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EVELYN FIDDLER

Evelyn Fiddler is a resident of Green Lake. She and her husband have been active in the Metis Association since its beginnings.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Early meetings of the Metis Association in Prince Albert.
- Malcolm Norris and the ideas he stressed at the meetings.
- Reaction in the community to the new organization.
- Achievements of the Association.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Evelyn Fiddler is a resident of Green Lake and has been involved in the Metis Society almost from the beginning. She recounts the first efforts to get the Association off the ground and talks about the goals of the group and the themes emphasized by Norris when he was organizing.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Evelyn Fiddler of Green Lake. Evelyn, can you recall the first time you met Malcolm Norris and what year that was and what the circumstances were?

Evelyn: Gosh, it's quite a while since I met Malcolm. Must be at least fifteen years ago anyway since we worked with him. At the time that we knew him, he was the president of the Metis Association and was just in the process of organizing. And actually didn't know him before that, prior to that.

Murray: So you first met him when he was trying to organize?

Evelyn: Right.

Murray: I've heard some people say it was 1963 or 1964. Does that ring a bell or does it seem..., was it earlier than that?

Evelyn: Oh yes, it was earlier than that but I imagine that there were quite a few of the people still working with Malcolm at that time. But he was working before that.

Murray: Before that, eh?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Murray: When he was first organizing the Metis Society, was he still working for the government at that time?

Evelyn: No.

Murray: He was fired from the government, eh?

Evelyn: No, he was not working for the government at that time. He was, well to be honest with you, I really don't know what he was doing in his own personal life.

Murray: But you know for sure he wasn't working for the government.

Evelyn: I know for sure he wasn't working at that time.

Murray: What kind of conversations did you first have with Malcolm? What kinds of things was he telling people?

Evelyn: Well, he was trying to get a better deal for the Metis people. It's the same as what they are doing today, let's say. But everybody was new at it at that time and they were more or less just feeling their way as to... you know. So the organization was small. We all went on our own. There was no expenses paid or anything at that time.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: It was just the people who were interested enough to take part in it that attended these meetings. Sometimes maybe we only had 25, maybe 30, but it seemed like every meeting that they had, it got bigger. People became more interested.

Murray: It was growing all the time, eh?

Evelyn: It was growing all the time, right.

Murray: The first meeting, how many people do you think showed up to that?

Evelyn: Well, I really didn't attend the first meeting at

Malcolm's shack but I don't know, being honest. I don't really know how long he had been working when we went to P.A. that time. And they, oh gee, there wasn't that many people there, maybe 25.

Murray: That was the one in Green Lake, eh?

Evelyn: No, that was....

Murray: Oh, that was the Prince Albert meeting?

Evelyn: That was held in Prince Albert. Where did we go that time? I believe it was the Avenue Hotel.

Murray: Avenue Hotel, eh.

Evelyn: I think so.

Murray: That was the first one you can remember, eh?

Evelyn: That's the first one that I remember attending and then they had a small little office at that time over on River Street East.

Murray: That was the Indian/Metis Friendship Centre, eh?

Evelyn: Yeah, right.

Murray: And that was the office of the Metis Society too?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Murray: Do you remember...?

Evelyn: Now really I don't know if the friendship centre, it probably was. It was just a small little old house that used to be there not too far off Central...

Murray: I think the city owned it or something.

Evelyn: Yeah, I believe. And that's where they had their offices. I don't really remember who was working with Malcolm at that time.

Murray: Do you remember the name Don Nielson at all?

Evelyn: Oh yes, I know Don well.

Murray: Was he working with Malcolm at that time?

Evelyn: Yes, he was.

Murray: He did at one time.

Evelyn: Yes, he was, yeah. He was working with Malcolm at that time.

Murray: Did you ever come across Jim Sinclair at all?

Evelyn: Oh yes, I worked with Jim.

Murray: He was there at the same time, eh?

Evelyn: Ah, no.

Murray: Was that later on?

Evelyn: No, that was later. No, Jim was not working with Malcolm. Of course, mind you, after Malcolm, what-you-call-him became president, Howard Adams, eh? And then I believe that's when Jim started.

Murray: I see, so Jim didn't work with Malcolm as far as you know, eh?

Evelyn: I don't believe, not so far as I know. Now, he might have had some contact with him but not as far as I know.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: When Howard Adams was president, Jim was a field worker.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: And so that was after Malcolm.

Murray: Can you recall at that meeting or other meetings anything in particular that Malcolm really focused on? Were there certain things that he talked about over and over again? Did he stress to people?

Evelyn: Oh yes, yes.

Murray: What kinds of things would he...?

Evelyn: The kind of things that Malcolm talked about was that we had to get up and start to make the governments aware to what our problems were, and in ways and means of doing it. At that time we never met with any government officials, eh.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: When Malcolm was in there as president. But, like I said, it was so small that it was really hard for him to do anything with no funds.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: So, he worked with as many people as he could get interested to work, to attend the meetings. And he done what I would say is the foundation of the Metis Society. He done a

lot of work, let's say, on his own.

Murray: Just talking to people.

Evelyn: Right, just talking to people. It wasn't until Howard Adams got in there that he started to get any government funds of any kind, you see.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: But Malcolm talked about the same things that Howard and Jim talked about, you know. The...

Murray: Discrimination?

Evelyn: Discrimination and the raw deal that the native people had got from the government for the past so many years and it was time that we now started to try to get, feel our way into society and have an equal right, the same as anybody else. That was basically what the whole thing was about.

Murray: This was a Metis Society but did you feel from what he said that he felt that it applied to Indian and Metis people the same? That they had the same sort of problems?

Evelyn: Oh yes, yeah.

Murray: He didn't make any differences between those two groups?

Evelyn: No, no, no, and never did. Even with the other presidents at the head with the Metis Society, they always said the same thing you know, that...

Murray: You were all the same, with the same problems.

Evelyn: Right, we had all got the same problem, definitely.

Murray: Do you remember if Malcolm talked about racism at all? And about native people being proud of themselves, was that something he talked about?

Evelyn: Oh sure. Oh yeah, very definitely.

Murray: He encouraged people?

Evelyn: Oh yes. He encouraged people. And one thing that I do remember that Malcolm did stress too was the discrimination in history books towards the native people. He brought that up pretty near at every meeting. That there should be things done about that sort of a thing that instead of teaching our children that the Indians were savages, that they were human the same as anybody else, you know. Where the history books don't tell us that, eh?

Murray: In fact, it might be said that the white man is more savage than...

Evelyn: (chuckles) But anyway, yes, Malcolm, he talked on that pretty near at every meeting. My impression at that time was that he felt that probably the native people didn't understand - which they didn't understand - what the government and the white man had done to the Indian and the Metis people in the past, you know. Because we were taught in school that they were all savages and...

Murray: And that you were worthless and...

Evelyn: Right, you know. So, basically that's as far as any of the Metis presidents were concerned, that was their...

Murray: A similar message.

Evelyn: The similar message and very definitely, you know, that it was high time that we sat up and start fighting for our rights.

Murray: How did people respond to that sort of message? Did everybody understand what he was saying or was there some who were a little slower to pick it up?

Evelyn: Oh yes, it took quite a long while before you really got some of the people to understand. The younger generation, I'd say, picked it up a little quicker and understood it better than the older people, eh. And it took longer for the older people to begin to realize that what the Metis Society was saying was so. These things were what should be done and these things did happen in the past. But it was understandable. Those older people were held down for so long, all their life, that it wasn't going to be that easy to bring them out of what they were taught to believe, let's say.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: You know.

Murray: Was there any hostility to the Metis Society from some of the older people? Or the younger people?

Evelyn: I would say it wouldn't have been so hard for hostility with the younger folks because, like I said, they understood.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: They knew what's happening and what should be done and they were out to, what would you call it? The younger people were out to get their rights, fight for their rights. Regardless which way it had to be done, eh?

Murray: So people were sort of ready for that kind of

leadership, eh?

Evelyn: Oh yes, very definitely. I think it would have happened.

Murray: Right. Do you think if Malcolm had come around five or six years earlier he would have gotten the same response? Or would people not have responded as easy?

Evelyn: I really don't know what to answer on that, exactly what would have happened. I really don't know what would have taken place at that time. Mind you, like I said, Malcolm was working quite a long while before we met him, you know. But at that time, it was just people like ourselves, around our age that were interested and went to his meetings.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: There was no young people involved.

Murray: There weren't at first, eh?

Evelyn: No.

Murray: And that came afterwards did it?

Evelyn: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yes, that came afterwards when the Metis Society started getting funds for the youth when you were able to pay these people and get them out to go to work. Which was understandable again. These kids couldn't get out on their own with no money. You know what I mean? You just can't.

Murray: Right. You got to feed and have a place to sleep and....

Evelyn: Right, you've got to eat and have a place to sleep and without money you can't do that so.... But I must say the young people done a lot of work in the Metis Society. They really did. I mean they went all out to do their job when they did have a chance to get out and do it, you know.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: I worked as a field worker for two years under Jim Sinclair but I enjoyed the work; it was interesting. I still say that we have to give the Metis Society a lot of credit for where the native people are sitting today.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: Because they just, they'd have been just where they were twenty years ago..

Murray: Without them.

Evelyn: Without them, you know.

Murray: Yeah. Can you remember the first meeting in Green Lake that you went to? Or that Malcolm...?

Evelyn: No. The first meeting we had in Green Lake was a guy by the name of...

Murray: Would it be La Rocque?

Evelyn: No, he's not living now. What was that fellow's name? Joe...

Murray: Not Amyotte?

Evelyn: Amyotte, right. That is the first meeting that I remember attending here, locally.

Murray: Do you remember what year that was?

Evelyn: No, I don't remember.

Murray: Was it quite a bit before Malcolm came around or about the same time, do you think?

Evelyn: It was just shortly after. It was not, maybe a year after and maybe, well, not any longer than two years I would say.

Murray: I see.

Evelyn: We didn't attend all the meetings to start with either because we just didn't always have the money to put gas in the car to go and eat and sleep too, you see.

Murray: So a lot of the meetings were held in P.A. and people had to go to P.A.

Evelyn: Oh yes, yeah, a lot of them were held in P.A. Well, it was more central for the north, eh, for to hold a meetings in Prince Albert.

Murray: But a lot of people would have liked to have gone but just couldn't afford it.

Evelyn: Just couldn't afford to go. That's true, yeah.

Murray: But there were meetings held in Green Lake too, eh?

Evelyn: Well, yes. There were meetings held here. Howard came in here. I don't know how many times Howard came in and held meetings. Jim Sinclair has been in and held meetings.

Murray: You don't remember Malcolm coming though at all.

Evelyn: I don't ever remember, no. As far as I know, not that I remember, Malcolm never did hold a meeting in Green Lake. Now, if Malcolm did hold meetings anywhere in the north, I'm

not aware of them or the places that he did go. You know, I think he done some travelling through the north alright but whether it was just more or less on a house to house basis and just talking to people or what it was. But I don't remember of him holding meetings in any place...

Murray: Any formal meetings here.

Evelyn: Yeah, right. Any formal meetings. The only ones that I knew of or attended were in Prince Albert.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: And I think we only attended two or three meetings with Malcolm. I remember the last time I seen Malcolm alive. Howard was president that time and (I guess I should be calling him Dr. Adams, but anyway) there was an election on at that time for the executives of the Metis Society and Malcolm came to the meeting. He was already then in a wheelchair and that was the last time that I've seen Malcolm personally.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Murray: Were there meetings held here with local people without Malcolm?

Evelyn: Oh yeah.

Murray: How many people would come out to those meetings?

Evelyn: Oh, to start with we had pretty near everybody interested. I was the local president here at one time and we had just house meetings like you start with, eh. And then we would have them in a hall once in a while and then we'd call the president in, either Howard Adams or Jim Sinclair or whoever it was at the time.

Murray: To come in.

Evelyn: To come in, and then you'd have a public meeting, eh.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: But we had a lot of members here at one time. But it's not that active anymore here.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: But then we're working exactly as to what the Metis Society had asked to do. Everybody is working now and at one time there was very few people here that had jobs.

Murray: So some of the goals have been accomplished?

Evelyn: Oh yes, very much so, yeah.

Murray: Do people generally give the Metis Society credit for that do you think?

Evelyn: The people do, yes. Locally, they do. I've heard it said many a time that if it hadn't been for the Metis Society, we wouldn't know what we know today or we wouldn't be where we are today.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: Oh yes, people are now beginning to realize this is so, you see.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: To start with they didn't think so but now they do know.

Murray: Right.

Evelyn: So...

(End of Side A)

(End of Interview)

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