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Nathan: ...having a conversation and then we started
specific, and then you take your time and (inaudible) as we go.
Then we'll probably go into other thing like, you know, if your
(inaudible). You see what we do too, where I've been like this is
historical research, oral history, not considered (?) the
techniques have to be certain way, like cross references. Like
there's certain documents government archives that we can't get
ahold of, something that we can get ahold of...

Joe: I got a tape in there, and my father-in-law we both
in Metis Society at the time, now he's pissed off at Jim
Sinclair anyway.

Nathan: Say what you want, because I've got my feelings about
some of them, I just work there. (laughs)

Joe: (inaudible).

Nathan: So, do you want to start then?

Joe: Yeah okay anytime.

Nathan: Okay, I've got your name properly.

Joe: Yeah, Parisien.

Nathan: Interviewing on August 8, 1983 with Joe Parisien, Joe William Parisien. Okay, Joe, what were you grandparents, Metis? What parents have you formed like your family background history like, you know, what you know about your grandparents?

Joe: No, both my grandparents on my mother's side and father's side were Metis.

Nathan: What area?

Joe: They came around Katepwa and Round Lake area.

Nathan: And that's back in when?

Joe: Oh this is back in possibly the early '30s, '20s, no earlier than the '20s my grandfather anyways. Also lived in the town of Qu'Appelle. They owned his own home there.

Nathan: Was it a Metis home, settlement, farm?

Joe: No. They had a house on the edge of town.

Nathan: Okay, where were you born?

Joe: I was born in Katepwa Beach.

Nathan: Where is that?

Joe: That is about twelve miles southeast of Lebret.

Nathan: How large was your family then?

Joe: Five brothers and sisters. Five of us.

Nathan: You had your own home there. What was it made of? Like logs, wood...

Joe: You still talking about my grandparents or...

Nathan: Yeah.

Joe: Well my grandparents I imagine the first houses they lived in were made of logs. After the first world war they built a house in Qu'Appelle and it was made of lumber.

Nathan: They were cut...

Joe: Yeah, cut lumber and it's, he was, he had quite a bit

of money so he built himself a fairly large house.

Nathan: Did your town, did you have your own land then, own title to your own land?

Joe: Yeah. Yeah they had title.

Nathan: What kind of furnishing did you have at that time, how did your family make a living?

Joe: Well, my grandfather he was, he was retired then I think he had some kind of a war pension.

Nathan: That's from world war one?

Joe: Yeah.

Nathan: He served in world war one did he?

Joe: Yeah.

Nathan: Your grandparent's names?

Joe: His name was Isadore Parisien.

Nathan: Isadore.

Joe: Isadore George I guess, it was George Isadore he went by too.

Nathan: Did you, that time you were growing up what kind of work did, like was at the time you are travelling?

Joe: Myself?

Nathan: Yes.

Joe: Yeah, I worked on farms for little while. I also cut bush in around the Qu'Appelle area for a living. Then I went down that was when I was pretty young yet and after that I went down to northern Ontario and worked as a lumber jack.

Nathan: How much did they pay you those times?

Joe: That time we got \$2. a day and minuse fifty cents for board and room. We actually got a buch and a half.

Nathan: What other work did you guys, your family at the time have gardens, live animals, any kind of...

Joe: Oh yeah. Yeah. My grandparents kept chickens, pigs, cows, geese.

Nathan: So you don't consider, you did pretty well at that time then?

Joe: Oh yeah. I don't think we were suffering that much.

Nathan: Where did you go to school at?

Joe: I went to school here in Regina.

Nathan: And at that time how far did you go up to?

Joe: Grade four.

Nathan: Grade four. Were you conscience that time of your family's Metis history?

Joe: Yeah I knew I was Metis. Other people a lot of the time they wouldn't let you forget it. You know, being new there wasn't that many people in Regina at that time that were Metis, most of them lived out in the country just very few here in Regina at that, in the '20s, late '20s and '30s.

Nathan: Dirty '30s.

Joe: Yeah.

Nathan: What kind of social events did you like at that time? Were they mixed like dances, or weddings, songs, you know?

Joe: Oh yeah, they had dances pretty well on weekly Friday and Saturday mostly. Made of jigging, square dancing.

Nathan: Any music?

Joe: Yeah. And my father, my grandfather was quite a musician he played the fiddle and piano, he had his own piano.

Nathan: He had a piano too!

Joe: Oh yeah. He had everything, he had cars, bought brand new cars at that time, yeah he had the money. Buy trucks for his sons to go to work with, gravel trucks. Tried to give his boys a good, you know, a fairly good start on life. Had to many, I don't think at that time had that opportunity to be able to go out and work around the country with a large truck.

Nathan: At the time like was just like, did he tell you stories like folklore stories on how it used to be around here?

Joe: Yeah. But I don't remember too many of the stories. Well they hunted and trapped, my father did anyway I don't think my grandfather done any of it, too much of it. He stayed home mostly and he had his pension that he lived on.

Nathan: (inaudible) Cree, French, or English?

Joe: Mostly Cree when my parents were around. There was, oh the odd time they'd speak French, they could speak French pretty fluently, both languages.

Nathan: Were you allowed to speak anything at school?

Joe: No.

Nathan: What were you allowed to speak?

Joe: English s the language there for the young people. When I first started school I didn't understand too much of English at that time. It was my parents and all them all spoke Cree eh, mostly Cree. So, by the time I started school I was about seven years old and all the language was Cree, not real northern Cree this is mixed between Cree and French eh. Somebody called it a funny language because they mixed French and Cree together, you know what I understood was, the old people were saying that the northern half of the province and the southern half of the province mostly these people here were French/Metis and they didn't get along with the other Metis people. And then instead of talking, they didn't want them to understand what they were talking about so they mixed the language with French, this was about ninety percent French and about ten percent Cree and that sort of threw the other people out that spoke the real Cree eh. Like the Cree Indian, so that way they sort of come up with a language all their own.

Nathan: Was there a bunch of, that time in the past like was there a special people dressed at that time?

Joe: No I don't think so, I think it was pretty well normal.

Nathan: Did the religion play an important role at that time?

Joe: My grandparents were quite religious.

Nathan: Roman Catholic?

Joe: Roman Catholic.

Nathan: Did (inaudibl)?

Joe: Yeah.

Nathan: ...church play an important role in the Metis community?

Joe: Around here in Qu'Appelle wasn't all Metis community, there was maybe ten, fifteen families there at that time. I don't suppose the Roman Catholic had too much to do with the native people and so they'd like to see them come to church and stuff like this eh.

Nathan: Had you seen changes in the churches since then?

Joe: Well, all the change now, all the churches have changed some to the modern times. (laughs)

Nathan: At that time did you feel that the Metis people had to hide their Indian ancestry or did they feel (inaudible)?

Joe: No, I don't think so. Like my father and my grandfather used to have frequent visitors of Indian ancestry and four or five Indians and they were quite welcome in the house. And, you know, they spoke Cree with them and then they...

Nathan: (inaudible)?

Joe: Well, it was more of a friendship than a bond I think. I don't think the people, the older people at that time they were more, more or less more courteous to people.

Nathan: Than they are today.

Joe: Yeah, than they are now today, like today different. Even the Metis, the new Metis now like the younger people are a lot different than what the way that I was brought up.

Nathan: Well, what means like do you see like at that time do you think they were better off (inaudible), or... How did they relate to the white people?

Joe: It's hard to say. In the town of Qu'Appelle where I grew up some we got along with the white people, you know, there was a few skirmishes here and there but it's always been there and it always will be there I think, I imagine.

Nathan: Would it be the same wages the Metis at the time, or were they refused jobs because they were Metis at that time?

Joe: Well the jobs that time they weren't, nobody was paying very good anyway. I think they were getting something like fifty cents a cord for chopping wood and that was pretty well throughout the country I guess.

Nathan: Did you (inaudible)?

Joe: Well, my dad got relief in the '30s. I don't know if he had any problem in getting it.

Nathan: Did you have any trouble with the town officials trying to get you to move, or try to force you off the land you were on?

Joe: No.

Nathan: Were there any (inaudible) like marriage (inaudible) Metis women marry white men, or did Metis men marry only Metis women?

Joe: Well, there was, there was a few two of my uncles married white people. And there was no discrimination as far as I know of the white woman wanted to marry a Metis person. If she loved him, well they got married. But most of them did marry their own Metis people eh.

Nathan: At that time did you like deal with your white neighbors, like did you exchange firewood, like barter and trade at that time?

Joe: Always, we used to barter with some of the farmers like when we were cutting wood and they didn't have too much money, so they'd say okay we take some chickens, or eggs, meat. I remember I went to one farmer and then chopped quite a bit of wood for him and I ended up with three pigs. (laughs)

Nathan: That was pretty good deal.

Joe: Yeah. In bartering at that time I think was the key to everything.

Nathan: During the depression.

Joe: Yeah. Because nobody had too much money, and the people that wanted to work, you know, farmer could have cut his wood himself if he wanted to, you know, maybe he didn't have enough time so he wanted a bunch of wood cut he would come into town and look up for guys that wanted to go out to cut wood for so much a load, and then maybe end up getting animals or, you know, for instead of money.

Nathan: That time, like what kind of medical services were available like doctors? (inaudible)?

Joe: Well we had a good doctor in town of Qu'Appelle at that time, Dr. Brian and he didn't discriminate on anybody, he looked after everybody the same way as he would look after his own children, I would imagine. He was always good and never asked for money if he knew you didn't have it.

Nathan: Okay, during world war one how old were you when it started then?

Joe: Well I wasn't born at that time. I was born in 1926. So the war was over a few years earlier, that's seven, eight years.

Nathan: You said your family, well members of the family did they have much affect on your family during world war one and world war two?

Joe: Well, world war two I was in it myself, my father was in it. I spent three years in the army.

Nathan: Stationed?

Joe: Yeah, I was stationed here in Canada, they found I was too young and they, when they were suppose to go over well that's when they found out that I was too young and then they held me back here. And by the time I got old enough the war was already over.

Nathan: Did you find that during that time that you

(inaudible)?

Joe: Yeah, why the people joined up?

Nathan: You tell about yourself.

Joe: Myself, adventure. (laughs) More or less adventure, because I was, I always liked to see what was over the next hill, even when I was a kid like travelling to Ontario. I went to Ontario two or three times before I joined the army, and moving from one place to another was sort of a lot of fun.

Nathan: At that time did it have any impact, like (inaudible) jobs if you really wanted one?

Joe: Well, during the depression there I don't know what kind of jobs were available, because I was a little bit too young that time. I went in the bush in the early '40s, so the depression was just pretty well over, there wasn't that much money around at that time you had to, until after the war. But there was, I imagine there was a lot of jobs available if people really wanted them.

Nathan: Did you see from the families like the garden of crops they had at that time help you get by?

Joe: Oh yeah, we had oh I'd say about, we had about an acre of land and we grew potatoes, and carrots, and corn, you know, all the garden stuff.

Nathan: What did you use for transportation that time most of the time?

Joe: Well, most of the people they used horse and buggies, but whether we were more fortunate than others like my grandfather had his own cars and trucks. And when I was fourteen I owned a Model T-Ford that I bought for \$35.

Nathan: For \$35.?

Joe: Yes. (laughs) And I travelled around with that for two or three years I guess.

Nathan: (inaudible)?

Joe: Oh yeah.

Nathan: What did you do for entertainment?

Joe: Well, went to dances, town dances. And played pool. There wasn't too much of entertainment.

Nathan: Getting back in the, were you aware of the Saskatchewan Metis Society formed? Do you know anything about the Saskatchewan Metis Society at that time?

Joe: That was in, Saskatchewan Metis Society I think at

that time there was another name I forget but it went sort of belly-up and it didn't come... The people sort of fell away from it during the war, you know, they tried to revive it a little bit but nothing really happened until Joe Amyotte started it in the town of Qu'Appelle. And that was, they had changed the name it was the Old Society that been inactive for so long. So he started up in Qu'Appelle. The town people even helped to finance the movement eh, and that's, as our first president and after that we had Dr. Howard Adams as president, and then Jim Sinclair.

Nathan: At that time you can see that the Saskatchewan Metis Society helped in anyway at that time?

Joe: No.

Nathan: Did it have like the CCF the company Commonwealth Federation affecting in anyway at that time?

Joe: Well, the CCF as far as I was concerned it didn't help me any. Nor any other government as far as that goes. You got to make it yourself through work if you wanted to live, you know, above what the older people lived in eh. Myself, I worked all my life, had jobs all the time, you know. Other than when I first started in Regina here I was working in the building trade that was only seasonal, just three or four months here, and I think it was in 1949 I joined the C.P.R. And I was with them for twenty-two years and I quit.

Nathan: At that time you felt that it was important, what do you see the reason why the Metis started organizing at that time?

Joe: Well I don't know just what Joe Amyotte had in mind at that time when he started it. I forget what year it was, it might be about twenty years ago anyway. He would be one of the, get a better life for the Metis people. And he told me what he was, what he thought he was going to do and it sounded good so I joined him and helped him out as much as I could, and say we put up banquets, and cabarets, and bingos and stuff like that to get money. And then he travelled and went to the other eh, and it grew up quite big.

Nathan: Have you seen any changes, have you seen betterment?

Joe: No. Betterment I guess is the ones that are up in the top executives of the Metis Society is the only one that got benefited by it. I went travelled to La Lache, Beauvalle, Candieux, and a little town south of Battleford and we were trying to start up a new organization for strictly Metis. So we went and talked to some of the people up there and we asked them what the Metis Society done for them and people they can't, they were pretty mad because they had promised them so many things that they couldn't come up with like they wanted a fence picket sort of a factory, and they would come into Candieux and pick up their dollar, each membership. And this ws the fieldworker at the time and he would come there and tell

them, well okay we're going to do this for you, we're going to do that for you; and he would collect all the money and then they'd never see him again for another year. And this went on for maybe seven, eight years before we were talking to them. And I told them I said, Well, when you guys going to get tired of this? You know, the Metis Society has done nothing for you and your still throwing you dollar for membership cards every year and you get the same problems as every year and the next year you don't see the guy for another year.

Nathan: What way do you see that, like people involved feel today, do you see a change for self (?) in regards to prostitution or, you know, change from what people see themselves as Metis, or see themselves today? Because there has to be a voice, a strong voice.

Joe: Well I think there is trouble within the organization and it's because of the non-status. To what I gather and talked to some people from different communities, they want strictly Metis in there and not non-status. Non-status they can either go back to the reserve on that new constitution, I understand, so they can form their own organization. They really think that if the Treaty Indian don't want them back on Treaty, well then they'll just have to fight for themselves. Either try to get back as Treaty Indians.

Nathan: Who are the significant people in your life that helped you to develop your ideas?

(END OF SIDE A)

Nathan: ...do you feel that today's values and morals have changed since the time you were raised by your grandparents, like the child rearing practices and the way you raise the children today?

Joe: Well, the Metis children today have it a lot better than what I did when I was a kid. There's more things to do. They, their social life is a lot better. When I was a kid we had nothing to do we either go out and do a little bit of work or played cool.

Nathan: Do you feel that today like in terms it's very important for the Metis people to recognize and be able to contribute to the society in a positive way?

Joe: Well, I don't know, I can't say, I can't talk to other people what they think about that. Myself it don't matter to me. I've worked with a white man for over forty years, I've got along with them and I make my living with them, so, you know, I'd go to (?) with them. Sometimes when they have their dances like, you know, (inaudible). And as far as I'm concerned I still help Metis people, but I've spent quite a bit of my own money in trying to organize different things in around Regina here. Like right now I'm the president of the

Elders' Society, and we have dances there every, well we had dances every Wednesday night, and Sunday night and we were teaching the young people how to square dance, and jig, trying to bring back the old way of living. Where the young people now has got away from it. Lot of them come down there and they look, you know, they say well what kind of dance they doing, you know. They have no idea. So, we had a dance group from about twelve to about eighteen and these kids are getting good.

Nathan: What do you feel like the importance of the elders (inaudible)?

Joe: Well, some of them will come to some of the functions now and again, but it's just only here and there eh. We have cribbage tournaments also. And very few of them come out, whether they didn't have enough time or whether they just don't want to come out. A lot of them they just sooner sit at home and watch T.V. than come out and... For awhile we had oh 150-200 people come out to the functions eh, and then that dropped down to about 40-50. They seem to be getting away from it whether they didn't like it there, I don't know.

Nathan: How would you feel that the (inaudible) support services and they helped develop, giving directions across (inaudible) getting a land base and identify those right, the aboriginal?

Joe: I don't know too much about that, because I never really, I never really got involved with any of that too much. I imagine their doing a good job. And hopefully that things will turn out better if we can get Metis people to come out and support our leaders, our local leaders then Regina is going to come out on top and maybe so the rest of the province things can be done if they'd only get together. But Metis people are hard people to try and organize in order to have it going real good, they'll come out for a little while till you start giving them some specific job to do, eh. And then they don't want that the response, responsibility of working this thing out, they'd sooner pass it onto the next guy if they can, eh. We had people come down, like we want cooks you know come and cook for the Riel Cresaultis and it's all on voluntary basis, there's nothing being paid out. Today some people volunteered one week and then they'd say they'd all come in, in one meeting, one woman and her husband came in one weekend and the cook, they cooking for us one week, one day and that was the last that we seen of them, they never did come back anymore. And they had to cook bannock and soup.

Nathan: Would the, what are some of the biggest problems that you would say right now you see that they are faced with today in regards to having a better life, and being on a welfare state like?

Joe: Well, I don't know. Well it's the, these, how can I put it now. You ask me one question at a time we'll see if I can answer it or not. (laughs)

Nathan: What do you think the biggest problems are today with (inaudible)?

Joe: I don't know. There's not too many, I think the Metis people in Regina that's unemployed there's a, I'd say there's a good percentage of them, but there's an awful lot of them that have steady jobs eh. And these younger people they got more education and they're, you know, they're getting jobs. I wouldn't say management jobs or anything like that, but they're getting a living out of it anyway. Like myself, I worked for IPSCO and then I don't suppose IPSCO ever set off again that at my age and my education I'd never get another job. And the jobs are not like was in the '40s where there was more jobs were available because it was all labour work eh, and the labour today is done mostly by machinery so that kicks out the possibility of getting a (?) job, is what they used to call them. There was lots of them (?) jobs in that time in construction. Now today they got backhoes and crains, so everything went modernized and it's tough. You have to have, when I got laid off at IPSCO I went to the building trade where I worked before and asked them for a job, and they said well how many years ago since you've done that job? And I said, well thirty-five, forty years ago. He said, well it's not the same thing. They wanted five years experience eh, in order to get the job. How you going to get five years experience, you know, you haven't been on it for forty years. It changed so much that they say, well you don't know nothing about the building trade anymore.

Nathan: (inaudible)?

Joe: Yeah. It's, it's a thing that all the building trades now are all done by machinery and, you know, there's very little left for the working man. That don't just include Metis or Indian people either that one included white people too. They have to get more education in order to be able to run some of these machines that they're using, especially today.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)