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Judy: Today is April 5, 1984, and I'm interviewing Mr.
Ernie Vandale. Mr. Vandale, could you describe to me the house
that you grew up in?

Ernie: Yeah, it was in a log cabin and we were up north, probably 120 miles north of Saskatoon. And that's where I grew up in my younger days till we moved to Saskatoon. Other than that...

Judy: What type of heating did you have? Did you have just wood burning heat?

Ernie: Well, that was always used up north out in the country in those days. It was a wood burning, there was no such thing as coal out in the country unless you lived in some small town community but out on the farm and like that there was nothing other than wood.

Judy: Did you have any electricity or running water?

Ernie: No, no. Well, it wasn't till recently that I put electricity out on the farm, so them days, I'm talking about 50 years ago, so there was no electricity even in the smaller towns through either.

Judy: Can you describe to me the furniture that you had?

Ernie: (laughs) Jesus. Well that's all, it was all homemade all the furniture out there. And, what the heck can you say, there was not the modern things we have today. It's hard to describe anything that was... now it's hard to describe what we had in those days.

Judy: It was all handmade though?

Ernie: Mostly, yeah all, yes it was all handmade where we were out there. But it wasn't until I was say 9 years old when we moved out to a town, Shell Lake, where I went to, started school. Then it was a little different, but...

Judy: Where you lived before you moved to Shell Lake, did your father own the land that you lived on?

Ernie: Yeah, it was on a homestead. Yes.

Judy: When you moved to Shell Lake what was it like? Were there a lot of Metis people in that community or was it a general mixture?

Ernie: No. It was generally a mixed... mixed community mostly. It was not like today. Shell Lake is mostly Metis in there, but in those days there was a lot of Norwegian in the surrounding... there were farmers, bigger farmers.

Judy: When you were young, do you ever remember hearing the saying road allowance?

Ernie: Oh yes. That was... Matter of fact, we didn't have no radio or anything up in those days and then they used the road allowance to indicate your noonday time. So that's how I

recall about the road allowance.

Judy: How would you get the time from...

Ernie: Well, I mean you approximately say... I remember Dad used to go out to the road allowance and say, well, that being straight north and south, the road allowance were running straight north and south. That way they say approximately about dinner time, you know, noon time and then they'd set their clock that way.

Judy: What do you remember your chores as being when you were growing up?

Ernie: I didn't have too much chores to be honest. We had our... Dad done all the chores, what you'd say. He had a few head of horses and cattle and that was all done up by Dad. But us, the kids, we very seldom done any... any chores I can't recall.

Judy: When you think of the word family does that just mean your immediate family, or does that include your aunts, uncles, grandparents?

Ernie: Well, right now we are I'd say a close-knit family on my dad's side and my mother's. My immediate family, we are close-knit. We've... I have, I can say I'm blessed with the, the thought of knowing that my family are within the short distance from Saskatoon. Matter of fact, there's all my family, other than Brian living in Dalmeny, we're all in Saskatoon here, eh. And I'm thankful about that. That's one thing I can say.

Judy: How do you remember your mother when you were growing up? How would you describe her to me?

Ernie: Well, how would you describe your mother really, you know. Mother was very, I'd say, very strict. She kept us in line. I can say one thing I can, the trouble that we've... we've never given her any trouble because she was... not that she disciplined us but she had an understanding that the way we were... we were a loving family, you see, that's the thing, and Mom never had any real trouble with us and we never gave her her any real trouble. And how do you describe your mother? Well, I don't know, a very loving person. That's what I... And to this day she's living and I'm thankful that... of her... the way she brought us up.

Judy: How about your father? Would you describe him the same way?

Ernie: Very much so, yeah. They were a happy couple. They've never had any fights among themselves, because -- that's something I can say, that I can vouch for that -- that they never had any quarrels that I've known, eh.

Judy: What do you remember your father doing for a living?

Ernie: Well, in the depression days it was damn hard to, say, remember what your father did, or any (inaudible) doing in those days. Hard times were hard times but we still... I can't recall too much. I know that he went out harvesting in the fall, and worked for several different farmers cutting wood in the winter time and hauling it to the towns, and that's just about... But... what else? He joined the army in 1939 and he was in the army overseas. And when he came back he become a carpenter and that's where I learned, more or less that's the reason I took that same trade too, as a carpenter.

Judy: What do you remember your first job as being?

Ernie: Well, I was working on the farm and also delivering groceries for... in the city here, Saskatoon. Really I worked as a delivery boy with a bike.

Judy: How old were you then?

Ernie: Fourteen.

Judy: Do you remember how much that paid?

Ernie: Yeah. We got, I think, \$5 and \$6 a week. That was... and we thought we were getting something at that time! (laughs)

Judy: What language was spoken in your parent's home?

Ernie: Well for, for us children, we spoke English all the time and... But Mom and Dad, they could speak either Cree or, what do you say, French. Dad was very fluent in either one. Sometimes they get all the English, Cree, and French combined, you'd have sort of like a bush Cree out of it, what they call. But that's what they spoke is English among the...

Judy: Do you think that your parents were proud of being Metis?

Ernie: Well, at that time there was no questions were asked on that. I never even recall the difference, so to speak, until I've been questioned on my nationality. Well, then I would say that I was Canadian Indian within... lots of Canadian Indian blood (inaudible).

Judy: Do you remember at what age that was?

Ernie: Well, at different times, you know. We didn't take... How far back would I be questioned on it, I'd never recall. But I know since, I'd say, within the last 33 years that I've been married now, we've been questioned, let's say, a half-breed couple, and they mistook Clem for being a Metis too. So I've... that's when I say that Clem was, you know... Like for instance yourself, you thought Clem was Metis when you were writing down there. Well, it's the same thing (inaudible) goes with the others, eh. And then we tell them that Clem, that my

wife was German descent, you see. And myself, well, I feel I was mixed blood. Lot of people want to say you're French, you're French, you know, but... Well, we've traced the Vandale name about 220 years now back and it's a Belgian, so I take it my name came from Belgium.

Judy: Do you remember the Metis families in your area getting together for social events such as the holidays as Christmas and New Year's?

Ernie: Oh yeah. That was... New Year's was quite a get-together, let's say for each, for a week. They'd, each family would go to a different neighbors and they have a dinner there and keep on going till it's, till the last... They'd make sure the last place where they were going to have supper, say, these people would have a big house and naturally there would be a dance after. And it goes on for a week: they celebrated New Year's for a week. And I recall in my younger days that we've been where the people would be dancing, and they were a happy bunch of people. But where I was brought up, that wasn't only Metis. There was Russian, there were a lot of Russian people in there, and German.

Judy: So it was a general mixture?

Ernie: General mixture, yeah. But on the celebrations like New Year's -- we didn't celebrate Christmas so much as we did New Year's. And today now, it's the other way.

Judy: You were saying that you would have dances. Did you know how to jig?

Ernie: No. No. My mother was a great jigger. She loved to dance the jig. Matter of fact, I can still see her in my thoughts, like. I can still see her dancing and she liked to jig. My dad was never a jigger though. He...

Judy: Did you have any family members that used to play the violin?

Ernie: I had a brother. All the family actually right from my dad, Dad played the violin and we were all musically inclined.

Judy: Did you ever play any Metis songs?

Ernie: Hoe-downs and that, you know. That's...

Judy: What they nowadays call the old-time music.

Ernie: Oh yeah, that was... well in... Harry and Lionel and they were all singers, except Gordon. He was the banjo player. Melvin, of course, he likes music and he's still playing strong. He has his own group.

Judy: Did your grandparents, or any of the elderly people that you know of, did they ever believe in the traditional Indian medicine? And did they ever practise it that you know

of?

Ernie: Gee, well, I knew that at that time there was quite a... there was a lot said about it, but as far as... I don't know whether I didn't pay attention to what was going on, but I don't know if they... I know there was a lot of... a lot said, you know, but as far as how strong our belief in it is...

Judy: You weren't really aware of it at that time?

Ernie: Not that time, you know, just never...

Judy: When you were growing up, how did you get along with the other people in the community that weren't Metis?

Ernie: Well, to be honest we... Like I say, I was never... There was no... We got along with just about every type of... in our community there was just about every type of nationality there was, eh. And then it didn't seem like there was no barrier or anything. We never even... we all went to the same swimming hole together, we all went to the same little creek and caught fish.

Judy: There was no discrimination that you can remember?

Ernie: No. We all played ball together. There was no discrimination there, I didn't think anyway.

Judy: What do you remember about the church, what type of role it played in your life, or perhaps your parent's life?

Ernie: Well, both my mother and father are Catholic and myself, and I think the whole thing is based around the Catholic... on the Church. I feel that. And it should be more today too, but the way things are going it's... the world is going so fast that... but in those days it was, the church was the main, main...

Judy: Everybody's...

Ernie: Everybody's strength, yeah. I mean there was no... I remember going to the pilgrimage many a times to St. Laurent. That's every year was the tradition to go there. And that's one of the big things, that I'd say, that every year we all got ready to go to the pilgrimage and that was...

Judy: Do you remember the priest ever visiting your parent's home? Or was there a church that wasn't close enough?

Ernie: No, I don't. Father Bernard Dunn... When we lived in Saskatoon here -- that was after we had been in here, after we moved the last time into Saskatoon -- he used to come to Dad and Mom, to visit Dad and Mom, but that was only in 1951, '52.

Judy: Do you think the church has more or less influence today on Metis people?

Ernie: Well it should. Like I say, the way things are going today it's... I think everybody is forgetting the main reason why we're here, eh. I mean, it should have, not only on the Metis people it should have... Marriage today is... there is no such thing hardly, and if it does, it doesn't last very long. If you're going... They don't have the long family time like they used to have a long time ago. When you got married, you were married till death do you part. But today it's so darn mixed up and everything. The way things are going, there's so many it should... Got a lot of children here that don't know where their father is and no responsibilities. The man don't seem to have any responsibilities, left it all to the mother. So I feel that the church should have... people should be more aware of the church. Then they'd become...

Judy: More responsible.

Ernie: More responsible for their own family. They just... more or less they think about themselves, that's to say the man, eh. And then the off-springs, well, they gotta just about fend for themselves after they get 14, 15 years old. And this is what we're having here, a problem with our young generation now.

Judy: What do you remember about school?

Ernie: Not too much about school. I didn't have too much schooling and the only thing I knew that we had seven miles to walk to school at one time when I first began school. And we had to leave damn good and early in the morning, and that was a long road ahead of us there each morning.

Judy: What do you remember about the teachers?

Ernie: Oh, the teachers were very nice, yes.

Judy: Did you enjoy school?

Ernie: What I did have, the education I didn't... The times I went to school, yes, I enjoyed the school. Played a lot of hooky though.

Judy: So you left school at the age of 14?

Ernie: Approximately 14. Maybe it would have been a year before that, but I say around 14. That's when I went to work. that's during the Second World War there.

Judy: Do you remember what kind of political parties your parents voted for?

Ernie: Well, geez, I think... right offhand I don't know. No, I don't know.

Judy: Do you remember any politicians ever visiting your parents' home?

Ernie: There could be a little story told there on that part

of my, my uncle. He was a politician.

Judy: What was his name?

Ernie: He was a Vandale. He was George Vandale, my Uncle George Vandale. He was running for reeve in Lorenzo -- that's quite a long time ago -- but he was running for the reeve of the Municipality of Lorenzo, I think. That's my early recollection of politicians, let's say.

Judy: Do you remember your parents ever being involved in the early Saskatchewan Metis Society in the 1930s and '40s?

Ernie: Yeah, my dad was a member of the Metis Society that time. And he was... matter of fact, he brought the Metis Society memberships up in Shell Lake, Spritwood, in that area there. I remember him trying to organize the Metis people there. That was just before the War there.

Judy: What was your dad's first name?

Ernie: Harry Vandale.

Judy: Do you remember what the Metis Society tried to do for the people in those days?

Ernie: Well, yeah. They were going to organize and set a land base, going to offer each family a farm, and horses and cattle to stock the farm. I recall that part and then... I think they're still fighting for the same thing today, something of a land base but...

Judy: Do you remember most of the Metis people being involved?

Ernie: Well, recently I've found out of the people that did start the organization that was... But it wasn't until I got involved with the Metis Society since, let's say 1969, that I found out who was the people that were, that started it back in the early '30s, say.

Judy: Do you remember any of the names of those people, such as perhaps Joe LaRocque?

Ernie: Oh yeah. Yeah. I had a cousin in there. He was Micheal Vandale. He was one of the organizers. And then Mrs. Moore and...

Judy: This was in the Shell Lake region or...

Ernie: No, this was in Saskatoon. This is where the Saskatoon... This is where they... they... But we've heard of them up in Shell Lake, eh.

Judy: Do you remember any of these other names -- ever hearing, perhaps, your father mentioning them -- Joe Ross?

Ernie: Ross, yeah.

Judy: How about Tom Major?

Ernie: No, I didn't hear that.

Judy: Joe McKenzie?

Ernie: No.

Judy: How about Sol Pritchard, or else Sam Pritchard, he was sometimes called.

Ernie: No.

Judy: But you do remember Joe Ross and Joe LaRocque, hearing their names mentioned?

Ernie: Yeah, and then there was, like the Fiddlers. That was from Birtch Hills, they were, but that was... And some of the Parenteaus, they were...

Judy: Do you remember anything else that your father may have mentioned about the Metis Society in those days?

Ernie: No, not too much really.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Judy: When you look back at your life and everything that's happened in it, how would you describe your life? Was it a hard life? A good life?

Ernie: Well, I feel I had a good life. There was good times and there was also rough times, but all told I felt I've had a... I've got a... being married 33 years, now 34 years, and got a happy family. We got our own home. I felt that I'm satisfied and happy with my, with the way life has treated me. Yeah I'm, I think I'd live it all over. Maybe I'd change a few here and there. But... there was some rough spots and there was good times, good times.

Judy: What would you say the future of your children and your grandchildren will be like?

Ernie: Well, the direction of my two sons, they're... One, I can say, is a non-drinker so I'm happy in that part. He has a nice family, a nice home. Greg, he's a happy way what he's doing, he's set a little... He was married; he had a boy but separated. That's the only bad thing that I feel bad about. And the girls are happy with what they've went to. I think they're not too much involved with the Metis Society. They don't think it's a thing to chase, eh, so to speak. They got

their ways of living and I don't try to change their ways at all. So as far as being Metis, to them it's just a word, as far as... And they have no gripes about it or anything like that. They just, they don't chase the Metis Society for anything, and they don't expect anything from the Metis Society.

Judy: So they pretty well have their own lives mapped out.

Ernie: Yeah, they have their own lives. I feel good at that part is that they don't. I mean, the frustrations that the God darn... with life as it is, not to try and chase some far dreams of the Metis Society going to become... I think, eventually... we'll always be a Metis society, a Metis... mixed blood in Canada. There's no gettin' away from that. But I don't think there's... far as chasing some... gettin' something for nothing, so to speak, you... So, well, I'm happy with the way my family's grown. I've got no... I did have a little bit of my own. I thought that when I first joined the Metis Society, I thought this was the real IT and there was a thing that we're going to get something at last, and you don't. If you're thinkin' that way each one is got to... gotta be dreaming, I think anyway.

Judy: Is there anything else you would like to talk about on this interview?

Ernie: No. That just about covers my viewpoints. I don't know if I've come over very good. I just... I don't know what advantage it's going to be. It might be put it somewhere where they can have a... If you want a good laugh more or less, eh, just listen to the tape. (laughs)

Judy: You did fine. Thank you very much.

Ernie: Okay.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)