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BRIAN: This tape gets increasingly more difficult to hear as
it goes along. If you can catch what I couldn't hear, please
do so. I quit after 16 pages because on my machine I just
couldn't hear anything worth typing. Let me know what you
find.

Sharon: I'm talking today with Mrs. Lena Desjarlais or
Regina. Mrs. Desjarlais, do you remember your grandparents?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: Could you tell me a little bit about them?

Lena: Well, on my mother's side, her mother died before I was born but I remember my grandfather on the Lafontaine side. And he was 98 years old when he got killed by the train.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah. (Inaudible) '52 or '53.

Sharon: Do you remember what their names were?

Lena: Louis, Louis Lafontaine.

Sharon: Do you remember where they lived?

Lena: In Portage La Prairie, Manitoba.

Sharon: And what did they do for a living?

Lena: I couldn't tell you that.

Sharon: What about your other grandparents?

Lena: My grandparents were Mr. & Mrs. Sam Bellerose and they lived in Lestock. They used to go out hunting, like, deer, rabbits, whatever they can find at hunting time. Then they both died.

Sharon: Do you remember where they lived, where in Lestock?

Lena: Well, they had a big farm just off, about five miles northeast, no, northwest of Lestock and they had that farm on the road allowance.

Sharon: Did your grandfather own that farm?

Lena: Yes. But it wasn't really a farm. It was a, I don't know what you call that, it was, like, two farmers had a piece of land that they worked.

Sharon: It was him and another farmer that owned the land?

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: Did your grandfather have a title to that land?

Lena: No.

Sharon: He rented it?

Lena: He didn't rent it, it was the government. It was just like a road allowance but they never used that road where they lived.

Sharon: So they just had a house on it?

Lena: Yeah, yeah.

Sharon: And were they there for as long as you remember?

Lena: Yes. As long as I remember. They both died in that house.

Sharon: Were they always here in Saskatchewan?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: And they were Metis?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: When were you born?

Lena: November 9, 1924.

Sharon: Where?

Lena: In Lestock.

Sharon: How big was your family?

Lena: There was twelve of us. And just my, when my mom was Virginia. My dad died when we were kids. Like, the younger one, he was gone (inaudible). Mom was pregnant when he was gone.

Sharon: What were your parents names?

Lena: What?

Sharon: Your parents, can you say their names?

Lena: Virginia and Gaspar Bellerose.

Sharon: How did your mother make a living then after your father died?

Lena: Well, that, in summertime we'd go out picking seneca roots, eh. And we'd make a big garden and we'd cut wood them days. You had to cut cord wood, not length. And we had to take that to town in the fall so we'd have something for the winter.

Sharon: Did you have your own home?

Lena: Yes, we had our own home.

Sharon: And what kind of a house, a home was it?

Lena: A log shack, mud floors, mud roof.

Sharon: Did your parents make it themselves?

Lena: Well, it's not my parent's. Somebody else used to live there but my dad bought that.

Sharon: They bought it, they bought the house?

Lena: Yeah. And we had whole quarter of land.

Sharon: Did he own the land or...?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: He bought it?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: He had a title for it?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: Does your family still have that land?

Lena: Well, see, everybody split the land when we started growing up and I'm the only one that stayed home with my mom because my brother, John, and he used to work in the extra things and he saved his money and then he'd pay the taxes so we let him have it.

Sharon: So he got the land now?

Lena: Well, not the farm land. He used to live quite a ways from, about eight, nine miles from Lestock on the west, northwest of Lestock and he sold that old land and then he bought himself another land.

Sharon: Your house then, it wasn't in town, it was out of Lestock?

Lena: Oh no, it was, yeah.

Sharon: What kind of furniture did you have?

Lena: Well, my dad made some wooden beds, like out of little trees and the mattress used to be from straw or hay or

whatever. We only lived in a two bed, two house. Like the kitchen and the living rooms, keep it up where the bedroom was. And I remember that, it used to look like a hospital, there was four beds all around. And my mom used to sleep in the middle in the kitchen so she could keep the fire all going.

Sharon: That's how you heated the house?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: With a fire?

Lena: Yes.

Sharon: What did you do for water?

Lena: We had a well.

Sharon: You had a well.

Lena: Yes.

(Break in tape)

Sharon: Okay, the mattresses for your beds, you made them yourself, your family made them?

Lena: Yes. My mother made them from, long time ago used to buy them bags of, see if I can say the name, (name) we used to call it. Like chop, you know. Bran, bran. Oh, I forget. My Mama used to make, used to buy them great big bags and mix flour all with it so the flour would go farther. They made

brown bread or bannock. And after she finished with that brown bag, she'd sew them together by hand and that's what she used then.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: And your father would (inaudible).

Lena: Yes, yeah. (Inaudible) sometimes we didn't even have to have the top, just the bottom and our hands on top, put our mattress in.

Sharon: Did you have a table and chairs?

Lena: We made them too.

Sharon: did you have cupboards or anything like that?

Lena: Cupboards, we made the cupboards.

Sharon: What kind of stove did you have?

Lena: An old clay stove where the bedrooms and for our cookstove them great big, heavy iron stoves.

Sharon: The black ones.

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: What did your father do, do you remember? What he used to do before he died?

Lena: As far as I know, my mother used to say, he used to try and, well he would pitch in and work for the farmers. (Inaudible) for the chickens, for the pigs and straw, hay for that.

Sharon: Did you have your stock for meat, to eat?

Lena: Yes. Yeah, had to try and fatten up a steer or a sow or a big whatever for the winter. In winter then you'd kill it and then you'd have that meat. And he used to be a good hunter, the same with my mom. They used to go out hunting and they'd grind the meat, the deer meat and the (inaudible) meat together.

Sharon: Your mother went out hunting too?

Lena: Oh yes. She was a real good hunter.

Sharon: Would your father go hunting rabbits in the fall with your mother?

Lena: Oh yes. That used to be our jobs, snaring that.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Oh yes. Well, now like, you go out picking, you know we used to pick a lot of berries. There are lots of berries picking. There was chokecherries, pincherries, strawberries, raspberries, saskatoons. And we used to pick them but we used

to, like the chokecherries here, we didn't have no machine to chop them up. We used to use great big stones. Well, after my dad died, my mom would dig up roots from the ground and put it in snow and get some ice in it, an ice cellar. That's where we used to keep all our meat.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: Did you can berries in the summertime?

Lena: Mom used to save any old cans and wrap them up and put that meat in the bottom and put ice around. And whenever we wanted to eat, she lift that can of meat up. It wasn't a bad life. In summertime, lots of times our meat would spoil.

Sharon: Would go bad.

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: With all those berries that you picked, did you can any of them or dry them?

Lena: We used to make jam, she even made some kind of a sauce from the rosebuds, made sauce out of that.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Well, she used to make it with that wild prairie rose, just like that.

Sharon: (Inaudible) from wild prairie roses?

Lena: Yeah. And that cranberries, she used to make jelly out of that for pancakes.

Sharon: Out of cranberries.

Lena: She used to make so much, you know.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: (Inaudible) our house, dug a hole underneath it and we used to haul sand and put our potatoes and raw carrots and then put sand and then turnips and beets in the sand.

Sharon: You'd bury them in the sand.

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: Then when you wanted them you'd go dig them up?

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: That's where you had the potatoes put?

Lena: They were put in the dark, we'd put them in a, kind of in a dark, not too damp place.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: Did you make your own butter in a churn?

Lena: Yeah. We made our own butter. (Inaudible) but not too much but enough.

Sharon: (Inaudible)

Lena: The flour we had to buy, baking powder and salt.

Sharon: Oh yeah. All that stuff you had to buy for baking?

Lena: Well, you know, this is what my mom used to do when we were old enough to cut wood. There was four of us and we used to cut four to five loads of wood and Mom would bake the

cakes and pies. In them days the Indians used to have rations. Yeah. And mom would make all kinds of goodies while we were cutting wood. In that days, Mama used to, you know, quite a few people from the reserve that (inaudible). We used to get the flour from them and the lard but we used to get all from the (inaudible) whatever they think they need for to eat. Mama used to trade them. And lots of times Mama used to make bread and so with change, they'd give us hay. That's where we were living, there was no hay for the horses. That's how we used to make deals.

Sharon: Trade back and forth.

Lena: Yeah.

Sharon: For what you needed.

Lena: Yeah. Like, they had stuff and we had stuff. But out on the reserve they had more, lots of hay, lots of wood. And that's where we were living at the time. Them were the good days. You never heard of anybody getting (inaudible). Everybody had respect for themselves.

Sharon: How old were your brothers and sisters (inaudible)?

Lena: I was eleven years old and my other two sisters was seven, thirteen, and sixteen and one was nine, eight or nine.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah. Cut five loads of wood. That's a day and we had no horses and the snow was that deep.

Sharon: Did you drag them on sleighs?

Lena: No, we drag them by hand. Yeah.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: (Inaudible) we'd cut wood for quite a ways and when (inaudible) where there was lots of wood, we'd have to walk it out. Two of them would carry the logs to the sleigh and the other ones would cut. And when we'd get them to the house, we had a big saw and that's how we cut cord wood. We'd saw that and go with wood, take that to town. And the other ones would be cutting. That's how come (inaudible) we were.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Yeah. Yeah.

Sharon: Load it up and take it in the sleigh?

Lena: Yeah. Take it to town.

Sharon: Did you have to do any other kind of work too?

Lena: Well, for our own meals, that's what we had to do or otherwise we'd starve.

Sharon: You couldn't get any help from anywhere?

Lena: Well, not for a while. When my dad died. Since my mom was getting in age, eh, she went and asked for, there was no welfare them days, they called it relief, eh. \$15 dollars they gave us.

Sharon: That's right, and how many were you?

Lena: There was Mom, Mary, no, not the older ones (inaudible). There was Yvonne, Henry, Eugene, (inaudible), Martha, and Agnes and Mother. Ten of us, nine of us. The other ones went out and looked for jobs. That's how much they gave us, \$15 a month.

Sharon: (Inaudible). So you had to go around barefoot?

Lena: Yeah. We used to go around barefoot. In wintertime, this J.P. Settle, he was a kind of a judge, eh. And he seen that we had \$15 a month and he used to come with us, we had to go way down to Wishart (inaudible) and he made that guy buy us some boots.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: Not that one, this was a chief and we went to see that one that (inaudible) said, "We want shoes." (Inaudible) we all had red rubbers, socks and panties, underwear, you know the full ones. And Mama wanted a pair of felt boots for when she would go out hunting through the day. Unless we had to go to school a mile and a half. (Inaudible) we would go around it would have been two miles by road.

Sharon: (Inaudible)?

Lena: Yeah. We used to live on (inaudible). But then people were around, eh. But they couldn't come into us because we didn't have no road. When we used to go to town, we had enough money like without (inaudible) neighbors and Mom would (inaudible) when they come back with ours. But when we didn't have no money, then we had to take the flour. Not the kind (inaudible). They used to drive the main roads but not ours. We were half a mile from the main road.

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: (Inaudible).

Sharon: (Inaudible).

Lena: (Inaudible).

Sharon: Like if we didn't have the money (inaudible). When I got a little older (inaudible). Then I'd go out and drive it up to the house (inaudible). By the time I was finished it was

eleven o'clock. (Inaudible) I'd get up at four o'clock in the morning and I would work long days until eleven o'clock (inaudible).

Sharon: (Inaudible)?