HARRY D. WILLIAMS
R.R.#3
WALLACEBURG, ONTARIO
WALPOLE ISLAND
ONTARIO
01/28/78
PATRICIA SONEY
HEATHER BOUCHARD
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- General discussion of his life.
Patricia: You said your people talk Indian all the time.

Harry: Yeah. Well, when I'm running this here business down through here, this here language guy he wants to learn... Well, in one sense of the word he's not full-blooded Indian like you and me. His mother was white, his mother was white, white woman. So in one sense of the word he never learned his mother's tongue, language. So now that he understands a little bit he wants to learn to talk Indian, talk a lot of (inaudible) to me.

Patricia: So you think only Indians should know the Indian language?

Harry: When I went to school they wanted me to talk English. Talk English, that's what they wanted me to learn. But when I came home my mother always forever spoke Indian; my parents they talk Indian. What the heck! I don't have to go to school to learn Indian. But now I'm 64 years old, you know what I mean?

Patricia: Yeah, I know what you mean now.

Harry: That's what I mean, it's a lot different. People, this generation, is different now, because there's lots of
people that I know wish they were Indian people like me. I worked in Alginack -- that's United States -- and when I got over there those people wished, my workmates, wished they were me. And I said, "Why?" "Well, just look, listen. You live on a Indian reservation, and you own your home, and you got, you carry group insurance. Your hospitalization is all paid for. You have your one doctor, you carry group insurance. And you don't worry about rent." And he said, "That's why I wish I was you. Look at my cheque and look at your cheque. They're both the same. And you know what I got to do out of this cheque? I got to pay $48 out of this cheque. And your $48, that goes in your pocket, isn't it?" I said, "Yes." He says, "That's why I wish I was you, an Indian person like you." And that man's name is George Waterhouse. He's the same age as me and he's worked in Maine, Michigan, and he's worked in Indiana, state of Indiana, and he's worked in Michigan. And he made his home in Alginack so he can be close to real true Americans. "I like it here. I like you too," he told me. His name was George Waterhouse. And you can go to Alginack when that ferry starts running, and he'll verify what I say. My name is Harry Williams -- he'll remember. You see, there's a many of people wish they were Indians living on the reservation like you and me. You see what I mean?

And I hope some day -- are you married? -- that you marry a Walpoler and then you don't have to... Look at my sister, she married a hillbilly from West Virginia. Well, she can't come over and live on this reservation, she married off. When she swore up and down for that man, well I guess, you know, if he goes to West Virginia, well then she goes too. And when they want to vote for the governor of Michigan, or Indiana or wherever he's from, well she's got the privilege to vote over there. When she said, "I do" to that man, well I guess you know the rest. You see what I mean? That's what I know.

Patricia: Why did she want to leave the Island?

Harry: I don't know. That's what I don't know. That man didn't ask me, so I guess, you know. You see what I mean? You know, I was in the Second World War. And I have been in Liverpool, England; London, England; Southampton, England; and I have been in Edinburgh, Scotland; and I have been in Holyhead, Wales; and I have been in Dublin, Ireland; and I have been in Rotterdam, Holland; and I have been in Brussels, Belgium; and I've been in Paris, France; and I spent one year in Germany in the Second World War. You know, if I was any good, I guess I would be still going, but I came back in 1946. You doubt me, you can ask me, "What boat did you go over on?" Well, I'll say, "I went over on the New Amsterdam." That's the name of the boat. Besides, I even engraved my name on the right side of the boat. I put "Harry Williams, Walpole Island, Ontario" on there with my knife, with my jackknife. That's what I put down on there. And if you doubt me, if you ever get on that boat you look for "Harry Williams" on that boat,
"Walpole Island". You'll find it.

Patricia: Why were you in Germany for a whole year?

Harry: I done occupation duty.

Patricia: What's that?

Harry: Well, in the Second World War we didn't want those guys to start over again, so we kept them quiet so they won't start again. That's two times they started, in 1914-18 and then 1940 again.

Patricia: Were you born on the island?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: Do you know your parent's names?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: And your grandparents?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: What about great-grandparents?

Harry: Well, on my father's side their names was Cowsack. Well, after all, there was too many Cowsacks, it seems. And they were going to school, he was going to school. Got in the First World War and it seems his father's name was William and then the Indians, after all, William -- there was so damn much William, they called him Williams.

Patricia: Really?

Harry: Yeah, that's how they adopted that name, Williams.

Patricia: And on your mother's side?

Harry: No.

Patricia: Well, yeah, that was on...

Harry: It would be on my father's side.

Patricia: Okay, and what was your mother's...?

Harry: Elgin from Alpina, Michigan.

Patricia: Were you born here, though?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: When did they come across?
Harry:  I don't know. My father came... The Indians were scattered all over. This is true American. North America, you can say. You can go to, Patricia, you can go to Whiteearth, Minnesota, and talk Indian over there; or listen to them talk Indian and you will understand them because they talk the same language as we do on Walpole Island.

Patricia: They're Chippewyan?

Harry:  Yeah. And then in northern Ontario, they speak Cree over there. They're Indians, they look just the same as any Indian, but they speak a different language. Just like in Wisconsin they speak Potawatomi over there. A little bit different than we do.

Patricia: Can you understand Potawatomi?

Harry:  Some of them are on Walpole Island. Other side the United Church River, what they call Potawatomi Island they used to call it over there. What you call, what the heck is his name now? Joe Shaw. You know Joe Isaac?

Patricia: Yeah.

Harry:  (laughs) They nicknamed him Joe Shaw because he married Lisa Shaw. And his father was Potawatomi. And Donald Isaac is Potawatomi, Allan Isaac, and Myrtle Oliver's father, George Isaac. See, they were Potawatomis. There were two tribes, you could say, on the Island. But they were one group, so they were all... It can be, like you can say Belgium, like the Belgian people and the Holland people. And all that separates them there is probably a road down the center, Holland on this side and Belgium on this side. And what about those people in between? What about those people in between? They can speak Holland and they can speak Belgium. And then they put up a name for those people that spoke Holland and they speak Belgium. After all, they cross-married, one was Holland and one was Belgium, so they called them Flemish people, Flemish group.

Patricia: When was that?

Harry:  1940.

Patricia: When you were away during the War?

Harry:  When that was? Oh gee, I don't know when that was. It must have been... Just like on Walpole Island, you can say, I guess. You know what I mean? Like Potawatomis and Chippewyans. It must have been like that, you see, so that's why they call them Flemish.

Patricia: Do they have a name for the ones here?

Harry:  Well it's, no, not as a group. They called, well, it was favored as a... Well, whoever was the chief, like you could
say, I guess.

Patricia: Who was the chief?

Harry: Gee, you'd have to go see Dean Jacobs about that. I don't know. George Isaac used to, was the chief too, I know.

Patricia: So you didn't go to school. Did you go to school?

Harry: I went as high as I could go, fourth grade.

Patricia: Was that over here?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: And you walked to school every day?

Harry: Oh yeah. People, they never thought about riding the bus. The bus never come here once in a blue moon. After all, we didn't have no bridge.

Patricia: Did you, was this your house when you were small?

Harry: Yeah.

Patricia: So how old is this house? Is it really old?

Harry: Oh gee, I don't know. It's been here ever since I can remember. It was a just a little wee house. I can tell you about Philip's house. You see Philip George's mother and my mother were sisters. And Philip George's mother married off to a fellow from Sarnia Reserve, so she moved and lived in Sarnia and raised her family over there. But her husband died so she come back home here. And that little house was only about 15 feet wide and maybe about 30 feet long, and look at Philip's house today, how big it is. My mother used to call him a woodpecker. You know why she called him that? There wasn't a day if you wouldn't hear her... (break in tape) No, that's his wife.

Patricia: Yeah, I went over there last week and he had just got a cupboard and he was pounding away putting it together.

Harry: Automatically he's like that. My mother nicknamed him woodpecker. And he still pounds away, you know, you heard him yourself. I don't care if it's Sunday, he pounds away anyhow. So his mother died and he was just a young fellow, he wanted to get married and he ran around with Elijah Kewayosh's sister. Elijah Kewayosh was the chief at that time. And so Elijah Kewayosh talked to him, "Why don't you transfer to Walpole Island and then you can be a member of Walpole Island, associate member. You live on Walpole Island all the time anyways." He thought, boy, that was a real thing. So he did. So Elijah Kewayosh was the chief, because Philip George was kind of running around with Elijah Kewayosh's sister.
Patricia: What was his sister's name?

Harry: I don't know, I forgot. Oh, this was years ago, about 25, 30 years ago, I guess. After all, I'm 64. And he turned around and he married this here. And she must be 85 years old, I guess, or more. I don't know.

Patricia: She's quite old.

Harry: Who?

Patricia: She is quite old. She was born in 1893. He was born in 1898.

Harry: Philip?

Patricia: Yeah.

Harry: He was born in 1900.

Patricia: Was he born in 1900?

Harry: That's as far as I know. Well, you know, you have to believe what he says, you don't know. His records you cannot believe in Sarnia Reserve, because he's a Sarnia Indian.

Patricia: Has this stove been here for as long as you can remember, or this a newer model?

Harry: Oh no, this is a new model. I tell you who has a good stove, Gilette Soney. He's got the one that you can put wood that long in there. You just slide them in. This here, it's got to be short wood because you bounce them in topwards. That's about, must be ten years old anyway. See, you have to patch it up once in a while. I was going to buy a different one but Bill Watson seen it and he said, "I believe I can fix that." He did too, so that's what he done, Bill Watson did that. So I have to watch around the bottom because I don't want to, you know, it can start a fire. That's what happened to Bill Watson, he brought a hotplate, one of those small hotplates. I used to plug it in there. All summer long I put it on top of the stove -- boy, I had a hotplate there, I could fry an egg once in a while. So this time I took it upstairs -- last spring -- that's what caught on fire. He said, "The wire wasn't any good. You got to watch it." But I didn't, I used it all summer, and I didn't tape it up like I should have. I didn't tape it up and it warmed up, warmed up for a little while and I didn't. I went to sleep after it did get warmed up and I didn't pull the plug. And it set the house on fire with all my rags and so forth. That's how it started. Five o'clock, six o'clock in the morning, I guess.

Patricia: How did you put it out?
Harry: The fire department. We got the fire department down here, you know. They woke me up.

Patricia: Oh really?

Harry: Because I was smoked out. People going to work, catch the 6:20 ferry, they go by here six o'clock in the morning. And they seen all that smoke going out the pipe, going out the windows. They knew there was something wrong and they called the fire department. I was smoked out. I was smoking, but I had too much smoke in my room. You couldn't see nothing for smoke. I was smoked out. I could have been, if those people didn't call the fire department, well, I guess, you know, I would have been burned to death. Automatically Myrtle Watson would have said, "He was probably drunk." She'd get angry right away. "Probably was drunk." That's her song. She went to Detroit when she was 16 years old. I can't say anything. She automatically was like that. My mother knew her. My mother used to say, "She takes after my sister," she used to say. That's the way it goes. Who do you take after? Your old man, I think.

Patricia: How can you tell?

Harry: Well, he was a good looking fellow, you see. And today there's freighters going up and down the river, first time this year. First time this winter those... As a rule they quit around the 1st of December, middle of December, or any time after that. They usually stop running in December, but now they are running all winter it seems.

Patricia: Do you remember the old excursion boats?

Harry: Who?

Patricia: The excursion boats.

Harry: Excursion boat?

Patricia: Yeah.

Harry: Wakeeta, Tashmoo.

Patricia: Yeah, would you go for rides on them?

Harry: Oh yeah. The boat used to get off here.

Patricia: Oh, right here?

Harry: Right here. You can still see the old piles out there.

Patricia: Oh yeah.

Harry: Where the big dock was.
Paricia: How often would they come around?

Harry: Once a day. Especially on weekends they would stop here. But that boat used to go Russell Island, over to Russell Island and then it would come over here to Walpole Island, and maybe it would bounce around and go to Alginack.

Patricia: How big was it?

Harry: Well the name of the boat was Wakeeta. And we had a bigger boat, the name of that boat was Tashmoo. Tashmoo wouldn't stop, couldn't make, couldn't come over that quick because it had to make that turn to Alginack, so it didn't stop here. Because we used to have a boat come in the morning, and one at noon, and maybe one at night. Well, you can ask me, "Do you remember the name of those boats?" Well, I can tell you, Tashmoo was the name of the one boat, the big long boat, big boat; and the other boat was Thousand Islander. That would stop over at Russell Island, and Walpole Island, and Alginack, and Port Lambton and all the way up to Marine City, and Sarnia, and Port Huron and back home again. Probably that boat would come in the mornings, and when it come here then I'd get on. If it didn't stop here I'd get on in Alginack. So I would wait for my mother to take me for a boat ride up to Sarnia and back again. Boy, it isn't like the old days.

(END OF TAPE)