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KEN COLLIER:

Ken Collier, while a young university student and CCF activist, met both Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Meetings with Brady and Norris in 1961 and subsequent years.
- Comparison of their attitudes, lifestyles and philosophy.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Ken Collier knew Malcolm and Jim as a young university student involved in the youth wing of the CCF. He met Jim in La Ronge in 1960-61 when Jim was very hard up and rather subdued. He describes his time spent talking with both men and contrasts them in character and politics.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I am speaking to Ken Collier of La Ronge. Ken, could you tell me when you first met Jim Brady and tell me your impressions of the man?

Ken: I first was introduced to Jim Brady in the summer of 1960 when I came up to work in La Ronge, and didn't get to really know him until the winter of 1961 when I came here again more or less holidaying and he was living here at the time in a cabin as I remember it, just off Boardman Street near the La Ronge Avenue. The way that I got to meet him I guess was through politics. I had stopped in at Prince Albert on the way to La Ronge in my first summer working up here. That was an

election year and I'd stopped in at the CCF headquarters in Prince Albert and they guided me to some people in La Ronge among whom was Jim Brady. So, when I came to La Ronge, I found a number of people here who knew him. These would be people like Berry Richards, Allan Quandt, Malcolm Norris, and they introduced me to Jim Brady at that time. The election campaign was on and since I was going out in the bush I didn't stick around much during that summer of 1960. But when I came back in 1961, I wasn't working so I had lots of time to go and visit whoever I felt like. I'd been told that Brady had a collection of clippings, and scrapbooks that he had mounted all these clippings in, that I might find interesting to look at. So I went over to have a look.

(Break in tape)

Well, I went over to have a look at these scrapbooks thinking that I would see two or three or four scrapbooks maybe, and found that he had scrapbooks going back to the early 1930s, piles of them. There were, as I remember it, three piles all boxed up, seven feet high of scrapbooks lying flat. And so I started looking just at one that he was working on at the time. And usually when you go and have a look at work that somebody is doing they show you what they're doing and they sort of hang around there and try to explain what they're up to and that sort of thing, but not Brady. He said, "Well, here you can have a look at this one," which as I remember it was somewhere in the mid 1950s that he was working on at that point. And he gave me the scrapbook and then put his parka on and left. And

he came back two, two or three hours later, I guess. And I had read just about everything in that scrapbook by then so he asked if there were any times that I was particularly interested in. And I had seen some tail end stuff about the Korean war so I asked him if maybe I could have a look at some from the Korean war so he opened up some boxes and I got into that. And so I started reading that and it took, I would guess, probably about six or eight days of reading this stuff, not all in a row. But when I would go there he would open this up and he would just act like I wasn't there, like I was a piece of furniture, you know. He would go and sit in his corner and write letters or lie in the bunk or sleep or cook and not say anything. And I'd just sit there and read this and occasionally I'd ask him a question and he'd acknowledge that I was there and answer this question, like why he chose a certain clipping or where he might have gotten some material from because it wasn't identified. And he'd come over and make a note where he had gotten this thing from. And I asked him at that point whether he had ever thought of publishing this material because to me it was just a terrific education being able to see a topic like the Korean war followed through in process. Seeing the clippings from oh, such diverse places as Time Magazine and a local newspaper and the Canadian Tribune all put up side by side. Accounts of the same incident that naturally varied quite a bit from those three publications. And he said, well, he had given thought to publishing it and was kind of vague about that whole thing. That's all he had

done was just given thought to it. And when I asked him why he had done this, he just said he thought that it was a valuable thing to do, to be able to keep all this material together. That he hadn't started off with the idea of publishing it or doing anything in particular with it. Just having it.

Murray: For his own use if nothing else.

Ken: For his own use. Yeah, and I suppose for his children and whoever else happened to be around and to me it was almost like an intellectual exercise that he wanted to be engaged in. Something that gave order to his life. Some order. I was telling you earlier that at that time, he wasn't working. 1961 wasn't a very active year in the north and particularly in the winter, everything was just dead in La Ronge. The mine was closed down and there wasn't much in the way of exploration going on so that Jim wasn't working at anything and I guess he didn't have very much money. I remember at that time going over there over a period of two or three months at various times and his diet always seemed to be the same, macaroni, oatmeal. Occasionally some fish or something that somebody

gave him. On the odd occasion somebody would invite him out for supper or something like that. But he was really down and out at that point. Seemed to be very, oh, depressed. Although to me that isn't a very good word to use because a lot of times I couldn't tell the difference in the way he acted when he was either elated or depressed.

Murray: He wasn't an emotional sort of...?

Ken: No, he didn't sort of show it a lot. I know that when I was reading through these scrapbooks, occasionally we would get on a topic that really interested him and then he would really sparkle and come alive then. But the rest of the time he just seemed to be kind of wiling the days away waiting for something to happen, waiting for some job to show up or something to do. He wouldn't often go out. Go and get his mail maybe once or twice in a week. Hardly anybody ever came and visited him. He didn't have any money to go anywhere like the bar or anyplace like that and so he just stayed at home and didn't do much of anything.

Murray: That's interesting. I've heard often that a lot of people used to visit his cabin, but not the year that you knew him?

Ken: Not during the times that I was there. I think I remember during the times that I was there, maybe one or two people came over and it was just because they were walking by on their way to somewhere and they poked their head in and said hello and saw that I was there so they carried on. He didn't talk much about anything. What I found most interesting was that he had the work, the scrapbooks and a whole bunch of other stuff too. He had a tremendous collection of books in that cabin. I remember the shelves in the cabin were made of house

siding with the angle irons holding it up on the wall and he had one angle iron at each end and the things would sag tremendously in the middle and it would be about a foot lower in the middle than they would be at each end. And it would just be overflowing with books and papers and novels and stuff falling off these shelves. And this was above his bed. And he probably would have, oh, four or five of those kinds of shelves, if you want to call them that, nailed on the side of his cabin. There was a real sort of split between that organized part of his life where the scrapbooks and the books were concerned, and it was a real contrast with the rest of what was going on that time. It didn't seem to have any aim or goal or direction or routine to it at all.

Murray: As far as his day-to-day life was concerned.

Ken: Yeah. You know, you might go by at night and it would be three or four in the morning and you would see the light on up there and you might go by at noon and he'd still be asleep. You might go by at six o'clock and he would be asleep or just going to bed. It didn't seem to matter much. I guess he just slept when he felt tired and ate when he felt hungry because there wasn't anything very much else going on to provide a routine. Once or twice, people like Allan Quandt or Malcolm Norris would come up after supper and sit and have conversations, mostly about things that I didn't know anything about at the time. I suppose La Ronge events and that sort of thing and I would just sit in the corner and read on in these scrapbooks and occasionally get into the conversation. Once or twice they would ask me what I thought of something because I was the person who wasn't from La Ronge and they would wonder what a young university student would think about such and such a thing. So they would ask that but then go on talking with each other and particularly Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady very evidently knew each other well and didn't have to become familiar with each other. They were very, on very good terms and very familiar with each other's ways of thinking.

Murray: What did they talk about?

Ken: Oh, the little bits that I can remember.... As I say, I was sort of into reading these things and didn't know what was going on so a lot of times I wasn't paying attention, but the little bits that I can remember had to do with native people and occasional outbursts about 'palefaces' and that sort of thing. These were usually from Norris rather than Brady. He would just sit and smile when Norris would get into these...

Murray: Norris would rant and Brady would smile.

Ken: Yeah, right. (chuckles) And Norris could go on for three quarters of an hour without taking a breath hardly and Brady would nod occasionally and smile. And once or twice I would see that Norris was talking himself into a corner and Brady would just be waiting for that to happen. He would come up with about a three-word sharp crack at the end and Norris would have to backtrack about six or eight paces and start all

over again to kind of redo the argument.

Murray: So Brady would lay a trap.

Ken: Well, he wouldn't lay a trap. Norris would lay his own trap.

Murray: (Inaudible)

Ken: And they both enjoyed it. I don't think I ever heard either of them just sort of talk idly about the weather or gossip or anything like that. There wasn't such a thing as an idle conversation. They always talked about something that was important, a political point, a theory, a smart move or a dumb move on the part of the government or cabinet minister or one of the local politicians. I can remember in that winter, there was a doctor in La Ronge whose last name I can't recall offhand, who was determined that there was some sort of Communist conspiracy going on in the town and that Brady was a part of it. And he would phone up members of this Communist conspiracy in the middle of the night, drunk as a lord, screaming and ranting about how he knew what they were up to, that he was going to have them all rooted out, that he would have their jobs. Even people who were self-employed, he was going to have their job taken away from them. And even more comical, he was going to have Brady's job when Brady didn't have a job. Now Brady didn't have a phone at his place but he would phone up somebody like Quandt or Berry Richards or Tony Wood and launch into these tirades and you could hear him, whoever it would be would hold the phone away and you could just hear this going on and on and on. Occasionally there were face-to-face confrontations with this character as well, and he would name off all the people in the conspiracy that were going to be thrown out of town, and they would be ridden out of town on a rail, or tarred and feathered and thrown out.

Murray: How did the recipients of these insults receive them? Were they amused or...?

Ken: Well, at first... I think that Brady just didn't sort of pay any attention. I presume he had been used to them for a while. But I remember people like Allan Quandt and Berry Richards who were both very concerned that they not write off another person's opinion, that they were willing to try and make even this doctor see reason. And they would try to argue with him over the phone, especially when he was somewhere near sober, and be very upset when this guy just couldn't accept what was going on. I remember one place that this happened, one or two times that I was in around the old Precam Explorations building and they had an old oil stove in there and sometimes there would be six or eight of us sitting around down in there and the phone call would come through from this guy. And Brady would just sit there in the corner and smile the same way he would always smile when Norris was on one of his lectures.

Murray: A knowing sort of smile was it?

Ken: Yeah, that you know, this is bound to happen. One should not expect this feature to be absent from the political life of La Ronge. There is always one. It never fails.

Murray: So he had a sort of nothing ever surprises me aura about him?

Ken: Yeah. That was about it. He often could quote an incident from somebody's life, like Norman Bethune, for instance. He knew about him and he could often quote incidents from his life or from some Russian revolutionary or Chinese revolutionary or something, you know. That they had had an experience that would show that this is bound to happen or that Marx had written or Lenin had written that these elements in society are bound to take these positions and don't be surprised when they do. And he'd express amazement that people like Quandt or Berry Richards could get so wrought up and angry and put off and why they would even concern themselves with such a thing, you know.

Murray: Petty incident.

Ken: Well, it wasn't petty. He thought that what this doctor was saying, and this doctor was sort of representative of a few other people around town too, that what they were saying was important but that one should not be surprised.

Murray: Deal with it calmly.

Ken: Yeah, just sort of see it as an understandable incident rather than getting all wrought up and angry and trying to do something about it. It's not going to change and those kind of people will not be changed and it's good that they're there to sort of be identified.

Murray: So he would concentrate on changing those who are changeable such as the native people or working people. Was that his attitude?

Ken: Yeah. And he always, you know, he didn't just sort of say that like mottos or slogans. He always had a lot of theoretical arguments to back that up and experience from other places so he had quite evidently read widely and he could usually quote where he got this idea from and a lot of that was way beyond me at that point. That, you know, I can sort of look back on it and appreciate the breadth of reading that must have gone into it. In any conversation that was going on, he was

not the kind of person who would get in there and fight and press arguments and try to score points. He would wait until there was a point to be made and usually take kind of an analytical position. He would analyse what had been said, why it had been said, what led up to it and try to put it together. And he would do this very briefly and this would not take a long time, you know. A minute or two of talking and he'd have the thing put down.

Murray: And he'd do it well.

Ken: Yeah. And to say it very quietly. It would be a very quiet voice from a corner somewhere. And quite often when he'd do that, there would be a real stir of excitement where somebody would finally say you know, "Aha, you're right you know. I didn't think of it that way before but you've got it." And he'd sit back and just sort of look satisfied. It was sort of like a Buddha figure, you know. (chuckles)

Murray: A Marxist Buddha.

Ken: Yeah. Zen Marxism, right.

Murray: So people always listened to him any time he said anything.

Ken: Yeah. You'd never hear him trying to have a contest or a shouting match to see who was going to say the next sentence, you know. He'd wait his turn. When it came around, he had material all set to go.

If I remember correctly, he also was really meticulous in his handwriting. I remember looking at some of the notations that he had put in and some of the letters that he wrote and that as I recall that they were really clearly written. For myself, like, I'm notorious for bad handwriting and usually think that most people don't care that much about their handwriting, but as I remember his handwriting was clear, very rounded. I'm not sure why that's important but I suppose it's sort of consistent.

Murray: It represents one half of his life, doesn't it? Where he is organized and precise and careful. And the other part of his life he seems to be sort of floating.

Ken: Yeah. Yeah, things that had to do with him personally just seemed to float by and could go any old direction and it didn't bother him much.

Murray: Didn't matter what he ate or where he slept or what he wore.

Ken: No. I suppose that he was probably capable of really hard work but he never left that impression with me, like that he was all charged up with energy. He seemed to be the most lackadaisical, slow moving, easygoing sort of guy. If he was going to go to the post office, it could easily take him half an hour to walk to the post office just sauntering along and no hurry to get anywhere.

Murray: No work ethic problem.

Ken: No. Well, he had his own work ethic but it was different from the way most of us have it. I don't know if he ever combed his hair. Or did up the buttons on his shirt. I

think I saw him walking around with his fly open probably thirty percent of the time. You know, he was just that kind of guy.

Murray: Not egocentric.

Ken: Yeah. I guess that's about it.

Murray: You mentioned when we talked earlier about his connection with the Legion. Could you elaborate a bit on what you know about that?

Ken: Okay, what I know about that is certainly not firsthand. I didn't hear this from him; I heard it from other people. But when he returned from overseas after the Second World War, he, I think, went to Cumberland directly thereafter or soon after and helped to form the Legion there. And since Cumberland House at that time was almost totally a Metis community, the Legion there would be people who had been overseas, native people. And the Legion there and later on in La Ronge, when he helped to organize it, was a political organization of sorts that helped to put forward the claims of native people from Cumberland House. And I gather that in a way it carried on a lot of the activities that organizations like the Metis Society would carry on today. That if they had a problem or a protest to make, the Legion was the place to go and talk to people about it, and often they would do it in the name of the Cumberland Legion. And I gather that a lot of the things that they did in Cumberland as a Legion were problem-solving activities. It was really a sort of organizing activity. And they would get into things like the Cumberland House Farm which is probably not a very good example because that's typically been run by the government. But oh, housing,...

Murray: Sports, recreation, that sort of thing?

Ken: Sports, recreation, fire control. Oh, if there would be some disaster like if the river went up or down or if there was a forest fire around that the Legion often had the means to get people marshalled together to solve problems. And while the Legion itself gradually became much more sort of typical and orthodox - like, I know now that it's probably mostly white businessmen and teachers and that sort of thing in La Ronge, or in Cumberland House now - the skills that were picked up by people who belonged to the Legion were things that have been useful in the Metis Society in later years for instance, and in a number of other organizations, Native Women. A lot of those things, from what I've heard, Brady had a hand in developing in Cumberland House.

That business about the Legion reminds me of a story that Brady told me once where... I don't know if I had made some statement like that in the war we were on the good guys' side or something along that line but it sort of spurred him to argue with that. And he said that in most wars, the people who are doing the fighting don't really have any sort of ethic other than trying to stay alive and trying to get the next meal. And

there is no real good guys' side. They are just in there fighting and trying to stay alive and if they have to they'll kill other people. And said, you know, you hear all these stories about the atrocities that the Germans were supposed to have committed and the Japanese and the other side, you know, that they were supposed to have done all of these terrible things. And he said that he had personally witnessed his own sergeant shoot German soldiers that had been captured, in the stomach, and watch them die. And he said they'd just stand around, that this was their way of getting revenge. And he said there were times when he had probably shot people when he didn't have to but it was just easier that way. And he said the kind of morality that goes along in the war, most people don't like to talk about afterwards and how a lot of times it isn't safe to talk about it afterwards. You don't like to have to say that guys on our side were just as bad as guys on the other side, and that we committed just as horrendous war crimes as the other side did but we got away with it because we happened to win.

Murray: And control the press.

Ken: Yeah. He said that there were times when he saw prisoners of war being shot because the local troop didn't have any means of looking after them or keeping them. So they just disposed of them and that was it.

Murray: Expedience.

Ken: Yeah. And he put this in his usual matter of fact way. You know, he didn't look either upset and sad about it nor happy about it. It was just...

Murray: A fact of life.

Ken: A fact that gets incorporated into the rest of what goes on. And I think also that probably I was at about the right age where I knew enough to understand but not too much and he sort of felt like it was good to set the record right with at least one person that all these starry-eyed idealists about, you know, being on the good guys' side was a bit unrealistic and you're never going to be good at politics if you go about it that way. I think that was probably his prime concern, that political people should not harbor illusions about what the world is like.

Murray: Romanticism about wars and things.

Ken: Yeah. Or even romanticism about things like democracy and all that sort of thing, that democracy is just a word for a kind of government that happened to get instilled. And this is the way he put it, I'm not just sort of rambling here myself. This is the way he would put it. And what we call democracy or parliamentary democracy got instilled because people who were powerful made it that way. And you can have it all dressed up in fancy clothes and it looks pretty good but when you start examining what it does, it's no more attractive

than winning in a war, you know. You can dress all that up in fancy clothes and when you find out that your guys have been shooting prisoners and torturing people and burning villages and probably left loads of illegitimate kids behind that they are not willing to take any responsibility for and, you know... We just happened to win, that's all.

Murray: He was very conscious of the place of events in history then, in terms of why they were there and what caused them.

Ken: Yeah. I also got the impression that he was also very conscious of the place of individuals. Like a person's life can go by and it's nothing more than a spark in the night. And I think that that was one of the reasons why he didn't take himself all that seriously even though it must have been evident to him that intellectually and organizationally, he

was probably far ahead of most of the people in the north, you know. Generations ahead. I guess that got him in a lot of trouble. He didn't sort of take that as an item about which he would be snobbish or put on airs. He just lived like anybody else.

Murray: And it didn't drive him particularly to be a political organizer or a professional revolutionary or anything like that.

Ken: I'm not sure whether he would be driven. I get the impression that people who are into organizing are driven by something. You know, they can't seem to stop doing it.

Murray: It could be a number of things.

Ken: Yeah. But I don't think that he did it for personal glory or so that the name of Jim Brady would live forever in neon lights or anything like that. It was more a matter of that he knew that that was the only way towards solution to things and if it happened during his lifetime, well alright. If it happened during somebody else's lifetime, well that was alright too. That it's all understandable if you can stand back far enough and look at it. I guess that's what most of what I know about him looked like. That he wanted people to understand and he wanted to understand himself too. He didn't have much time for intellectuals, artsy types, that sort of thing. On occasion he put up with them. Like when he was working for the Centre for Community Studies, I gather that he had to put up with a lot of that stuff and I can just almost see him smiling during some of those meetings. They must have been ridiculous.

Murray: All the academics in Saskatoon.

Ken: Yeah. Arguing points and how to set up a page properly and how to punctuate a sentence. That would....

Murray: Bore him to tears, eh.

Ken: Bore him. Although, I suppose that he wouldn't see that as being any more of a waste of time than sitting in his cabin in La Ronge waiting for some job to come around so that he could try out a good meal once again.

I never could understand why he would have any patience in dealing with me because you know, I was one....

(End of Side A)
(Side B)

Ken: ...in trouble. A lot of police action that year I remember, people getting arrested outside the bars. And I remember that being one of the things that Brady got most angry about. The bar would close and they would throw all the drunks out.

Murray: Everybody who came out of the bar they would throw in jail.

Ken: Well, they wouldn't wait until they were... What they would do is, like the bar would feed people alcohol until they passed out and then they would go and put smelling salts under their nose to wake them up, prop them back up in their chair. And often all that did was sort of wake the person up enough and they'd throw another dollar on the table and pour some more beer for them and bring it back. And then of course, by the end of the night, these people were just blotto; there was just nothing. They were just walking zombies, and a lot of them by that time had just slid down under the table and were left lying in a corner and nobody paid any attention. Then come closing time and the bartenders would come and pick them up and throw them out the bar door. And there were two or three times when people came very close to freezing out in front of the bar. And there was a... I'm not sure of this. There was a guy named Lionel and I think it might have been Lionel Deschambault who was over at Cumberland but there was a guy named Lionel here in La Ronge and I'm not sure if it was the same person. But this Lionel whoever it was, had organized a little troop of people who went down to the bar at closing time every night and made sure everybody got home because there had been some pretty serious incidents and it was partly to save them from the police and partly to save them from freezing.

Murray: Because they had no qualms about throwing them out in the snow.

Ken: None at all. And I remember being in the bar and watching this business of seeing somebody lying on the floor and they come over with the smelling salts and wake him up and sit him up on a chair and the poor guy would just be unaware of even where he was but he had this signal that you pull out a dollar so he didn't get thrown out. And that was it.

Murray: Would it be consistent with Brady that he would see the situation as one in which there was no point in breaking himself trying to organize when the situation wasn't right for

it? Would that be possible or would it be just out of his depression over things or that he didn't...?

Ken: I think they all sort of fitted together. Part of his depression and being subdued was the fact that nobody seemed to give a damn about anything. And part of it also was I think he knew that when people were in such terrific poverty that they weren't likely to pay much attention to organizing efforts; they were too busy just trying to scratch together a living for themselves. And I guess also his own personal circumstances, having no money himself, you know. It's really difficult when you are dead poor to be able to pick yourself up and go and do something. You know, it's really difficult to find the energy and kind of transcend your own personal difficulties. And putting all those three things together were what did it.

Murray: Overwhelming barriers to any action.

Ken: Yeah. And yet I think that in a way he did also draw back from that and look at it and say, "Well, that's the way it is. There is no point pining away here. I might as well do something." So he would do the scrapbooks or write letters or read books but I think at the same time it also disturbed him a lot that that was all that was happening. Just sitting there in his cabin here in La Ronge, putting together scrapbooks when all the other things in the world were going on.

Murray: Yeah, so he was never unaware of what he was doing or not doing. If he got into a slump, he would have analyzed that, I suspect.

Ken: Yeah. After a while. It might take him a day or two but you wouldn't see him just sitting there just with no energy and no interest for weeks and weeks at a time.

Murray: Right.

(Break in tape)

Murray: You met Malcolm Norris as well. What can you tell me about Malcolm?

Ken: Well, I met Malcolm and Brady both at about the same time and the first way that I met Norris and the second way were both in the same day. I was up here working on geological survey and Malcolm at that time was the head of the Prospectors' Incentive Plan or P.I.P. I guess it was called P.A.P. at that time. Prospectors' Assistance Plan because it was called PAP then. I remember he used to talk about PAP. Malcolm's job included helping to train the new people on geological survey how to run lines and use the compass and that sort of thing. So

that he had all us junior guys out there showing us how to run these lines out across the muskeg here. And he was always in excellent physical shape at that point so he could run a line and be back in half the time that any of us could. We would be out falling all over branches and everything but he'd show us

how it was done and how to avoid obstacles and stuff like that and he was always terrific with an anecdote or something. He was never a boring person to be around. So that was the first way that I met him. And then, as I said, when I was coming to La Ronge, I'd stopped in at the CCF headquarters in Prince Albert and was given Malcolm's name to contact, and that was an election year. So that when I came here, we had this afternoon with him showing us how to do surveying and running lines and that sort of thing.

(break in tape)

So, after the afternoon lesson and running lines, I found out where the CCF meeting was that was scheduled for that night and I had, by that time, found Tony Wood and Berry Richards and so we went down there. And this meeting, I think, was in the Anglican Hall. And when the meeting started up, Malcolm for some reason decided that it would be good to introduce this outsider as a visiting dignitary of some sort. So he stood up and introduced me, "This is Ken Collier from Saskatoon. He is a long time CCF worker and he is up here working in La Ronge now." And so I got a big hand and cheering and all this sort of thing. Wow, you know, what a welcome to La Ronge. First day, you know, and getting an ovation from the local people; it was really something. Then Malcolm had a fair amount to do with the way that meeting went. He would make motions and that sort of thing and it was also a nominating meeting and Allan Quandt was nominated to run for the CCF at that time.

I don't remember much else about that particular summer or even subsequent summers because most of the time when I ran into Malcolm here, he was working as the head of Prospectors' Incentive Plan or Assistance Plan and it wasn't until he moved to Prince Albert that I visited him more often. I'm not even sure where he lived here in La Ronge. But in any case, I'd go down to Prince Albert and I often hitchhiked through and his house at that time was almost at the southern edge of Prince Albert and it was only half a block off the highway. So I'd often drop in there and he always made me welcome and once or twice I went in there with friends of mine from university. And he'd sit us down and we'd figure we were just going to drop in for fifteen or twenty minutes and three hours later he'd still be going strong. And he would've gotten some tea made and he would leave the thing sitting there; the teapot would be

sitting on the table. And have all these cups and everything all lined up and he would be ranting and raving on and talking and telling us all these stories and forget all about the tea and it would be stone cold by the time he remembered it. So he would pour it out and start it up again. Sometimes he would go through three teapots before we finally got to have some hot tea, you know. (chuckles) He would forget all about what was going on and he'd tell us stories about things that went on in the north, most of which I don't remember much of. They were more like, sort of light anecdotes. They weren't any sort of heavy political stuff.

And then we'd get into politics and with us he would usually stick to kind of theory things. And he would have a book marked here and he would just pull this book out and have it marked at the right place and he would open up and say, "Now you just read that paragraph there and then when you get to the end of that paragraph, we'll go back to that thing that we were talking about before." And so we'd have to sit there and read this thing. We'd give it back to him and he'd shove it back in the bookcase and launch into another theoretical thing. Then when we were ready to leave, he'd often give us a couple or three books to take with us. Even, you know, some other friend of mine who he'd never met before in his life would have books thrust into his hand to read. "Bring them back whenever you're coming through. Come on in for a cup of tea or mail them back," you know, whatever you were going to do. So we'd take these books away and read them and he says, "When you get those books read, you'll know what I'm talking about. You'll see that this was the way it was supposed to go."

The only time I ever saw him sort of down in the dumps was when the Thatcher administration was putting the pressure on him to get him out of the Indian-Metis Friendship Centre when it was down on River Street in Prince Albert. He felt that the local board should have had more strength and that it was sort of dirty pool that the government would take a partisan position like that and try to tell the Indian-Metis Friendship Centre what it should do with its money that the government had granted it. I think he figured that the board and other agencies between the government and the Friendship Centre should have been able to ward off the pressure somehow. And he seemed to get a lot of the pressure aimed at him personally. That it was because of Malcolm Norris that they weren't going to get their funding and of course, as a matter of fact, that was true. You know, he was named as the cause of why they weren't going to get any more money. If they wanted Malcolm Norris for the director then they could find their own money from somewhere. But he also felt that there should have been some way that it shouldn't all have been dumped on his shoulders and there should have been other people around who

could have helped to fight that thing. That it wouldn't look so self-serving for him to have to try to hold the Friendship Centre up on his own with the appearance of it just being to preserve a job for himself. He thought that that was kind of bad news.

And oh, a couple of other times when I ran into him, it was still in the CCF or NDP youth. At that point and I remember the youth putting on a program in Prince Albert where there was a debate to be staged between some NDP young people and another group and I was the moderator of this thing. And one of the people in the debate was one of Malcolm's daughters who had gotten in a lot of trouble around Prince Albert. I think she was involved in breaking and entering and stuff like that, you know.

Murray: This is one of Malcolm's daughters?

Ken: Yeah. And it seemed that that debate which had to do with something to do with the generation gap. I can't remember offhand what the debate was even about, but it became a debate between Malcolm and his daughter about that. And a lot of parents would be really shocked and dismayed if their daughter kind of attacked them for things that they had done and criticized them but Malcolm handled that almost as though he was carrying on a debate with somebody that he didn't know. And I think that wasn't true because it wasn't like he had lost touch with his daughter. You know, obviously they were very close in spite of all the difficulties and tough times. And after the debate was over, she went and sat by him and held his hand for a while and they talked over some more stuff at that meeting. And there were a number of people around at that meeting who felt that things should have been shut down when it got into this personal stuff and yet I don't think that either of them were particularly offended by the fact that other people had been listening in on this.

This may not be terribly complimentary but I often got the feeling that Malcolm's wife, Mary, did not particularly appreciate his political activities. When we would go by their place sometimes, she would treat us in a very offish, almost hostile manner, like we were interrupting something important even though nothing apparently was going on.

Murray: The family in other words.

Ken: Yeah, I suppose. Although a number of times, even, you would go there and there was quite apparently nothing happening. You know, Malcolm and she were just around. And we

came there and she seemed to be very put off that Malcolm would take time to talk to these political people, these young university punk-type political people at that. And I got the impression from that and a number of other things that she didn't appreciate his political actions at all. Probably she had had to suffer some of the results of it and didn't like it. And particularly since she did not like the political activity, she felt that it was really unfair that she got the brunt of it sometimes. That that was really....

Murray: That she shouldn't have to share that.

Ken: Yeah. If he insisted on getting into that, the least he could do is protect her from it. And he didn't apparently make much effort of doing that. I think he felt that anybody, everbody should be involved in politics.

Murray: Either part of the problem or part of the solution.

Ken: (chuckles) Right.

Murray: How did he deal with her cool manner to you when you visited? Did he just ignore her coolness or did he speak to her about it?

Ken: No, he never spoke to her. She occasionally would come in with something like, "Are you going to go and do that shopping?" or "Are you going to return that telephone call today?" or something. And he would get a little impatient with that as though he didn't really need to be reminded, he was aware of those things.

Murray: He knew it was a tactic of hers perhaps.

Ken: Yeah, I suppose. And I don't know if it was a tactic. It might have been a very practical thing that. I presume that she would probably get a whole bunch of telephone calls from people wondering when he was going to get around to returning them.

Murray: So she would have acted partly as a secretary which is something she probably resented as well, eh?

Ken: Involuntarily.

Murray: Right.

Ken: And yet, you know, knowing the kind of life that he led, what choice was there?

Murray: Right.

Ken: There were always people who wanted to talk to him about something.

Murray: Do you recall what that debate was about that you mentioned?

Ken: I don't offhand.

Murray: But it was quite an argument between he and his daughter though was it?

Ken: Well, okay, his daughter was on the panel.

Murray: And he was in the audience.

Ken: And he was in the audience. And the debate went on for probably an hour to an hour and a half on the topic that it was supposed to be about which it seems to me had something to do indirectly with the difference between the youth and the adult part of the party or older people and younger people or the generation gap or something like that.

Murray: So it was all within the NDP was it?

Ken: Yeah, it had something to do with the NDP. It was a political topic. But then it began to, I suppose you could say, deteriorate into this personal harangue and yet they both wanted to do it and here was, I suppose, a safe place to air it. I don't know.

Murray: It was personal yet political.

Ken: Yeah.

Murray: Political implications.

Ken: Yeah, it was like her saying that he was too busy with political things to pay attention to her and the needs of the other kids. Yet at the same time he would say, well, the political things that were going on were of importance and that the solutions that would come out of those would accrue to his kids as well as everybody else's and that he personally couldn't separate the rights and welfare and that sort of thing of his own kids from that of everybody else. He thought that that was a false way to go at it. If you just sort of try to wall your own family off into their own little enclave, it's a protection of sorts but if somebody really wants to assault it

they can break it down and then you are left defenseless because nobody else will help you since you didn't help them. The only real protection is being together with other people who have similar problems and similar goals. That was the way I remember his part of the argument going. And I guess that that was the way that he could avoid getting sort of personally stung by the criticisms that must have hit home. But I know that a lot of the other people, there were both young people and older people from the NDP in the audience of this debate, and a lot of them were really very critical of me for failing to call the meeting off, you know, to stop it, or critical of Malcolm and his daughter for baring their souls in front of everybody. And I think in a lot of the cases, it was a matter that that was touching pretty close to home for a lot of people in the audience whose kids had also experienced the same feelings and also probably been involved in a lot of the same illegal activities and troubles and that sort of thing.

Murray: That was brought out too was it in the thing?

Ken: Not in the debate, no. Not out, oh, I'm sorry. Maybe I'm...

Murray: Well, the fact that she had been in trouble, had that been...?

Ken: Well, everybody knew it. Prince Albert was a small enough town at that point that everybody knew who Malcolm Norris was and who his daughter was and what things had happened. And you know, at the time they were pretty tragic kind of things but looking back on them, they're not that different from what hundreds and thousands of other families have....

Murray: All the tragedies that are more serious that have happened.

Ken: Yeah.

Murray: Which daughter was that? Do you recall her name?

Ken: Shirley?

Murray: Yeah, there is a Shirley.

Ken: I think that was her name. Do you remember the names of any other daughters?

Murray: Not offhand, no. I know I've got them somewhere.

Ken: Yeah, I think it was Shirley but I'm not sure.

Murray: How old would she have been? Fifteen or sixteen or something like that?

Ken: Oh, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, somewhere in there. I think just at that point she had just gone to live somewhere else and was boarding on her own because around the family things had gotten too hot to handle so she was living elsewhere.

Murray: Was this part of her conflict with Malcolm then, eh?

Ken: I think so. Not that I think he disapproved of her living somewhere else. I think it was more a matter of why they couldn't have straightened all this out before. And that this debate happened to be a forum where they could both say what they wanted to say and have the protection of people around there. I suppose that probably she had a fair amount of insight knowing that in a political setting Malcolm was not going to get personal and vindictive with her.

Murray: He'd have to answer her charges.

Ken: Yeah, and they would have to be answered in a sort of upright, forthright manner. He couldn't do this, "I'm your father you have to listen to me," number, if he ever did that which I don't really know whether he did or not. He may have and he may not.

Murray: Did you get the impression that she was active then in the young NDP at all?

Ken: No, she wasn't. She had a number of friends who were active in it and I think that's the only reason why she was there.

Murray: But she was on the panel though.

Ken: Yeah. She had gotten on the panel. I don't remember how but she was one of four people on this panel.

Murray: Did Malcolm ever talk about the conflict of his politics with his family?

Ken: Not to me, no.

Murray: That was something he never discussed.

Ken: Not that I ever heard.

Murray: Right.

Ken: There were, as I remember, down in PreCam Explorations here in La Ronge, a couple of times when that topic very broadly came around, you know, about the personal and political lives of people and how that kind of fitted theoretically together. But I don't remember anybody ever giving examples. I suppose that among themselves they were probably aware of things but...

Murray: One thing I meant to ask you about Brady, and you could tell me as it applies to Malcolm as well, about their attitude towards the CCF or NDP at the time. How did Brady fit into that? What was his view of the CCF at that time?

Ken: Well, I remember Brady going to that meeting I mentioned.

Murray: Where you were introduced?

Ken: Yeah, where I was introduced and I remember during that meeting, he didn't say anything. He just sat back in the corner and smiled and kind of arched his eyebrows and looked very skeptical - you know, like looking at the ceiling - about a number of things. And yet at the same time when Allan Quandt was nominated, Brady worked hard and talked to people and went around with him and did things. I think that Brady sort of figured that, well, this is a stage and eventually we'll get through it.

Murray: The same sort of attitude.

Ken: Malcolm figured that the politics of the day are what we're in. There is no point trying to pretend and this is all we've got so let's make the best of it, let's bring every last ounce of whatever we can get out of it.

Murray: So there was somewhat of a similarity in their attitude?

Ken: Something. You know, I don't think that Malcolm figured the CCF was going to be the answer to everything but at the same time he was far more publicly and enthusiastically involved.

Murray: And more hopeful too.

Ken: Yeah. And I think he liked the political life, the play of people, the arguments and the resolutions and the conventions and stuff like that. I think Brady just would have

been browned off with that whole thing, you know, that this was just sort of hopeless fooling around. And one would do that for some specific reasons, but good Lord, let's not fall all over ourselves.

Murray: Let's not like it.

Ken: Yeah, right. You know, let's not get indecent about the thing. But Malcolm clearly enjoyed going to conventions and having arguments and ....

Murray: So he enjoyed it for its sake alone whereas Brady would never have enjoyed it for that reason.

Ken: Oh yeah, never.

Murray: It was simply a political job to do as far as Brady was concerned.

Ken: Yeah.

Murray: If it was to be done at all.

Ken: Yeah. You know, he would cooperate with it because he knew that's what existed but I think that you would never see Brady at the back of a hall arguing points of theory and resolutions and going around politicking in corners at a convention. He would just think that was ludicrous.

Murray: But he would go from trapper's cabin to trapper's cabin and talk to people, that kind of thing.

Ken: Sure. I think that he figured, like a convention, you don't organize anything at a convention.

Murray: It's already organized.

Ken: Yeah, it's already organized. He would go to conventions occasionally but mostly, you know, you'd see him come in and he'd stand in a corner and smoke a cigarette and he would always catch the ashes on the palm of his hand. He would never drop ashes on the floor, never. You would never see Brady being sloppy. You would go to his house and there was always places where you put the ashes and the butts and stuff. You never see just slop on the floor and stuff like that. And you would see him standing in a corner at a convention, you know,

smoking these, roll these cigarettes, and tapping the ashes into his hand and sort of looking at everybody and finish his cigarette and go outside and maybe get some coffee at the back and go home and come back half an hour later and see if this was still going on. Have another cigarette and...

Murray: Aloof from it then in a lot of ways.

Ken: Yeah, sort of looking at it. I don't know if he ever wrote anything down about all that. But that's the way he was.

He would be down at PreCam Explorations, around that oil stove which I'm sure heard many a discussion like that, and I would almost guarantee that he would be putting the ashes in the palm of his hand and carry them outside and throw them away.

Murray: No matter where he was?

Ken: Where he was, yeah. The only time he'd ever put them anywhere else is if there was an ashtray right there in front of him. He wouldn't go and find one.

Malcolm Norris, he seemed to almost figure like it was his job to keep people on top and going and charged up, you know. He was sort of....

Murray: The initiator?

Ken: Yeah, the morale officer for the left. (chuckles) In a way. I never heard of him dwell on his personal problems. Even after he had that heart attack and was out of the Friendship Centre, you would go to his house and he would be just as up and gung ho as he could be physically able to do. He wouldn't be sitting there playing the invalid or anything like that. I thought at that time sometimes that Mary had a point, you know, that he was probably overdoing it.

Murray: Do you think he was overcompensating somewhat for his illness or was it just the, he was just treated it the same as he always would?

Ken: No, his sort of spirits got ahold of him and he was off and talking about something and would lose track of the time and lose track of how much energy he had available. Get tired out. And I seem to remember once or twice, once anyway, when Mary suggested that Malcolm was getting kind of run down - this was shortly after his heart attack - and it might be best if we came back another day. And that was about the only time I remember her being kind of solicitous to us rather than just being impatient and put off.

Murray: She was really concerned about him.

Ken: Yeah, she was concerned about him and also figured that the only way she was going to get it to happen was to suggest it to us nicely, you know, and that diplomatically it would be better if we came back another day. Rather than just saying, "What? You guys here again taking up Malcolm's time?" She never said that but that kind of approach seemed to me to be there. I never knew her very well and I suppose for reasons that I've stated.

Murray: Right.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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