and that one boy, you know. So we stay there and I told them there was a bear hole there. I check for the bear, maybe the bear's there now. So I went out and my wife said, "Well, bring me a caribou tongue," she said. And that boy Ernest (inaudible). Nobody knew there was caribou. This time was a little freezing, you know. So I went and I said, "Okay." So I went out and I never suspected there was caribou, but just joking, you know. But soon when I hit that bush, you know, that thick bush and there's... right up Clearwater was just like prairie, you know, just a little stick about that long and they don't want to cross there, I guess. So he stopped there, eh. And as soon as when I get there, boy. Oh, one squirrel is climbing, you know. So I shoot that squirrel. Boy, I see something here -- wild caribou. Well, talk about a caribou in the bush. Oh, so I just killed seven right there, you know. I just shot seven. I never seen so many so close, you know. I never seen that. So I skin every one of them and I pack it in. I took all the tongues and I went to bear holes; nothing, no bear. So I come back. "Well, you were asking for caribou tongue," I said, "there's caribou tongue in the bag." Oh they don't believe me, you know. My wife and that boy don't believe me too. (inaudible). "No," he said, "you got it," he says. "Oh there's caribou tongue," I says. And they set the tables and I started eating, you know. "Why don't you boil that caribou tongue?" I says, "I brought seven of them." No, they don't believe me. At last that boy, you know, he grabbed that sack and he was checking these with his hand, you know. "Something in it," he said. So he took it out and, "Yes," he said, "that's caribou tongue," he says. And about two weeks after, that place where we stayed, two weeks after just crossed that little prairie. Stayed right along there, don't want to go across to Clearwater. In a little brook, you know. That's what I figure. That's why maybe they won't come here, because there's too many burned country, you know. Some places there's fairly big place, you know, on the other side of that Lloyd Lake on this side, you know. Three others took planes just checking all that fire around. Boy, it's a big country burning. So we haven't had the caribou coming across just like the lakes (inaudible).
Ray: Why are there so many fires now? In the old days there wasn't so many fires, eh?

Arsene: Yeah, I don't know why. Used to be a fire, (inaudible) used to be to sometimes. But nobody's fighting the fire at that time, and you'd see the smoke and that's all. Sometimes you couldn't see nothing. Sometimes you could hardly go across and see the land, it's full of smoke on this lake -- but nobody going after the fire and things like that. When the fire this way, the wind comes this way, you couldn't see nothing across. Heavy smoke. That's the way it used to be. But after when the government goes after the fire, and I figure -- I don't know why -- too many fires. Too much fire, but nobody did that. Can't be out in the bush like way far up north; you can't go there. Some pilot that do that all right. That Morris he used to make lots of fire; everyone knows that. Everybody know but they can't prove that Morris made that.

Ray: At Athabasca?

Arsene: Yeah. And usually when he gets here sometimes, you know, when he come here, that fire there, that fire there. (Inaudible) Oh there's about three, four places of fire at the same time. And they figure that guy does that.

Ray: You told me one time about a fire around the lake, eh?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: From West La Loche?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: How did that fire get started?

Arsene: That Max Clark(?) does that.

Ray: When was that? A long time ago, eh?

Arsene: Quite a long time ago, I don't remember.

Ray: When the Bay was over on West La Loche, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. Everybody was living up there. Boy, it's a big fire.

Ray: How did it get started?

Arsene: Well they went for a horse, to borrow a horse.

Ray: Oh.

Arsene: His daddy borrowed a horse from my dad, and my dad told him to look for the horse. Maybe it's on that little lake around there somewhere. So he went up there with one little boy. So he went there and the hay it was half stacked there,
you know. That dry hay. So he burned that, I think, that's what that little kid said that, and naturally they put a fire on that -- crazy enough, eh.

Ray: I wonder why. Just for fun, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. And when he come back there's a big fire there. How is that fire going? Well, don't know. And after that the kids had said that. They just burned that hay. That's our hay too, you know. Right now though he'd be in jail now for six months for sure. (laughs) No fine.

Ray: And then what? It caught onto the trees, eh?

Arsene: Oh yes, right up to the town, you know, right up to the fishery there. The other side too, it burned too quite a bit. The fire sparks went across, eh, and on this side.

Ray: Went all the way around, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. All that way around that fire goes.

Ray: Were the people afraid that their houses would burn too?

Arsene: Yeah, the people took all their stuff to the lakes, to the shore, you know, that big bank there across, you know, had them, you know.

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: So they put it on the rock, all their stuff. We did that eh, everything and the ready canoes, everything ready. When the fire come too close well they could go. But at last change the wind. That's why they're lucky -- maybe it would've killed everybody that smoke, you know. Of course that first time the wind come this way, and at night, you know, that fire that big spruce all around the point, you know, big timber, you know, went all the same time. That fire, they could see that fire through the half lake; just like right on top of you that fire. But they're lucky it changed the wind right away, this way. Blow the smoke out, you know. But we don't believe it kill the people. Of course if it's full of smoke on this lake, what the people going to do? The only thing that fire, you know, when the fire was, you know, on the lake, when we were in the bush some place, you run away out of the fire. When the fire is too close you got to be in the water, you know, the only place that's safe. The air is too strong. See that fire... But that water air is stronger than that smoke. That's what saved you. Smoke right up to the lake, but right away like this, just about this high. The only place you could have a chance.
Ray: *This is Ray Marnoch, and I've been talking with Arsene Fontaine at his home, in La Loche, on January 28, 1980.

(END OF SIDE A)

(DATE: February 14, 1980)

Ray: But that was the First World War?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: About 1919, eh, something like that?

Arsene: I don't know how...

Ray: I think it started in 1914 or something like that.

Unknown: 1914. I'm five years old.

Ray: And those guys, what was their names again?

Arsene: One is named Pete, one is named White, one is named Johnny, one is named John, and one is named Jack. You know that Edward Park, that's his mother he'd been married with that. So this is his stepfather, you know. And that Jonas Clarke too. So, and one is named White. He went crazy that guy.

Ray: Is that right?

Arsene: Yeah. Out there north, Harrison Lake. He was there for three years, stayed there all the time never come to here, but they (inaudible) somehow, I guess. So back in the springtime, Jonas Clarke, I think -- one of them -- he went out trapping in the springtime for beaver. So they found him -- he went crazy. Oh, he just nervous, not really crazy, but nervous, you know. He couldn't even walk out of the house, he said.

Ray: Too long in the bush, eh?

Arsene: Too long in the bush. So they brought that guy from there by canoe right up to here, so they send help. After that I heard he was okay. That's a long time, you know.

Ray: I wonder why he went crazy.

Arsene: Oh maybe he was alone too long or something. That's what the doctor said, yeah. One of my brothers went that way too one time.

Ray: Too lonely, eh?

Arsene: Too lonely in the bush, and a young guy. Pretty hard for him; that's what the doctor said. So the guy just go
crazy, he's all alone. Got to have something, he said, medicine or something. And maybe that white guy got medicine, you know, so they just leave him there. And these guys when they come there right at the end of the lake, there where is my old dad's place, you know.

Ray: Fontaine's place, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. And never show up in the summertime. We seen his dog when we go for berries, or something, a big dog we seen in there. But they don't know whose dog, but they know that there's some people in the bush. They was kind of scared, I guess, the people at that time, you know, (inaudible). I don't know, maybe they stole the fish. I heard they stole the fish, something at night, you know. People used to have their nets around the shore like this, and at night they used to be coming in there and just pick up their fish. That's what I heard. Rabbits too, I guess. So, and then in the fall time can't stay in the bush in winter, you know. So he's scared to come out too. When he gets there well somebody said something. Not like today, he's crazy, eh. No phone or anything. I don't know how he could walk there to somewhere to tell them about it. (inaudible), so he just stay and in the fall time my dad said he seen him there. He called, "Just come to here. You're going suffer like that. How you going to live in the bush in the wintertime?" So he just get his partner and coming there.

He make a house with a spruce, you know, just like a tipi, you know. And he made a fire there, learned to make it. So my dad said... the old man is fishing there, you know, used to get lots of fish that time. They get back, you know, "Well, I'll take everything, he says. (inaudible) like that (?), you know, five pound of pail, that lard pail. They put everything in there. And they made a soup with that supplies (inaudible) in the fire.

Ray: With (?)?

Arsene: Yeah. They made a soup with that, it was from the side of (?). They said they just burned that, something like that. But he said, "He needed that, he liked that. He said, 'It's good, good soup.'" And then some of them go to the Clearwater River and build a cabin there. Some of them go the other side; there's a little lake there. But every time they make a house right in inside the ground.

Ray: Inside the ground?

Arsene: Inside the ground, yeah.

Ray: How did they dig it?

Arsene: They dig it with shovels, I guess.

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: Yeah. And they make a house like this.
Ray: What did they put over top?

Arsene: Well, they put a stick there and stick a mud on it, I guess. And my daddy says the houses were really... "You don't need a fire," he said. And on that little lake where he was living he made a house there, you know. There's that little hill there.

Ray: It's up by Clearwater?

Arsene: The other side of Clearwater that little river there.

Ray: By the tower?

Arsene: The other side of the tower. There was lots of suckers there, you know, in that little shallow lake, someplace. So they had a net, they found a net. My old grandpa gave them a net. So the suckers net like that was walking in the water, right up to here, in the fall time. Boy, it's darn cold, and he said there lots of suckers in here (inaudible). So he kept that fish for winter. And they would be trapping around there. And some of them lives up north. And John Nicholson, he used to be trapping all his life.

Ray: Up north, eh?

Arsene: Yeah, and Jack too. Take all his family up north.

Ray: Did he marry somebody from here?

Arsene: Yeah, that was Edward Park's mother.

Ray: Oh, that's right.

Arsene: Yeah. No that was Jack. John, he never got married.

Ray: And those guys, those six men they came from the States, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. Came from the States.

Ray: And why did they come here?

Arsene: They said they're scared of the war. Don't want to be in the army; that's why they run away. And my old grandpa had asked him why, how he come here. Well, he say he don't want to fight, don't want to be in the army. "So that's why we run away. So that nobody knows where we run away," he said. So they lived here and John Nicholson used to be good trapper, used to make anything; moose hide like that, make them, smoke them. Everything he could do, that man. Jack was just the same. He's like old Joe's family like that making moose hide, and everything he made. And when they build a house up north, after that, big house, boy, bigger than this with a (?).
There's still some of the house there, I guess. (inaudible)

Ray: And he went to Uranium City?

Arsene: John Nicholson. He was looking for a mine here, you know. All they made doing that, come here in the springtime and go back with a -- no planes at that time -- just go back there where the... just go back there with a horse, pack, you know, hire the people. Of course he made a lot of money with the trapping, took lots of fur in the wintertime. For a lot of years he stayed, you know, in winter. And then go back and stay there all summer. Just paddle around the lakes, hit the rocks, break the rocks looking for mine. At last he found it. On the other side of Descharme Lake. That big fish lake. That's where he found something, and then he went down to McMurray. So this thing got out that that was gold. So he hired a plane, back and forth, and he stayed in Clearwater. Boy, back and forth every day. That's what he broke himself, and what he found there. And after there, there's nothing left. Didn't find anything after that. He made quite a bit of money in the first place. But he hired a plane, he hired a plane, (inaudible) just broke himself.

Ray: (inaudible)?

Arsene: Yeah. And after that he went to Uranium City that's where he lived all his life, and then he was dead. (inaudible). That's the way they used to...

Ray: When did he die, a long time ago?

Arsene: Quite a long time. Yeah, that's why he lived long time. Maybe if he joined the army maybe he would've got killed. (chuckles)

Ray: Yeah, I guess so.

Arsene: That's the only guy, Johnny, in the colony, you know, Johnny Russian. I mean, that's the Russian people that, these guys.

Ray: Yeah.

Arsene: Yeah. That's Russian people. So that's why Johnny Laprise, they called him Johnny Russian, you know. That's what they called him, sort of nickname he got, because that Johnny, when he get here and he's got a cripple in here, you know.

Ray: In his back?

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: Hunchback?

Arsene: And he was a small little guy too, and that was Johnny Russian's, his dad.
Ray: That was Johnny Laprise's dad?

Arsene: Yeah, Johnny Laprise's dad. He must have got a woman. (laughs)

Ray: I guess so, eh.

Arsene: Yeah.

Ray: Was there any other people that went a little bit crazy up in the bush? Do you remember?

Arsene: Yeah. One guy to here, on this Clearwater, (inaudible). This is his brother, Joseph Lemaigre's dad. Pierre Lemaigre is the guy who found him. He went crazy. He cut his veins here, you know, right here.

Ray: This was Chipewyan guy, or white man?

Arsene: No, white people from the south that cut his vein here. He was sucking blood from there. That's how they found him in his cabin. So he stopped that bleeding and took him like that to here. Did he die? I don't remember that. So they took it out like that. And when he went to on this Clearwater, he's not crazy that guy, but he'd been a cowboy, you know, out south. He said he used to go down to McMurray, you know, and farmed there, taking him down to his own people, you know. And that guy he just make (?), you know, that old man. Then I took him down to McMurray. He's got a little canoe. So he give us a story there. He said it was out south, and he's a cowboy. And everybody hate him, he says. "I used to kill lots of, lots of Indians," he says. "For the government," he said. "I used to kill lots of Indians for the government," he says. "That's what I used to do," he said, "used to make money like that. And of course the cowboy he hate me. I'm a good shooter guy, that's why they hate me." Boy, he made a good story when he gave me that, you know. "And then at last, them cowboys they're trying to kill me," he said. "Everytime, in the hotel or something, (inaudible) just come to, trying to kill me. Well, my sister told me, 'You better go up north. I don't want you to die. So you better go up north and live there.'" So that's why he came here, you see. And so he stayed in that, wherever. He trapped.

Ray: Did he have a horse?

Arsene: No. Just from Ile-a-la-Crosse you could go by the river all the way, you know. To the Clearwater.

Ray: I thought if he was a cowboy he would have brought his horse up here.

Arsene: Yeah, should have brought his horse. (both laughing) And then, and then he lived there. And in the springtime, you know, I guess he was sick and these guys from here was trapping
rats, you know, and he hear somebody, I guess. Boy, these people they're crazy. You can make him laugh that old man, you know. And he hear somebody shooting, I guess. That's what he said. That's what he mark on the paper, you know, what he said. "I hear somebody shooting and I started to shoot with a rifle. So maybe those guys don't hear me, or maybe don't want to come to me, maybe scared." He said that on paper, you know. He wrote like that. "If that guy comes to me, he give me a pepper, and he feed me something with a pepper, I would have been all right and I would have been alive." And he didn't see nobody. That guys, they run away; they run back to here. He said, "So that white man was there; he was shooting (inaudible). Boy, they were crazy. And them guys could come to here I could give them everything what I got," he says. "(inaudible) trapping," he says, "everything. I could give them my land and everything. I don't know why they never come to me to save my life to take me down somewhere." That's what he said on the paper. And then he died there, you see, in that house. When they pass in the springtime they smelled, I guess. So it was a bear. He broke the windows off so the bear eat him up, that old man. Just take it out like that, eat him up.

You know that Joe Bag, from Turnor? You know that guy? That's the guy that went there with the RCMP. Boy, he was laughing about that time, you know, right now. "He eat everything," he says. "Just nothing but the bone, couldn't find some of the bone too. He ate the whole thing, but his ass. The only thing he didn't eat is the ass," he says. Boy, that old man, he's laughing too, you know. But the RCMP look at it, he says, "Joe," he said, "look at that bear. Funny he don't like the ass. Don't eat his ass."

So see and got a ring on his hand, you know. He says it's five thousand dollar ring. (inaudible) too, but when that bear he must have swallowed it up, you know, the ring. So just looking for that for quite a long time. The people went there and try to find that, tried to find that but couldn't find it. It must have been the bear ate him up, you know.

Ray: And he wrote everything on a letter?
Arsene: He wrote everything on there until he died.

Ray: And the RCMP took that letter?
Arsene: Yeah. He put that on the table there.

Ray: Where were the RCMP from?
Arsene: From Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Ray: Ile-a-la-Crosse, eh. And that man's name was what?
What was his name?

Arsene: Joe.

Ray: Joe, eh.

Arsene: I forgot his last name. I knew it one time, but I forgot it now.

Ray: And he was a cowboy, eh?

Arsene: He was a cowboy. He was a good shooter too. He's right to that. He's got a gun, you know, got all kinds of guns. Sometimes he go down, you know, "Come on, boys, put something," you know. You know you put something, a little stick, boy...

Ray: Throw it up in the air, eh?

Arsene: Just through here. You shoot lots of ducks when we go down, with a .22, oh yeah. You'd see the ducks, you know, (inaudible). Well, he's a good shooter.

Ray: He's a good shot, eh?

Arsene: Yeah, he's a good shot. He said, "I'm a good guy for that. That's why the cowboys hate me. Trying to kill me." Yeah. But he's been trapping all his life there up north, you know. He must have. He told me a good story about that.

Ray: Three Frenchmen.

Arsene: Three Frenchmen. And two of his brothers had died. They'd been suffering (inaudible) days, you know. They lose about three dog, I think. And a little cabin up north. So one of them sick. Well at last he died. So he makes something on his, with a stick, you know; he put it on top there. And another brother he had, so they went for trapping and his brother started to get sick again. Something I guess with the food or something, you know. So at last his brother died, right in the bush, outside. He made a camp, he made a fire there and he said he sleep with his brother. And it really is cold, he said. So he took the blanket this way and he died. I don't remember exactly, you know. I think that's what happened. And then I see that guy he's...

Ray: Two died, eh?

Arsene: And two brothers died, and that guy he walked there with the snowshoes, you know, all the way here from way up north. Lots of snow, no grub, nothing, but he made it to Turnor, he get there. But he froze all his leg, the bottom here. And somebody take a letter or something from there to Ile-a-la-Crosse, and that DNS guy, you know, that old man there, that old guy, Naysmith that's what they called him.
Ray: He made it to Ile-a-la-Crosse?

Arsene: Yeah. And they bothered him about that dope, you know, that medicine, poison. He must have used that. So that as soon as he went there and check everything before that. Well it made him mad like, you know, and check all the floor and everything, he said. Just checking everything but couldn't find anything. Well, somebody said he had a poison. The Indians, Chipewyan, I guess, they say that, you know. They're scared.

Ray: You mean he poisoned his brothers?

Arsene: No. Just by somebody said... Well they kill fur, you know, with that trapping and things like that. Maybe they used the poison all right, but them guys don't have to talk about it. Right today somebody helped them, nobody could talk about it. (inaudible) he just put a poison all over for a wolf now, see. But this here is (inaudible) now. See, and they said that guy had a poison. That DNS guy he went there -- check everything, but he didn't find anything. And then them guys just trapping like that. Two brothers he had they died. And, you know, he got to Turnor Lake and somebody took the letter, I guess. And them guy he come, and still, you know, "He want to try and make me walk," he said. He told me, he put an outside toboggan in the back and go and sit down there. Look at the way he froze his feet. He was a young guy, too, you know. He was about 25 years old. And he says, "I got mad," he says, and I told him, "I'm going to kill you," he said.

Ray: Who was he talking to?

Arsene: He was talking to that DNS guy. "I sat behind you," he says, "like I'm sit right now. You put me there and take me like that. I'm going to kill you on the road," he said. "That's what I told him," he said. "And he got scared, you know. So he said, 'I'm going' and he put me inside the blanket, with the dogs, you know." So took him like that to Ile-a-la-Crosse. He'll be there for about a month. And they put him in court about that medicine, you know. And he lost two brothers and I bet you he don't give a damn about anybody else, you know. "Boy," he said, "I was sure swearing in court. I just figured let them kill me. I wouldn't mind if they killed me right there, the way I get mad," he said. So they just let him go like that. Well then he come back this way with somebody. So he pass here and he stayed in West La Loche. He stay with us again.

Ray: Do you remember his name? That French guy.

Arsene: No, I don't remember his name.

Ray: So his two brothers died and they didn't even worry about that, they worried about if they had that poison, eh?
Arsene: Yeah. Still worry about that, and that guy just about starving when he get there. He said, "I'm just about starving. I could see the light across the lake from that island. Not far, but I don't figure I could make there," he says, "because I could hardly walk. Sometimes I just fall down. But still I tried." And of course he made it. So the people, they just help him right away, you know, lots of old people there.

Ray: He had no dogs?

Arsene: He's got three dogs but they're starving, I guess. Them dogs starving so he just, just by walking, just with nothing he said, he's got a gun in his hand that's all, he says. "That's one thing I made mistake," he says, I should take rifle. Yeah, take a rifle right across the lake there. I shoot lots of time maybe somebody could hear me," he says. "But I make mistake. I figure that's too heavy so I (inaudible). I figure I couldn't make that light I seen, and I fall in the snow sometimes and lay there for a while, but I don't try to move the dogs so I just walk again. At last I made it," he says. And that old man was there. "So I get there," he says. So that old man was just startled. Help him right away, you know, (inaudible).

Ray: That was at Turnor?

Arsene: Yeah. Somebody sent a (?) to Ile-a-la-Crosse, you know.

Ray: So he was okay after that, eh?

Arsene: Oh yeah.

Ray: He went back up north to trap again?

Arsene: No. (inaudible).

Ray: Oh to McMurray, eh?

Arsene: Yeah. Boy (inaudible).

Ray: This is Ray Marnoch I have been talking with Arsene Fontaine, in his home, in La Loche, Saskatchewan, on February 14, 1980.

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