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INTERVIEWER: JOHNNY SMITH  
INTERPRETER:  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Traditional life and the changes brought about by the treaties.
- Crowfoot and the taking of Treaty 7.
- Alcohol, and the problems it has brought.
- The surrender of reserve land.

John Smith: My name is Johnny Smith, I work for Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research, Indian Association of Alberta. The purpose of this interview is to get an Indian understanding of the treaty and of the promises made to the Indians by the government representatives at the signing of the treaty. What is your name?

Interviewee: Sally Provost.

John Smith: How old are you?

Sally Provost: Eighty.

John Smith: Where were you born?

Sally Provost: Right here on the reserve.

John Smith: Have you always lived here?

Sally Provost: Yes, I have always lived here.

John Smith: Could you tell me about the time of the buffalo hunters? On how they hunted the buffalo and what they did with

the buffalo.

Sally Provost: They all say that jump that buffalo jump in the olden days before they had horses they used to go to them places and... yeah when they need that grub. That's the time before they had the horses, before they had the guns. You see them pits (buffalo jumps). The buffalo jumps itself; it's very big. They've got certain young boys that go on each side. And they line these boys up towards where the buffalo are going to fall. And they put some kind of ... just like a blind (hut), I just forgot how much. They used to say. And there's certain men, they used to stay in there on each side. And the buffalo they come and the boys they chase them and when they neared this pit they all jump down. And I don't know how many hundred they kill and they start to butcher and they put away the meat. And everybody's fat. They've got to save that meat. And a lot of it spoiled. So many buffalos, you know, they don't take all that meat. And they don't do that all the time. I don't know. Just certain time, once a year they do that. They have enough supply. Yeah, the olden days. But I did hear the old people. I don't know it, me, but the olden days they used to give stories and that's what I heard from the old people.

John Smith: When did they disappear?

Sally Provost: I can't tell you. My days, it was all past.

John Smith: Was that before the signing of the treaty?

Sally Provost: Yes, before the signing of the treaty.

John Smith: When the buffalo were all killed off, did it change the way the Indians used to live?

Sally Provost: I don't know. I can't very well ... that's what I heard from the old people.

John Smith: Did they tell you how they were able to survive after the buffalo were all killed off?

Sally Provost: Well, they don't say. This certain bunch, they chased them to that place but I guess that there's a lot of people they're just going to say: more than what they need. They're crazy; there's a lot of it that wasted that meat. They waste it. But the olden days when they used to have tipis. They used tanned buffalo hides for their tipis. And the old women, they tanned them and then they get together and they sew them with sinew. And they put up their tipis. Everything was buffalo hide. If their tipis get old, they used them for moccasins, you know, and they make new ones. I don't know how long.

John Smith: When they were going to sign the treaty, did the treaty change the way the Indians lived at that time?

Sally Provost: Yes, well, they said the police is coming and the Queen is coming and certain high officials. They're going to come to give peace to the Indian and try to civilize them.

And a lot of old Indians, they didn't like it at all. A lot of old people, they never did eat that cow, cow meat. You know, they're sons, son-in-laws, they manage to get food for them. Game, you know, deers. They managed to hunt for them old people. They did that for them. The died like that, them old people. They never had the real cow meat; they don't like it. Because it's something... tastes bad. They wouldn't eat that cow meat. John Smith: How did they feel about being put on reserves?

Sally Provost: They were not put on the reserve right away. They were just moving camp and they used to travel around and still they hunt. And when they first had treaty in the first year, they said they were going to get \$12.00 a year, as long as the river and the sun. They said they were going to get that \$12.00. But the next year they just got \$5.00 and to this day they are getting five. Seven, they said they're going to put them away for us. And it's for the Indians. And each year we get interest off that seven dollars. And I don't know how long and what became of that money.

John Smith: Once they were put on reserve did they like or dislike it?

Sally Provost: Well, they really hated it. Everything, you know. There was these five chiefs and four councillors. And everything what they were told to do, it's the law, they were supposed to accept it. But none of them accepted it. Still they'd be forced. Everything was forced. They just tell them and it's done. No matter if they don't like and they don't agree. They just do it. The government they just do anything.

John Smith: Before they were signing the treaty, there was a treaty that was made across the border in the United States. Did they hear about it? What did they think of how the government was treating them there?

Sally Provost: At first we belonged to the States. We used to put up councillors like now from here. They used to give them rations, clothing and I never did hear if they got any money. And we were all in one. States used to look after us. Give us rations and clothing. And lately, these Canadians on this side, they cheat us, really bad.

John Smith: Before they signed Treaty Seven did they hear about the treaties that were being made down east?

Sally Provost: I didn't hear anything about it. They took several days before they agreed to it and the one, that Crowfoot, he was just a common man. And on account of him he said no. He said it won't be done. And the way we are, everybody is depending on him. And that's why he was appointed the head for all the tribes that went to Treaty Seven. And him, he agreed, a certain time, a few days after he accepted the treaty.

John Smith: Did you hear anything about who the interpreter was at the time of the signing of the treaty?

Sally Provost: They say that he was a halfbreed. I just forgot his name. The old people they knew him. And there's a lot he didn't do right. He didn't interpret good, that's what I hear. The old people was telling me.

John Smith: Did most of the people want treaty?

Sally Provost: We never. I don't think anybody... all the Indians accepted it. They wanted to live the way they were living. Yeah.

John Smith: Did they say why they signed the treaty?

Sally Provost: That Crowfoot, everybody was depending on him. And that's the one. When he accepted, well it was signed. And they started to elect the chiefs and there was one from here and the councillors for each reserve.

John Smith: How were they told that there was going to be treaty made with them?

Sally Provost: They were told, as long as the rivers run, as long as the sun is, the government, they were going to give us rations, ammunition, that money, look for game and hunt. And that's what they were told. They're going to be helped as long as the government, going to be no end to it. And just now, you know, a lot of it they left out.

John Smith: What did the Indians think the treaty was for?

Sally Provost: Oh they were so stupid, nobody knows that. No, they don't know nothing. They were just like babies. Anything that you tell them, they accept it. And all the things they should have done, never, nobody knew nothing. They were just blindfolded. I don't know whether or not they put up any kind of an argument. In every way we were cheated. Like now, when we first had a claim, each reserve had a claim for the land. We own Macleod. We own Claresholm on this side, all up west and over there by Castle River where the old people used to get paint and that land was given to us by a mile square. And we know that paint is for us and one of the old people, he said we signed an agreement. Now, I don't know what became of that map. But we own that place up there. But nobody seemed to know that agreement, where that map was. Nobody is supposed to claim it. Us, we go there once a year and we get the paint.

John Smith: What was the meaning of the smoking of the pipe at the signing of the treaty?

Sally Provost: Well, it's a sign of peace to say we accept the treaty.

John Smith: What was the Indian's understanding of what the treaty was for?

Sally Provost: I don't know.

John Smith: After the treaty was signed, did the Indian people feel that they could go on using the land the way that they

could before?

Sally Provost: Well they still travel, move their camps and they were not fenced yet. But lately, I guess 1882, then they got land. I mean they severed the fencing. It was all cheated. They said they were going to fence this much and later on they fix it, so still we got cheated. We own Fort Macleod, that's our land. The first chief that was appointed at the Treaty Seven and the mounties came to Macleod and they were all camping along the river there, the old people. Claresholm, that place where they used to call that creek over there, Claresholm, on that side. Then some of them were camping there. And that old chief, to the mounties he said (it was in the winter), "Could we winter here? We just went to this place." And they wintered...Macleod...across the river. And that's where the old Macleod used to be. And that winter, that old chief he died. And I don't know if he signed paper with them to rent that place and it's ours. Yeah. Macleod we own Macleod, Claresholm, all the way. We own it.

John Smith: Did they get a copy of the treaty?

Sally Provost: Well, I don't know anything about it. Yeah, the old people they don't know nothing about it. They didn't even know what's ahead; they just think of today, not tomorrow. There was nobody at that time that was looking out for what was going to happen to know ahead of time.

John Smith: After the treaty was signed, what did the Indian people do?

Sally Provost: They still move their camps, they still move around, look for game. They go as far as Medicine Hat, all over that way they look for game. And some, they look near Porcupine, all those places to look for game. They still do that and yet they were getting rations, meat and flour. There's no such thing as welfare, in them days. And everybody's got to work. Like the women, they tan hides, and from here they bring them to Edmonton to trade.

John Smith: When they were signing treaty, they were given rations too, eh?

Sally Provost: Yes and they promised, they told them, as long as the river flows, the sun is out, you are going to get rations and five dollars at the same time. And that seven dollars, we'll put it away for you. And you'll get it some time. And that's the one, that band funds. I don't know. They're saying now, there's no more of that. I don't know what became of that money.

John Smith: And how much of the land did they surrender to the white man, to the government?

Sally Provost: When they surrendered. Well it's all crooked work. All across the river they surrendered and all these people that surrendered this land. A few had a big argument. None of the chiefs signed it, that surrender. None of them

signed. My old man (husband, old Charlie Provost) was interpreter for nine years. And that fellow that agent told them...

John Smith: What was your dad's name?

Sally Provost: Well, my grandfather raised me, my real father is Little Moustache. But my grandfather and grandmother raised me and they adopted me.

John Smith: What were their names?

Sally Provost: Bull Plume. He was just like a lawyer, he was a councillor. And Butch is a head chief. But the councillors all depend on my grandfather, Bull Plume. He does all the talking. And he checks everything. You know, he knows a lot. He argues, but still he doesn't get what he argues for.

John Smith: They (old people) were saying that they just surrendered one foot of the top soil of the land.

Sally Provost: Well, no. One time they got together, after they finished to surrender that land. My husband went ... the agent told him "Tomorrow we're going to sign that surrender. Go around and tell the chiefs to come out in the morning." And that night, these men they surrendered. They got all together with the agent and they signed. None of the chiefs and the councillors signed. It was all crooked work. And after that, when it was surrendered, they got together and of course the agent did dirty work. He went away. He had to quit. And the chiefs got together. That agent told them, "What are you going to say about that surrender? Are you going to surrender the whole thing down? And if there's any minerals or anything like that, do you still own it or are you going to sell it to them?" We never signed any papers. We still own the surface and under. It's all ours.

If there's anything, well it's all ours. And if there's anything not paid for, we'll get it back. That's what my granddad told the agent. And it's like that. That's what...and they signed it. And I don't know if it's still there.

John Smith: At the signing of the treaty, how much of the land did they surrender, did they give up?

Sally Provost: They were saying they were going to...well, the government he takes that place and us, that's where we got that twelve dollars a year for each person and as long as the river flows the agreement, we're going to get that. And it is not like the way they said it was going to be.

John Smith: At the signing of the treaty did they know the meaning of money, what money was?

Sally Provost: I don't know anything about it. They didn't care for the money, that's what they were saying. When they got that money, most of them they throw that money away. They've got no value of money. They don't know what it is.

John Smith: At the signing of the treaty did they know anything about buying or selling of land?

Sally Provost: They never talked about it. 1909 or 18...I think that's when the surrender was, around those years. And that's when that land was sold. And all them fellows that surrendered that land, none of them are living today. They're all gone. And it's by crooked work. The councillors never signed paper. Just them few fellows that surrendered that land; they were the only ones that signed. And it was at midnight that they signed that.

John Smith: How did they make the treaty?

Sally Provost: What they hired, I guess, from England, the government, the Queen. They said we'll go up there and sign peace with them, with the Indian. So they won't be on the wild life. We'll try to civilize...that's why they came. But they had a hard time at that. I guess these Indians wouldn't accept it from the start and finally they depended on that old fellow, Crowfoot and that's why he was appointed to the headman. Because the rest, they depend on him. And they were going to have war. He said, I'm going to shoot you. And we'll have war against the police. Trying to make peaceful, the Indians. They didn't want to sign treaty.

John Smith: When they were having the signing of the treaty, were the terms written down before they were brought out there?

Sally Provost: They don't even know. But the interpreter is the whole cause of it. And maybe they know. Maybe they step aside, and I don't know where they are right today.

John Smith: When the government was saying what they would give the Indians in return for signing the treaty, did the Indians ask for more?

Sally Provost: No. I didn't hear anything. They were just promising, promising, and we were going to get help for the rest of the time. And they give you rations, as long as the sun is and the rivers flow, you are going to get rations and you are going to be helped. That's how they talked. But I don't know if they signed it.

John Smith: What did the Indians give up to the government in return for the treaty promises?

Sally Provost: Well all this is promises. And I don't know really, what they promised. All I know is them two things. The twelve dollars and the rations. That's all.

John Smith: Did they understand how much they were giving up to the government or to the Queen by signing the treaty?

Sally Provost: They were just like babies at that time. They didn't know what they were doing. I guess nobody knows anything like that. There was nothing. And perhaps, us Indians, we own the minerals, all the coal, everything. It belongs to us. And government he just took all that stuff away from

us and they're making benefit. The oil and gas, that's all ours, the Indian's. And the government took everything and they sure cheated the Indians.

John Smith: Well did they know anything about gas or oil ...?

Sally Provost: No, nothing like that, but everything was all ours in the agreement. There was no white man at first here. Just the Indians own this land. And the white people start to come. And the government knew that this was a good country and they cheat the Indians. They don't even know all the promises they made. They were going to take over and take the land away from us. And perhaps we should be getting that money what they get from Alberta government. We did get it for a while. It was one or two years and they cut it off.

John Smith: Did you ever hear any stories about that smallpox epidemic?

Sally Provost: Yes, it was a long time ago. Well, I guess that's four generations back, that's when it was. It just about killed all the Indians. Some say the camps, they just stay there. They move or walk another place. They were trying to beat it away from that sickness. And finally they just leave the whole...and some they were saying some of the people were still alive and they had the disease. They just left them there. It was real bad, that smallpox. Yeah.

John Smith: Was that before the signing of the treaties?

Sally Provost: Yes, before - way before.

John Smith: Was there quite a bit of fur trade in the old days?

Sally Provost: Yes, quite a bit. Once a year they go to Edmonton and a big bunch of them. And on the road a lot of time they have war with the Crees, when they go by. They buy all kinds of fancy stuff and dry goods, all kinds of things like pots and knives and axes. And they just trade them for their hides. And all kinds of trapping. They do a lot of trapping, all that.

John Smith: That whiskey trade, did you ever hear any stories about whiskey trade?

Sally Provost: There was a lot of murder amongst the Indians. And the white man just brought the liquor here. And that was 100 percent strong stuff. And there was a lot of murder and fighting. And one year the government, they said, "We won't allow the Indian to get liquor." So I guess it was like that. It was so, it was good that way. But since they opened it for us, oh - everything went to pieces. In them days, everybody used to work before then. Everybody works. Everybody has horses, cattle and their farm. And since this liquor, nobody.... Since this welfare, it just spoiled people.

John Smith: Did you ever hear any stories about Sitting Bull when he came across the line?

Sally Provost: He was a real mean man. He was mean because of how white people treated us the Indians.

John Smith: Did he stay here long?

Sally Provost: I don't know, but they said that he was here a while.

John Smith: Why did the Indians refer to earth as our mother? What did they think of the earth, the land?

Sally Provost: I don't know. There's a lot of things that I don't know and there's some things that I know.

John Smith: What kind of religion did they have in the old days?

Sally Provost: They pray to the sun and some - they've got power. They've got power and they know. They know what's going to happen, those powerful people, what's going to happen. They say the sun follows it. There's a day we're going to get to all the young people, they're going to sit on branches, that's these chairs. They're going to have a box to stay in and there will be no more camping. And everything it will disappear. And right to this day there's no such thing as burying a fellow. Sometimes they put up their tipis and they put the dead people in there, they just go away from there. And there's a lot of people they roll them up and they put them on a tree, hang them on a tree. There's no digging and there's no cemetery. They just put them any place.

John Smith: What did the Indians think of when they started putting fences up?

Sally Provost: They didn't like it. First of all they fenced around; they fence us up. And they claim... and right now, over there, that plant, that shell plant, that plant is ours too. Great big place. We had the Kootenay River on this side all the way and Macleod up this way to over there up north and they just fenced. I don't know who fenced it and they just said for the time people are going to fence this and the rest is all yours. It's all lies. Like that surrender, it was a big crooked work. The chiefs, there was four chiefs and four councillors and one head chief. None of them signed. It was just a few fellows that were crazy for something. And they, I guess they claimed the chiefs they signed. Nothing, they never signed.

John Smith: I am finished asking you questions. Those are all the questions I have to ask you. These were real good answers you gave me. When I am finished copying it out I will send you a copy.

Sally Provost: Yes. That one there, that surrender it was a put up job. That's not the way it should have been, just the crazy fools they signed it. All the young fellows. And there was two old fellows in there too. And all they said I heard it. What's not paid for. And that's how Maxwell... I guess they want to run that road because he knew that under it

there's something of value. That we'll take it, not the whiteman that bought that land. That's why they just left.

John Smith: Yes. It was a very good this interview. I can make good use of it.

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