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Margaret: Mrs. Lafontaine, can you tell me a little about yourself when you were born and where you were born?

Mrytle: I was born in 1930 in about nine miles out of the town called Quinton, Saskatchewan. We lived out in the country just about a mile out of the Poorman's Reservation. My father was Metis and mother came from Poorman's Reservation. And...

Margaret: How long did you live with your family?

Mrytle: Quinton?

Margaret: Lived with them till you were how old?

Mrytle: Until I was ready to go to school.

Margaret: How old were you then?

Mrytle: I must have been about seven years I imagine.

Margaret: What school did you go to?

Mrytle: Oh, I went to an Indian Residential School. In those days like the Metis kids weren't allowed to go in the Indian school like, you know, you had to be Treaty Indian. So my grandfather like my mother's dad registered us under his name like, you know, (?) that's how we got into the Residential, Indian Residential School.

Margaret: Were there many kids that were going to school that were in the same situation as you were being registered under someone else's name?

Mrytle: No not that I know of. Think we were the only ones.

Margaret: Only native kids going?

Mrytle: Yeah. I consider myself lucky because in those days schools were so far from, you know, where you lived. Like this was the boarding school and I was glad that I had a chance to have a little bit of education where a lot of kids with our ancestry background didn't even get to school.

Margaret: If you had not been able to go to that school what school would you have gone to?

Mrytle: Well, they used to call them Day Schools in those days, we would have had to commute back and forth.

Margaret: How far was it?

Mrytle: I would say about seven miles where we lived in.

Margaret: And how would you go, transportation?

Mrytle: Well with team, you know, or walking, I don't know. We had a neighbor living about a mile and a half from us, I suppose they were white people we could have got a ride with them.

Margaret: Did everone all the children in your family go to this school?

Mrytle: There was three of us that went to Lestock Residential School. The younger one didn't get to go, like Louis the youngest one she didn't go to that school at all,

because she was too young at the time.

Margaret: So was, did she have a chance later to go to any type of school at all? When she was young, when she was a child.

Mrytle: No, not when she was a child. In later years we moved, you know, to Lestock and lived in, to a place they all Chicago Line.

Margaret: Chicago Line could you explain that? What do you mean by Chicago Line?

Mrytle: Well they nicknamed it that because, you know, it didn't really have a name but it was on the municipality road allowance they used to call in those days and it is about eight or nine miles from Lestock, Saskatchewan and that's where my husband, John Lafontaine, was born.

Margaret: On the Chicago Line? (laughs)

Mrytle: Yeah on the Chicago... (laughs)

Margaret: About how many Metis families lived on the Chicago Line?

Mrytle: Oh I would say about fifteen. Yeah at least about that many.

Margaret: And how old were you?

Mrytle: I was about eleven years old I think when my parents moved there and, like I was still going to the Mission School at that time. I went there till I was twelve or thirteen somewhere around there. And then like it was kind of hard for us being at that school because, you know, like one of the teachers at least didn't, you know, treat us very well because we were Metis ancestry, you know.

Margaret: What did she do to you, like how did she treat you different from the other children?

Mrytle: Well, she always said that we didn't belong there, you know.

Margaret: Were they, what type of teachers were they? Did you have any nuns?

Mrytle: Oh we had some, we had nuns yes all nuns.

Margaret: They were, all the teachers were nuns?

Mrytle: Yeah.

Margaret: The nuns told you that...

Mrytle: Oh one of them like I think it was some pretty nice teachers like the nuns that we lived a very strict life, you

know, at the Mission.

Margaret: Were you were able to go home on the weekends at all?

Mrytle: Not in those days we just went home on holidays in the summertime. I think now they go home on weekends, you know, it's more like a regular school. But I always though of it as a prison myself when I was a kid, you know.

Margaret: What type of restrictions did they have there, like were they were really strict then?

Mrytle: They were strict yes. And we only went to school half a day, you know, and the other half we worked. You know, did the cleaning in the whole school like, you know, making beds, and doing dishes, helping in the kitchen washing dishes, and all, you know, the normal things you do every day.

Margaret: So what grade did you complete in the school?

Mrytle: I completed grade seven.

Margaret: Grade seven, and then after that did you go on to get into high school, or did you just...

Mrytle: Well they had up to grade nine I think in those days, you know. Like if you had to complete your, they had to go into Lestock, Saskatchewan to, you know, finish your education. But I left school when I was about thirteen so, you know, like we had a bit of problems there so I couldn't finish my education. It got so, you know, rough.

Margaret: Did your, you mentioned John Lafontaine when did you meet him?

Mrytle: (inaudible). Well I met him and I guess when we both, you know, lived Little Chicago we used to call it, he was born there and...

Margaret: Did he have a chance to go to school?

Mrytle: He was unfortunate as I was in not going to school at all in those days.

Margaret: And later married John, did you?

Mrytle: Yeah.

Margaret: And how old were you when you married?

Mrytle: I was nineteen.

Margaret: I understand that you have a fairly large family.

Mrytle: Yeah. Eleven children. My family eleven children. Seven daughters and four boys.

Margaret: Were, did you live in Lestock long or while you had all of your family?

Mrytle: No, we lived in Lestock til 1949 and then at that time the government saw fit that they relocate us like, you know. So there were, that was to, while we were sent up north, you know, to Green Lake where they had a population of like, you know, Metis people. And we were promised in those days that we would get better housing and jobs and that. And yet when we got there there was, you know, it was really discouraging because we couldn't find, like I think they were worse off than we were, you know.

Margaret: Did you, how many children did you have when you moved up to Green Lake?

Mrytle: We didn't have any children, no I wasn't married yet.

Margaret: Oh you weren't. You went to Regina...

Mrytle: That was in 1949. Well, the same year when we stayed there for two months like, you know, left. We found out that, you know, that it wasn't get us what they promised us, you know, and the living was really hard. And another thing the area was not like we were used to, it was so much heavy bush like it was more like a forrest, you know, the environment was really different than where we were brought up.

Margaret: Well how did you survive the two months while you were there?

Mrytle: Well we, there was no jobs so everybody just, like we got help like, you know, welfare that's about all you could do because there was no jobs. And we were new in the area so we didn't know how to get around and, you know, find jobs. But most of the people left after a couple of months. It was only a few families that stayed there, you know, like my dad stayed and mother, I would say about three families stayed in Green Lake out of all those families that went.

Margaret: So how many do you think went, how many families moved?

Mrytle: I don't know exact number, but I would say mostly all the people that were living in Little Chicago.

Margaret: So, what fifteen families or so?

Mrytle: Yeah about that I guess.

Margaret: Well how did the municipality approach you when they came and told you about Green Lake?

Mrytle: Well, they, you know, came to all the houses, you know, and promised that we would, you know, get better housing and jobs and, you know. But when we got over there we just felt like we were unloading like a bunch of cattle really.

Margaret: So you went up there, how did you travel up there?

Mrytle: By train. Like we took some of the animals like horses and there was dogs, people, you know and when they got off it was just like...

Margaret: You all travelled up then...

Mrytle: On the same train.

Margaret: On the same train all the time you were going up there. And did you save any of your furnishings there at all?

Mrytle: Yes. Some of the people did, you know.

Margaret: Well how, what was the general attitude of the people, the Metis people on going to Green Lake?

Mrytle: Well they were happy to go, you know, because they thought they would get a better life over there. But when we got over there, you know, the people were so different, they just stood there and stared at us, you know, like we were from outer space or something, you know. Like they were different from us like they spoke nothing but Cree, Cree we couldn't even understand really because they have a different lingo to it, you know.

Margaret: So these were Treaty Indians?

Mrytle: No they weren't Treaty they were Metis people like we were.

Margaret: But they treated you totally different?

Mrytle: Well, they treated, I cannot explain this.

Margaret: Do you have any examples that you remember anything?

Mrytle: Well we used to, like we used to go in the restaurant and, you know, they would come in there and just stand there and look at us like we were, you know, it was hard to accept because, you know, they were so different. But after awhile we got used to them, you know, they started to come around and used to play ball, you know, every day like the men had a really good ball team. I guess that's about all I could really remember about that place because I only stayed there for two months, it was sort of like a holiday in a way.

Margaret: Did you when you found out that you couldn't make it there, couldn't find jobs and that you left right away to come to Regina?

Mrytle: Yes we left right away.

Margaret: So then you (inaudible)?

Mrytle: Well, we, I would say it was better I mean, you know, we could at least have, you know... My husband got a job and although he never had a permanent job he worked seasonal most of the time. It was pretty rough too because not having education you can never, you know, train himself for any job other than labour.

Margaret: So once you came to Regina that's when you started to have your large family?

Mrytle: Yes. (laughs)

Margaret: Your family, eleven children in your family they all went to school here in Regina?

Mrytle: Yeah. Yes they all went to school in Regina. It was pretty rough in those days.

Margaret: How did you manage with such a large family?

Mrytle: How did we manage? Well sometimes I wonder about that when I think back. It's very difficult. Lot of times, you know, we didn't have very much to eat and it was like in those days welfare wasn't that easy to get and they...

Margaret: Was this with everyone or just with you?

Mrytle: Yeah with everyone I think it was. In those days the city used to give the social assistance like it was the government.

Margaret: What, did your children ever come home and have any problems with the other children because they were Metis? Has there ever been any conflict or anything from other children at school? Just about your native ancestry and...

Mrytle: Well as far as I know they never came home and complained that somebody called them, you know, Indian or native, or whatever. I think they fitted in with the white society quite well, because they were all born and raised, you know, they didn't know they were any different from, you know, anybody else.

Margaret: How about when you were growing up did you...

Mrytle: When I was growing up I remember when I was a little girl there was a, we had went to town in Quinton, you know, that's... And there was some little white guys that they were standing beside my parent's wagon, you know, my sister and I and little white kids came up to us and asked us if we were Indian. And we said we were and these little kids say, well you sure don't look like Indians. And we started, like we started to fight them because we wanted to be Indian. (laughs) This really happened to us.

Margaret: So that was, is that the only incident?

Mrytle: That's the only incident that I could remember, you know.

Margaret: So you didn't have too much discrimination against, you know, just during your childhood; how about now today? Is anyone (inaudible)?

Mrytle: No, I don't think so. I mean, you know, like you have to go out and work in a white society like I've been working at Regina General Hospital since 1971 and to me, you know, everybody treats me the same as anybody else. I get along with my co-workers and I have never been called, you know, anything but, you know, but my name. There's no discrimination there, although, you know, a lot of people make fun of Indians, you know. You know, those jokes about... But I think you learn to live with that, you know, we don't take it personal because, you know, that they don't mean, you know, if you have confidence in yourself, you know, nothing really bothers you.

Margaret: I understand that your family is quite active in the AMNSIS Association. What are your feelings towards this? Your sons are (inaudible). What do you feel AMNSIS is doing anything for (inaudible)?

Mrytle: Well as far as that, you know, AMNSIS is helping us, you know, I don't expect them to because when your, you know, independant. But I'm happy to see them work there because they're helping other people. And I'm, you know, proud.

Margaret: What do you think stimulated the boys in the family to become so involved with the AMNSIS?

Mrytle: Well I think it's the way they were brought up, you know. We were poor and they want to, you know, get out there and help as many people as they could because, you know, like to see people, you know, suffering. And they want to help people to better themselves and, you know, for better housing and education and all that. You need to live easy.

(END OF SIDE A)

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