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INTERPRETER: ALPHONSE LITTLEPOPLAR
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mrs. Carter was brought up by her grandmother and learned traditional ways. Attended schools, both day and residential. Married at 19 and had ten children, five of whom survived. In addition raised 20 children who were orphaned or came from broken homes.
- Attendance at day and residential schools. Training in traditional ways by her grandmother.
- Story of how she received her Cree name after mistakenly eating a snake.
- Traditional medicine; medicine exchange ceremonies; medicine bundles, medicine bags; "bad" medicine.
- Traditional foods; collection, preservation, preparation. First I will tell about my grandfather. He was the oldest of all my grandfathers and he told many stories of Cree raiding Blackfoot camps.

Cree used to remove their breech cloths when entering a Blackfoot camp, so my grandfather used to say. He was a mean old man. He had an awful temper, and when he arrived home from a raiding party, he would find some excuse to beat up his wife. His usual excuse was the food was not cooked the way he liked

it. He never left his lodge without first giving his wife a dirty look. Also long ago when a man brought in a moose, his wife would at once go to work preparing the meat and also the hide. That was the custom in those days, even when rabbits or ducks were brought in. The man was insulted if the meat he brought in was not prepared at once. Today things are not the same. Many times the wives of hunting men do not bother preparing the meat brought in by their husbands. People have become wasteful. Such was not the case when I was young.

Women appreciated what their husbands did for them. When meat was brought in, the woman skinned the animal, tanned the hide for moccasins and other things. The fat was not thrown away, it was rendered down to be used later on. Even the hoofs were used. My grandmother used to cook them and they tasted very good. Only the hair from the hide was thrown away. I don't remember what they did with duck feathers and rabbit skins.

My father never was any good at hunting. He made a living the white man way. He farmed and grew grain; also he raised pigs and other things. He would have made good, I suppose, but his trouble was he had two wives. Father Lacombe was a Catholic priest. When he arrived he put a stop to men having two wives.

So my father married my aunt, Susan Whitecap, and mother also married, and I went to live with my grandmother and I stayed with her for a long time. I guess till I grew up. From her I learned many things. She also taught me many things. The things she taught me I try to pass on to my own children. My daughter Annette, who is married and lives in British Columbia, often dries and smokes meat. She does the same with fish. Her husband is a Frenchman, and he likes eating dried meat. Other white people often come to their place to eat dried meat and fish.

I have no trouble with the two small boys I am bringing up. They are hard workers. Already they are learning the ways of nature. They set out snares and catch rabbits. In this way they are able to feed themselves. Also in season they pick berries, which I clean and freeze. Every year they pick at least 300 pounds. When they need a little spending money they sometimes sell a few berries.

My daughter began working on two hides. Her husband helped her, and now she is waiting for me to come over and finish them. She also does beadwork, but her beadwork, she wrote to me some time ago, is not so good. She never could learn to do beadwork properly. Other work she does well.

Being married to a white man and living amongst white people hasn't changed her. She is still a Cree. Like the Cree people she puts her babies in moss bags, and breast-feeds them till they are six or seven months old. Breast-feeding babies, I think, is very good. I kept all my babies in moss bags and breast-fed most of them till they were three years old. Only the twins were not breast-fed. They were brought up on canned milk. Here I note a big difference. Where the twins were sick most of the time, my breast-fed children were tough and strong.

None of them ever became sick. They know nothing of operations or hospitals but the twins were in and out of hospitals. They were brought up on canned milk and baby food just as the doctor ordered. My other children nursed till they were two or three years old, and never ate baby food. They all grew up to be strong, tough individuals. These are some of the things my grandmother taught me.

Inter: Where did you get your schooling?

Marion: For two years I attended classes at a day school at Thunderchild. But I missed many days of school and I suppose I became unruly. My father came over one day and said to Grandma, "This girl is missing much school. Also she wants to be her own boss. Both are not good for her. I have made arrangements for her to go to a residential school." The year was 1925. Here I stayed two more years, and I did not like one bit of it. Every day it was classes or church or prayer. I was glad when the school burned down. Now I would see Grandma again.

Inter: What school was this?

Marion: It was the school that burned down in 1927. I was happy when it burned and I went home to Grandma. Soon after I arrived my father came over and said to me, "You will continue your schooling here and this time you will behave yourself and not miss any school."

While another was being built at Onion Lake I went to a day school at Thunderchild Reserve. But I did not behave myself. I missed a lot of days. I would leave for school, but many times I never got there. I played in the bushes with other

children all day long. My father, I suppose, knew what was going on all the time. He came over one day and he was mad. "Who do you think you're fooling?" he said to me. "The new school at Onion Lake is ready and I am taking you there and you will stay there. You will not even come home for summer holidays. You will come home when you have learnt to behave yourself."

Again I found myself at the new Onion Lake Residential School. I stayed at this school and it was back to the same old monotonous routine. Other children went home for summer holidays for two months, but I was allowed only two weeks. I grew up at that school, and my father told a priest name Father Pascal to keep me there till someone offered to marry me.

When I was nineteen years old I married my husband and this is how I finally left school. My husband and I have been together since then. We had ten children, five of whom live today. But I have raised about twenty orphaned children, some of them from broken homes; some I kept only two or three months. They have grown up and like our own children have left home. From time to time one of them will turn up to visit us and it makes

us happy when they do.

One that we raised is Henry Dufresne. He is back with us, and has been for five years. I guess he takes us for his real parents. Now I guess I will begin to raise my grandchildren. I am thinking of something else I can tell you about.

Inter: How about telling about my uncle from Thunderchild Reserve and when he came back from the war.

Marion: You speak of David Jimmy. He must have returned from the war in 1918 because that's when the war was over. My grandfather Jimmy put on a big celebration when his son David came back from the war. 1918 is the farthest back I remember. I still think of the time John Jimmy received in the mail a picture of David and another soldier dressed in army uniform. John took a needle and pricked the eyes out of the men in the picture. No one knew why he did it, but it ruined the picture. 1918 was also the time of the epidemic and many people died. I remember that too.

Inter: Does anything stand out in your memory about this epidemic that you could speak of?

Marion: I remember Grandma looking out a window and saying, "Why aren't people going by on the road, did they all die?" Then my father arrived riding a gray horse. "Is anyone sick here?"

he asked Grandpa when he came in. Grandpa told him that we were all well and that no one was sick. "Try to stay that way," said my father. "There is much sickness going around and people are dying in large numbers." Then he told Grandpa the names of people who had died and there were many. "Perhaps," he said, "you living away out here away from other people, you won't get sick. Maybe you should stay home and not go anywhere till the epidemic has run its course." My grandparents agreed it would be the smart thing to do.

Inter: Where were you living at the time?

Marion: We lived at the time on Thunderchild Reserve about a mile north of where the school used to be. That's the same school I went to later. On my way to school I had to pass by my father's place. If he did not see me go by, he would come looking for me.

Inter: Did you like going to school?

Marion: Not at the start, but later when I got used to it and knew what it was all about. I guess I can say I kind of liked it.

Inter: What did parents and grandparents think of Indian children attending schools?

Marion: They had different views. Some didn't like it. Others pushed their children to school and urged them to remain

there. "Soon," they said, "our land will be full of white people and you will need to learn to speak their language and also to read and write."

Inter: Do you think Indian people are abandoning their culture and Indian way of life?

Marion: A lot of them are doing just that. Because they are educated, they think they have the world by the tail. Reserve life is not good enough for them anymore. But they soon see that education is not enough. They find that living in the city, one must work hard. One must make his own living and also give some of his wages to the government. Soon they start to think things over. And many return to reserve life. Indian culture is returning and more and more people are becoming interested. One thing I heard recently I did not like. It seems that an old timer living at Nordegg has predicted the return of bad medicine. If bad medicine falls into the hands of the wrong people it can be very dangerous and there is nothing the white man's law can do about it. We heard this bit

of news when we were in Edmonton. We did not learn the name of the old man who predicted this. I am wondering if he is not the weather forecaster we heard so much about.

Inter: Did your grandparents know any Indian medicine?

Marion: My grandmother was often called upon when someone was sick. From her I learnt a little about medicine. I know what to do when a baby is born. I also know how to make the medicine when the afterbirth won't fall. Grandma taught me many things. "A pregnant woman must not stare," my grandma used to say. "Also she must not laugh at or make fun of deformed people. She must also be good to all the Creator's animals." I tell all these things to my daughter-in-law.

Once a long time ago I was at a name-giving ceremony. Babies in those days were not baptized. A pipe filled with tobacco was passed over sweetgrass smoke, then given to an old man who smoked it and said some prayers, after which he was given some cloth and tobacco. Then he gave the baby a Cree name. That was all there was to it. In his prayers, I would suppose, he asked the Creator for good things for the baby, like good health, a long, happy life and I guess numerous other things. All babies in those days were breast-fed, and kept warm in a moss bag instead of diapers. This would be why they are called moss bags. Swings were made for the babies to sleep in and lullabies were hummed or sung to lull them to sleep.

Inter: Do you know any lullabies? Would you sing one?

Marion: Yes, I can try. I sang many lullabies in my time, and I'll see if I can sing one. (Here interviewer and Mrs. Carter laugh.) Oh, it has been so long, maybe I better not try it. There were no favorites. Baby boys and baby girls were loved by their parents and grandparents. There being no liquor, there were no broken homes. It was only orphaned children who

were brought up by grandparents or other relatives. At the age of ten or twelve a boy would begin going with his father on hunting trips. Before the white man brought his religion, the Indian religion consisted of much singing. Therefore there were many good singers. Today good singers are few. My boys never sing. Only Gerald, he sings at dances and pow-wows and is a very good singer.

Now that I am old and I look back, I can see I was luckier than most. This will sound like bragging. It is not intended that way. But in my grandmother I had a good teacher. And I can do many things. From the residential school, I learnt cooking and canning and many other things. There are not many things I can't do.

Interviewer: How old were you when your grandmother took you?

Marion: Six months old. I was a month old when Father Lacombe came and told my father he could only have one wife. Then mother took me with her when she married a man at Little Pines Reserve.

Grandma used to tell me times were hard when mother and I went to live at Little Pines. No milk was available and I lived on soup, soup made from whatever kind of meat was at hand. When there was no meat I was given gopher soup. To this day I still like eating soup. I can hardly go a day without having soup of some kind.

Because I was at a residential school when it happened, I did not go through the womanhood ritual, but my daughter did. Annette was thirteen at the time and we were living at Butte. As soon as she told me, I pitched a tent a hundred paces or so from ours and moved her in there. It was the season of the chokecherries and she worked crushing chokecherries. Also we made her a meat rack and she smoked and dried meat. She also did some sewing, finishing a quilt I had started to make. Her brothers missed her and wanted to go visit her. But they were not allowed to go there. Our son Okemow was seven at the time and wanted to know why Annette was living there. "Is she coming back? Why can't I visit her?" I told him Annette would someday be married and is learning to do things for herself and that she would come back in four days.

After breakfast one morning one of the boys got up and announced he was going over to visit Annette. "You can't go there!" his father shouted at him.

"Why can't I go there and why doesn't she move back?" he wanted to know. His father then explained to him that his sister was no longer a child but was now a woman, and that she was learning how to do things for herself.

Annette now lives in B.C. in a mobile home her husband bought for \$1500.00. Beside their house is a deep ravine. Part way down this ravine she has made a place for smoking and drying meat. So she is hanging on to her Indian ways and customs. Mostly she dries and smokes the cheap cuts of meat like stewing

meat and other cheap cuts of meat.

I have told how girls learn from their mothers and grandmothers. Boys also learn from their father and grandfathers. And then there was also the marriages arranged by the elders.

Boys and girls who did not know each other were married if their parents told them to.

My sister Rose had this kind of a marriage. She did not love the man she was married off to and refused to sleep with him. She had her own bed and he had his own. Every time her husband looked at her she would make faces at him. But today, they get along very well. That was the old Indian tradition. Marriages of this kind never broke up. There was no big wedding celebration, only a feast and a prayer ritual. Today they have big wedding celebrations and try to outdo one another. Marriage is, I suppose, where a woman looks after her husband, and the man looks after his wife.

For my part, I would prefer the old Indian way of life. But with moose and other game so scarce we would be hungry most of the time. I hear the white men are now demanding a licence from native people to go fishing. Young people had great respect for old people, and relatives kept and looked after their old people till they died. Nowadays young people try to put their old people in homes.

Inter: Was your grandmother named "Tall Woman?"

Marion: No, but Tall Woman was a sister of my grandmother. She had no children of her own, but she raised many orphaned children. I remember her as a kind old woman. Aye-mih-tay-wihk is a medicine exchanging ritual. Grandma used to go to these rituals. In B.C. it is still practiced by the Squamish Indians.

(End of Side A, Tape IH-017)

(Side B)

Once as a child I asked Grandma what Kah-mih-tay-wihk was all about, for I knew she had been to one and I had seen her place something in her medicine bag. Whatever it was, it was well wrapped up and tied securely with a strong leather thong. One day when she was out and I was alone I looked in her medicine bag and brought out the package she had hidden. It contained something that looked like pearls to me. One day I asked her what they were. She said they had to be taken along when one went to a Kah-mih-tay-wihk. It was then I asked her what this thing called Kah-mih-tay-wihk was all about. She explained it was a medicine buying or exchanging party and it was held in a lodge with a back door. She had stopped going to these parties, because some people were beginning to bring bad medicine to sell. Grandma attended only when good medicine was brought in. I think bad medicine was brought in only at a

certain time of the year. In any case, Grandma didn't like to have anything to do with bad medicine and stopped going to these exchanging parties.

There was a strange thing about the pearls grandma had. Every year she kept them, one new pearl was found in the package. My grandfather also had a medicine bundle. This is different from a medicine bag. I used to wonder what was in Grandpa's medicine bundle. This is different from a medicine bag. He never undid it at least never when I was around. One day, though, my curiosity got the best of me. Again I was alone in the lodge. I went to work undoing the medicine bundle. Inside I found some very small shirts and a small vest, also some little dresses or gowns. Around the medicine bundle on the inside was a necklace of dog claws. My grandfather's spirit helper would appear to him in the form of a dog. This is the reason he had a necklace of dog claws.

Also in the medicine bundle were several thimbles full of medicine in powder form. I was looking at these when Grandpa walked in. I became frightened and began throwing the things back together again, but Grandpa said he would do it himself, and that little girls must never undo medicine bundles. I asked him what the little shirts and other clothes were for. They looked like doll clothes to me. He explained they were the clothes of his children who had died as babies when he was young. He also told me then of the necklace of dog claws. In the thimbles, he said, was bad medicine and he was hoping he'd never need to use it.

Grandma said later the medicine Grandpa had was in good hands and she thought it would never be used. I don't know how Kah-mih-tay-wihk would be translated to English, but I hear they still do it in B.C. somewhere near Vancouver or near Kamloops. Annette was telling us about it. Long ago people could forecast the weather. How they did it I don't know. All I know is when clouds come up rain can be expected.

Inter: Did you ever hear anyone tell of a scaffold burial?

Marion: I was present once when an old man died and was buried on a scaffold. We were with a small band moving from Island Lake to Big River, when an old man became sick. I don't remember his name but he was Mrs. Guspar Morin's father. He became sicker and sicker and soon he died. The men just built a platform up high. They made it very strong and on the platform they spread blanket on which they placed the body,

then covered it with another blanket and the funeral was over. This happened the year the school burned down (1927).

Inter: Do you remember the year you started school?

Marion: Oh now, let me see. I am so stupid I don't remember the year, but I would think it was 1925.

Inter: Were you well treated by the people who ran the school?

Marion: Oh yes, the sisters or nuns were kind and we were well treated. When the old school burned down and a new one was built, it was the same there; we were well cared for. The only thing I didn't like was we never went home for Christmas or Easter. Students from Onion Lake were permitted to go home for Christmas dinner but they had to be back at school by supper time. The same at Easter time. Easter dinner at home and back in the afternoon. That was one thing no one liked about that school.

Inter: Were you satisfied with the food and clothing?

Marion: Yes, we had good meals and there was plenty to eat. Nobody went hungry. Our clothes were different. Our dresses were homemade from some heavy blanket material. Also our underwear was a light canvas material. For underpants we had two army toques sewn together. Later, just before I left school in 1934, all that was changed and we had flour sacks for underwear and we were taught to make them ourselves. For aprons we used a heavy overall material, which I think we called denim. It was blue in colour. We also knitted our own stockings. We never had cotton stockings or sockies, only the woolen stockings we made. We were also taught cooking. Girls would take turns working in the kitchen one month at a time. One thing we were never taught to do was bake bread. The boys did the baking, and they made good bread. Freddy and Arsene were two boys I remember who used to bake bread. Girls were taught canning and cooking, but baking bread was for boys.

Inter: Were the school children in those days occasionally taken on picnics?

Marion: Yes, we had picnics twice a year, in June before summer holidays and again in early September. I enjoyed picnics. I guess we all did. Usually we had our picnics beside a lake near the school. Before the old school burned down, we had our picnics where George Paul is now living.

Inter: I have been told there was a race track there at one time?

Marion: There might have been, but when I was there I didn't see one. It must have been a way back.

Inter: Do you have a Cree name?

Marion: Yes, I have a Cree name and it came about in a strange way. I have never told anyone how it came about but I will tell you how I got my Cree name. My grandmother used to tell me about it. It seems that we were on a hunt with several other families. Grandma didn't say how old I was at the time but I must have been small, because I don't remember anything about it. One day when game was being dressed an old woman in camp cleaned some tripe which she roasted on the camp fire. I guess dad killed a snake and threw it in the fire, the same

fire where the old woman had been roasting tripe. Later, I came around when the fire had almost burnt itself out and saw the burnt snake. Thinking it was some of the tripe the old woman had been roasting, I picked up the snake and began eating it. Then someone saw me. "This little girl is eating a snake," the person shouted. People came running. They tried to shove their fingers in my mouth to make me vomit, but I clamped my jaws shut as tight as I could and no one could make me vomit. Then Grandma asked an old woman in camp to give me medicine. The woman thought medicine would not be needed. "Instead," she said, "I will give her a Cree name." So this old woman called me Kay-pay-tway-way-ki-nay-pic-oh-sqwayo. Grandma then gave her a small gift for giving me a Cree name. "I have asked the great spirit for a long life for your little granddaughter," the old woman told Grandma. "Also I have asked that she never be sick." I have had a long life. Now I am old and have never been sick. I have never been in a hospital as a patient.

Translator: (For Mrs. Carter's Cree name there is no adequate English translation, but it has to do with a snake.)

Marion: When I was a bigger girl other children used to call me snake-eater. I used to get mad. Another silly thing I did as a child I will tell you about.

I was about six years old at the time and I guess because I was never breast-fed as a baby, I used to wonder what it would be like to nurse. At that time we had a big ugly female dog whom we called Mah-yak-chan (Ugly). She was a big friendly dog and we all liked her. One summer day she had pups in some bushes beside our house. Often I would go sit beside her and her pups and when the pups nursed I nursed too, and I noted that dog milk

is very salty. Then I got caught. I do not remember how it happened, but I was caught nursing along with the pups. People used to ask me what dog milk tasted like. I remember telling them it was very salty. I used to call the pups my little brothers and sisters. In moulting season I used to take the dog out to some sloughs nearby and she would catch the ducks who were moulting and couldn't fly. So she helped put food on our table. She was a very ugly dog and her name was Ugly, but she was a good dog and she stayed with us till she died from old age at the age of sixteen.

Inter: You could tell of Indian bands moving about in the early days.

Marion: We had wagons for moving. I don't remember ever seeing anyone using travois or Red River carts. These, I guess, were before my time. Some people I have seen moving about used only pack horses. We used horses and wagons when we moved. Before that my grandparents used to have cows. They put their cows to work. They were called oxen.

David Jimmy used to tell of the time there was a famine. People were hungry. Game was nonexistent. There was no work

to be had and people became desperate. When Grandpa butchered one of his work cows, Grandma cried. David Jimmy was my grandmother's nephew. My grandfather used to tell of Indian bands moving north from Regina and these people would store pemmican in the ground as they moved north for the winter. On their way back south in the spring, they would dig out the pemmican. Some died in the winter and no one dug up the pemmican they had stored. To this day white men are finding pemmican on their farms.

Not too long ago we were in Edmonton and we saw my cousin whose daughter married a white man. They live on a farm between Cold Lake and Bonnyville. While digging a well or a ditch her son-in-law found a large piece of pemmican six feet under ground. My cousin tells us the pemmican still tastes good.

Old people tell us that long ago people lived a clean life in a clean country. Liquor was unknown to them. They tell of having drinking parties, but drank only tea at these parties. They also talk of a dance they used to have where only mih-qwa-puy (blood water) was served. I guess it was a kind of a soup made from blood. People sat and when the drumming and singing began they stood up and danced in one place. Today when we attend a dance many people are drunk. They spoil things for the ones who don't drink.

Another old Indian custom comes to mind which is no longer practised. Because wives in the early days respected their husbands, they did their husband's laundry first and separately. Only after this was done did they do the family laundry. They do not do it that way anymore. Now they do a mixed washing.

Any food dropped on the floor was given to dogs, never picked up and eaten. My other grandmother, my father's mother, did not believe in Indian medicine. She never had medicine of any kind. All she did was pray when she or some loved one became sick. She was a very religious woman.

Inter: Do you know when white man's religion began amongst Indian people?

Marion: I do not know when but I would think old Father Lacombe brought it to the Indian people. Old people used to speak of old Father Lacombe. He was around I would think before the 1885 troubles. The other Father Lacombe died not too long ago. Maybe in 1938. The old priest, old Father Lacombe, was here in the 19th century.

I sometimes tell the young people that if they had to live off the land they would starve to death. At one time we used to tap three hundred trees every spring and we made sugar syrup and candy.

Inter: How did you go about tapping trees and making all these things you just mentioned?

Marion: It was hard work, but I enjoyed doing it. First a notch would be made a foot or so from the ground and a pail or a can placed under the notch to catch the juice or sap. The cans of sap were collected and poured in a large container as they became full. From five gallons of sap you made one quart of syrup. Boiling the sap over an open fire was the worst part. It would need to boil all day long and very much wood was needed. For maple candy or toffee you boiled it longer and still longer for maple sugar.

My aunt, Mrs. Whitecap, lived at Highgate, a small town the other side of Delmar. My grandparents lived there too. They lived beside the river. Their old cellar can still be seen today. They used to tell of making maple syrup and drying berries for winter use. They made birch bark containers in which they kept maple syrup and sugar.

My sister, Mrs. Tootosis, used to make a lot of maple sugar but hasn't made any for several years because no one helps her. Like I said, it is a lot of work and help is needed. A

large amount of wood must be cut and stacked. To collect the sap a team of horses hitched to a sleigh are needed and also a barrel into which to pour the sap.

Inter: Did you ever learn to work porcupine quills?

Marion: I have worked porcupine quills. It is a very slow job. Like I said, Grandma taught me many things. Porcupine quills cannot be removed by hand. It would be too dangerous. We used to take a piece of tanned hide and with this we would slap the porcupine. The longer quills would stick to the hide. We would then remove these and snip the sharp points off. Then we would dye them. The next time we slapped the porcupine the shorter quills would come and so on till we had them all. We used to also dye horse hair, the hair we pulled off the tail of a white horse. The dyed horse hair and porcupine quills were used for ornamental purposes. How dye was made I do not know. We got our dye from stores.

One thing bothers me and it is that Indian children do not speak Cree. Younger parents speak only English at home and therefore their children speak no Cree. Once I was speaking in Cree to one of my grandchildren. He just stood there staring at me. He did not understand. Then he said, "Grandma, you are speaking to yourself." When his father returned he said to him, "Dad, Grandma is going crazy, she's been talking to herself or maybe she is sick."

I was present when a fish weir was made at Turtle River. You know what a fish weir is?

Inter: No, I never heard of one. What is a fish weir?

Marion: A fish weir is a river or creek dammed with rocks and stones designed to catch fish. A basket is also made for the

fish to fall in. Once in the basket, they are trapped. A platform was built beside the basket for the people to stand on and catch the fish as they fell in the basket. Four turtles were also caught and killed. These were cooked and eaten. There were turtles there all the time. I guess that's how Turtle River and Turtle Lake got their names.

Inter: How did they kill the turtles and how did they cook them? And how big were they?

Marion: I did not see them kill the turtles or even see them cooked and they were quite large. I didn't even get to eat some. It was treaty time and there were many people. Grandma would take a bag and go every morning to the fish weir and return with a bag of fish.

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