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BILL KNOX

Bill Knox is a mining prospector who worked in the La Ronge area. He hired Jim Brady to assist him.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Brady's work as a prospector in the La Ronge area.
- His disappearance and the subsequent search.
- Theories of his disappearance.
- His interests and personality.
- Malcolm Norris: brief comparison with Brady.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Bill Knox was a mining promoter active in the LaRonge and northern areas in general at the time Brady was active as a prospector. He grubstaked numerous prospectors including Jim Brady. In the interview he recalls the circumstances surrounding the fatal trip on which Brady disappeared. He had been working for Knox just before he left on that trip. He describes his version of the murder theory and other possible explanations of the disappearance - which he dismisses. Brief discussion of Brady's character and personality. Very brief and

critical description of Norris.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Bill Knox of La Ronge. Bill, you knew Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris when you were working in northern Saskatchewan in the past. Could you tell me when you first met the two men and what your impressions of them were?

Bill: Well, Malcolm Norris was in charge of the assistance plan, a Prospectors' Assistance Plan here and for some years, 1956, 1957 I believe. I used his prospectors to work in the bush. And I remember, as a token of appreciation one time, I'd sent Malcolm Norris a blown up color photograph which he claimed didn't look like him at all, he said.

Now, Jim Brady, he had a little log cabin behind the liquor store (and the same liquor store that's there now) and I think he's one of the first men that went out in the bush on various contracts for me staking, prospecting, doing various types of geophysical work. Jim was a very bright guy. I remember reading bits of his diary which I had after he died and which I can't find now. But I remember a description of one time when the river somewhere where he was camped where this river "debouched into the main stream." That was the sort of word he used. I suppose, he liked the French language. Deboucher would be to, you know, be at the mouth of or... And I understand he was writing or translating a history of the Metis race into English from French. I had him up to my house after every trip, he used to come up and I'd feed him a big home-cooked meal and my wife was very fond of Jim. And the first time he had a tub in the bathroom there, he sat with his back against the faucet, which went to show you that Jim didn't have too many baths in his life in proper bathtubs. It was usually out of a galvanized tub. The last time that I saw Jim, he came into town and, as I said, he left his diary with me of his trip. And we'd made a discovery and he'd staked some claims but I was never able to record the claims because we never found Jim afterward for the signature. So I was never able... I applied to the government for the claims to be recorded for part of his estate because he thought he'd found something

pretty valuable. And the strange thing is it was right in the middle of what later became Gulf permit #1 not far from Wollaston Lake and if we had been allowed to stake, to record the claims, I think Jim would have made a lot of money out of them because that's where the first big uranium discovery was. Up at that Rabbit Lake area near Wollaston Lake.

Murray: Who had actually staked the claim? He had found the claim himself or he had found it when he was working for you?

Bill: No, he told me that he knew about this showing and it was very rusty and there was definitely some zinc there but he didn't know what else was there and would I grubstake him to chip in there and we'd go 50/50 or something like that. And I said sure, I'd pay his way up. And so when he came back, he

had the sketch maps and everything but I never did get a chance to make the applications out before he was gone on his last and fatal trip and I never got his signature.

Murray: How long after that time you staked him did he disappear?

Bill: Well, it was the following trip so it would have been... he would have come out on the plane after staking those, he would have gone in on the plane the next day for Berry Richards and he would have been lost the next day. So that was two or three days from the time he'd come out.

Murray: Right.

Bill: But like I say, this was a previous discovery of his that he'd known about and he wanted some money to go and stake it.

Murray: Do you know when he first had suspicions that it might be worth staking?

Bill: Oh, that would have been, well, the way he was talking it was some four or five or six years previously. He'd been in there with some other old-timer and they'd gone up this river and he'd seen this thing on what he'd call a bit of a bluff. Actually probably more geologically was more of a scarp. And it was rusty and anything rusty you look at, see.

Murray: What is your feeling about his disappearance? There has been lots of theories put forward, of course, because there was very little trace ever found. There was a story around that he was killed. There were stories, of course, that he just got lost. And no one seems to come up with a really solid story or any proof of anything. What was your feeling about it at the time when he disappeared?

Bill: Well, I headed the search committee that went looking for him and of course I was the vessel for all information coming from all different types of informants (or alleged information) and I am of the opinion that he was murdered and his partner too. You just don't disappear. There was a story came out of Stanley Mission that a certain Indian over there had killed him because Jim had been going with this Indian's mother. And as a corroboration or fortification to this story, this man had gone out with his own father and his father had never come back, was supposed to be drowned. So it appears to me that if you find an Indian with an Oedipus complex, you might have the culprit.

Murray: So you tend to accept this theory that Mr. X or whoever, killed the two men.

Bill: Well, not only that. There is further, well, further...

Murray: It would have to be circumstantial evidence...

Bill: Yeah, there is further circumstantial evidence in as much as the chap I think that killed them was on that lake that day and was guiding for one of the tourist operators here. And we know he was on the lake that day. And furthermore, he got drunk in Stanley Mission. As I was the head of the search committee, I had every Indian coming to me with any clue and several of them independently came to me and said that he'd been drunk in Stanley and had boasted that he'd shot two men coming down the side of a steep cliff onto Foster Lake, Upper Foster Lake. So...

Murray: They were on Middle Foster at the time. They were set down incorrectly, as I understand it, on Middle Foster? They should have been on Lower Foster.

Bill: No, they should have been on Middle Foster and they were set down on Upper Foster. I'm pretty sure that was that because shortly after that... you see, I'd sold these claim blocks to a promoter in Toronto and he'd put up the money and I'd got Berry in, not only on the writing the original report but got Berry to start the prospecting. Well, then when we lost these two fellows, we lost heart in the venture. Great Plains took that ground over and they found a pretty nice looking uranium showing right there which is called Caron Lake Dome which is the north end of Upper Foster Lake. Now, Jim Tough went in there for Great Plains. He was doing a contract for Great Plains. He was working for Bruce Comwell and he did a contract for Great Plains and he found this picket line and a stake and this blazed line in that Jim Brady had made with Halkett

and the post with JB and AH for Brady and Halkett's initials. And he was doing the job for Great Plains so I know that was Upper Foster Lake.

Murray: So they were definitely, wherever they were set down they made a claim close to Upper Foster?

Bill: Well, it wasn't really a claim post. They had cut down a tree and blazed it and put their initials on it. Why I don't know, just to pass the time of day. You know, a woodsman in the bush can't resist chopping trees as he goes along. If he's got an axe, he's got to whittle at something. And they probably stopped for a cup of tea and one of them had chopped the tree down and made a little post and put their initials on.

Murray: So, were they on the right track then when they were doing that?

Bill: No, no, they weren't but you've got to remember that Upper Foster Lake from the air and Middle Foster Lake look exactly the same. They were so similar, it was very strange.

Murray: So they thought they were...

Bill: They thought they were in the right place. They would have found out after they circled around that they were wrong because they would come to certain lakes or certain features

that were not on their maps and then they'd figure it out because they were darn good bushmen.

Murray: Something happened to them before they found that out. Is that the indication from the first?

Bill: No, I think what they did as soon as they found out they were on the track they circled around. As a matter of fact, you know, they would have just gone out for a quick reconnaissance because their sleeping bags were not unrolled; the meat hadn't even been put away. And when we came there a couple of days later, the tent was just the way they'd left it and the meat was rotting. Well, the first thing they'd ever do would be to bury their meat in the moss somewhere in some north side of someplace where you get permafrost sometimes all the year round, you know.

Murray: So that would indicate that they only expected to be away for a couple of hours.

Bill: That's so, right.

Murray: What did the searchers find when they searched for the two men? What indications? Any besides this report?

Bill: No, it's one of those things. No matter what country you go in, you always have these clues popping up all over the place because there had been other people there before, you know. Berry Richards found, for instance, pieces of a raft; and they didn't know if it was this year's or last year's or what year. And somewhere else they would find something else. They combed the bush. We raised quite a lot of money, you know, from all over the place, for a rescue operation. We thought maybe they were wounded somewhere. And for a while there was a theory that one man had shot the other and then killed himself but that's impossible because... well the personalities of these two fellows. Halkett was a lay minister going in to be ordained and Jim, although maybe he got the military medal for being a darn good fighter, he was the gentlest of souls.

Murray: And certainly not unstable in....

Bill: Oh, he was as stable as anything, stable as anything. He lived what I call a perfect life, if there is such a thing. He didn't have any women to bother him and he...

Murray: Highly principled...

Bill: Highly principled and, well, he was just a wonderful fellow, that's all.

Murray: Other people who don't believe he was killed, they say that there must have been something dramatic happened to the men. If they weren't murdered then something dramatic would have to have happened to explain their complete disappearance.

Can you think of anything else? I mean, if you had dismissed the theory of murder yourself, what other thing could have happened?

Bill: It's not the sort of situation where a man plans to disappear. You could tell a man is planning to disappear because he usually ties up certain ends before he disappears and there were no ends tied up.

Murray: And he doesn't go with another man.

Bill: And he doesn't... well, he could have made some sort of a deal to travel through the bush, maybe, and get lost

somewhere and turn up and start a new leaf. But no, it just doesn't make sense to do that.

Murray: What about some dramatic incident that injured both men so that they couldn't walk any further or...?

Bill: Well, we would have found them. We combed the bush and we must have had 15 or 20 parties, not just natives but parties going out and systematically searching. Now, if they'd cut their leg or something drastic had happened, they'd have found them. There is only one way to get rid of a body like that and that's to open the stomach up and fill it full of stones and tie it up again and sink it to the bottom of the lake. Now, the other, the Indian's father, the father of the chap that I suspect, had disappeared; and they never found his body either. But this is the sort of thing, if I'd have been the RCMP I would have... of course, I don't really know how much effort they put into it. They may have put a lot of effort into it but I sort of feel let down because they didn't come up with an answer, you see. So I feel like blaming them for not doing enough.

Murray: Were they carrying explosives at all? Were they doing any blasting work or were they just...?

Bill: No, no. You'll have to ask Berry Richards that because he organized the party but I'm almost sure there were no explosives.

Murray: So that eliminates the possibility that they...

Bill: Well, if they had taken in explosives, they would have taken in a plug. I know they didn't have a plug. You just don't blast rock just with bare explosives. And even if they had, if they'd blown themselves to bits, you would find their remains.

Murray: Right. Yeah, I mean there would be some indication in the bush where the explosion had occurred, I suppose.

Bill: That's right. I'm pretty sure the story is valid that somebody came up the lake that evening. They were coming out of the north, near the northeast corner of Upper Foster Lake.

There is quite a cliff there. They climbed down the cliff and whoever was in a canoe saw them climbing down. He's an expert shot and that he shot both of them.

Murray: Was this person supposed to have been alone when he was..?

Bill: Yes.

Murray: What would he have been doing alone on that lake?

Bill: I haven't the faintest idea. I don't know.

Murray: If he was guiding for someone, surely that someone would have been in the area.

Bill: Well, you know, guides don't work 100% of the time. And you can't keep a guide away from his canoe if there is a nice calm evening and the sun is beautiful in the sky, he'll go out. They don't like to hang around the camp if there is nothing doing.

Murray: Right.

Bill: Did I tell you, I got this fellow a job with a drill crew?

Murray: The fellow that supposedly killed them?

Bill: Did I tell you that?

Murray: No.

Bill: Well, we got him a job with a drill crew and I gave the drillers instruction to try and get this chap drunk. And they said they got him drunk but they never could get him to talk. Big Bear, or John Big Bear or some chap with that name, with a Bear in it anyway, at Stanley Mission, went in and broke this guy's arm one time. They were so sure that he was the chap, that they put him in Coventry. For all I know, maybe they still don't talk to him.

Murray: I think he has claimed that his life has been threatened several times.

Bill: I wouldn't be surprised.

Murray: Getting away from that for a while, could you tell me a bit about Jim and the conversations he had with you outside the mining aspect of your relationship. Did he talk much about the conditions of native people? He was certainly a leader in that sense.

Bill: Yes, but when he talked to me, usually our conversation went to such matters as discussing Darwin's Origin of Species and what a wonderful start that it gave modern theoreticians.

Animal behaviourism or anything that had to do with being in harmony with your environment. He always took the opportunity to, not to proselytize in my case, but rather to pick my brain is more like it. That's the way I look at it. Although he was certainly an idealist and if you are an idealist when you are 50 or 55 years old, I think that you must have led a pretty faithful life. But he used to come up and borrow books. I think he read everything I had in the library. And I think he could read equally well in French as in English. But he was the sort of a chap, you know, one out of a million, that might study Jean Jacques Rousseau on the original which you probably can't find anybody in northern Saskatchewan doing that today.

Murray: He's been portrayed as someone who is a tremendous reader and searcher for knowledge. Yet the other side, of course, he certainly was proud of his native heritage. How did he relate to native people and how did they accept him in the sort of native culture in the north?

Bill: Well, I really can't give you an answer except by the results we had when we called for help. We had every native person that could walk on two legs offering to go out at absolutely no pay. Go out and try and see what they could do to track them down, find out what happened. But you could say, well Halkett was a popular guy, or you could say that they would do that for anybody. I mean, it's pretty difficult to say. I can't make a judgement on that. I can say that as far as I personally am concerned, I thought he was a great fellow.

Murray: How was he as a prospector in terms of a competent prospector in that area?

Bill: He was very interested. He was interested in geology. He was interested in anything to do with the nature of things so he was naturally interested in rocks and ore structures. Scenery interested him. His diary was always a flashback of the day's activities with numerous references to waterfalls or what a hazy hill looked like, things like that.

Murray: So he's extremely observant sort of person.

Bill: Yes, I suspect he was a romantic. I suspect even at the day's close, he would romanticize on certain things. But when he did a report, it was more than just a report. It was a...

Murray: It was a story.

Bill: It was a sort of a work of art, you know. No, I don't think I can add much more unless you've got some other questions.

Murray: Well, I was going to ask you a bit about Malcolm Norris if you...

Bill: Well, I can't tell you too much about him.



Murray: You didn't know Malcolm nearly as well?

Bill: No, I didn't know Malcolm and I don't know why you'd bring Malcolm in. Malcolm has got a son here, of course, you know Mack. Malcolm was a kind of a vain chap in my opinion.

Murray: Would you say he was an arrogant man?

Bill: Yes, semi-arrogant, not really all that arrogant but I think he was vain. And I think he was inclined to attribute to himself qualities that didn't exist.

Murray: Was he as close to native people would you say, as Jim was? Or was he more aloof from them?

Bill: No, he wouldn't be that close, no. He was, oh, he was fairly well-educated. I don't really know much of his history but I do remember somebody telling me that he had gone to school, and maybe university for all I know. And I think that this accounted for his feeling that he was superior to other people. There was no... he didn't have the warmth that Jim Brady had.

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