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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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INTERPRETER:
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ALEX BISHOP

Alex Bishop was a community leader in Green Lake, Saskatchewan for many years. He was local president of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan and met Malcolm Norris on several occasions.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Problems in the Green Lake area.
- His work for the Metis people.
- Impressions of Malcolm Norris and Howard Adams.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Alex Bishop is a long time resident of Green Lake, Saskatchewan and has been active as a community leader for many years until recently when old age had slowed him. He was local president of the first Metis Association and remembers Malcolm Norris as the best leader the Metis people ever had.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: Alex, can you remember the first time you met Malcolm Norris?

Alex: The first time I ever met Malcolm Norris was in Green Lake. I was one of the head men there at that time, yeah. But I met him just for a short time like. He was so busy you know, and he travelled around to Prince Albert and all over and all there. Really he didn't have time. Well, he put up a meeting at one time but I forgot what he was talking about now.

Murray: When was that do you think? Do you remember what year that was?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Do you remember what year that was?

Alex: Oh God, no.

Murray: Was he working for the government then or was he organizing the Metis Society?

Alex: Who?

Murray: Malcolm. Was he with the Metis Society?

Alex: Yeah, the Metis Society.

Murray: And you were one of the leaders in Green Lake?

Alex: One of the leaders, yeah. I remember that.

Murray: Did you meet him... did you call a meeting and everybody met there?

Alex: Eh?

Murray: How did you meet him? Was it at a meeting?

Alex: Yes. Malcolm Norris, he's the one that started this here Metis Society. No, no, a fellow from Regina, now I don't know what his name was. He was the guy. But shortly after, we got acquainted with what's his name there...

Murray: Malcolm?

Alex: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: Was the man from Regina a Metis fellow? Was he a Metis, the man from Regina? Was he Metis? Was he an Indian person, this other man from Regina?

Alex: Oh, he was a halfbreed. But he was a smart guy in a way.

Murray: Was it Howard Adams?

Alex: Oh, hell, no. No, no, Howard Adams, no. The first one was La Rocque.

Murray: La Rocque?

Alex: La Rocque, that was his name.

Murray: Do you remember his first name?

Alex: No, I don't know his first name. And then, Howard, I

don't know, Howard Adams, I met Howard Adams right here. He came over here, the first time I ever saw him. He is a smart guy but he is an underhanded guy.

Murray: Is that right?

Alex: Oh God, yes. He is nothing now. Yeah, see he used to work for the Indians and halfbreeds. Now, he changed. Yeah, he is working for the white man.

Murray: Do you remember how many people were at the meeting that Malcolm Norris came to?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: How many people were at the meeting where you met Malcolm?

Alex: How many people?

Murray: Yes.

Alex: My God, I can't remember but there was quite a few. And a few white men too.

Murray: How many do you think, maybe twelve?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Would there be twelve people, ten or twelve maybe?

Alex: Oh more than that.

Murray: More than that?

Alex: Oh yeah.

Murray: Twenty-five?

Alex: I would say around about fifty.

Murray: Fifty people?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: And that was just from the Green Lake area, eh?

Alex: Yeah. About fifty.

Murray: And that was to talk about a Metis Society?

Alex: Yes.

Murray: Do you remember what Malcolm talked about at that meeting?

Alex: No, see, you've got me. I couldn't tell you.

Murray: Did he speak in Cree?

Alex: Cree and English. Mostly English but he interpreted himself after that.

Murray: He would speak both languages, English then Cree?

Alex: Oh yes, and he could talk real Cree.

Murray: He spoke well in Cree?

Alex: Oh yes, yes, yes. And good English. He was an awful smart man.

Murray: Do you remember if he talked about Indian people and halfbreed people having pride in themselves?

Alex: I forget, I just think. See, I forget. It's no use.

Murray: How often did the Metis Society meet in those first years? Did it meet very often?

Alex: Yeah, yeah. When I was the leader, yes.

Murray: You were head of the local were you?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: How often would you meet, once a month?

Alex: No. Sometimes once a month and other times maybe once every two, three months apart. And that time the halfbreeds, you know, they were all working together. But not long. Not bullshit, goddamn it, Green Lake is the arse end of the country now, I tell you.

Murray: Didn't last long, eh?

Alex: Oh God man, no.

Murray: How long did it last when those meetings happened?

Alex: Well now, lasted pretty near a year.

Murray: That would have been about 1965, eh?

Alex: Well, I would say about that, yeah.

Murray: Did Malcolm come very often to Green Lake?

Alex: No.

Murray: How many times do you think?

Alex: About maybe three times.

Murray: And he would come and there would be a meeting each time he came would there?

Alex: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: And he would speak to the meeting?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: He would speak at these meetings?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Would he tell you what was going on in other places at these meetings?

Alex: Yes, yeah, I remember that. But this (?) here, he was tough. He was English and his member is pretty good.

Murray: This is Joe Morin?

Alex: Yeah. And Joe Laliberte. But Joe wasn't a member of the Metis Society. He wanted to be a white man, you know. But he knows what has been going on. Mostly, my God you know, he'd go against us. And it's the only two that I know. I know others.

Murray: What happened to all those people, those fifty people who first came to the meetings? Did they stop coming or did they keep going to the meetings after?

Alex: They would come in there very frequently, in the meetings, yeah. But they got too busy, always making a lot of money. I wasn't getting a goddamn thing. But I worked for the Metis Society.

Murray: But you didn't get paid?

Alex: No, no.

Murray: Nobody got paid?

Alex: No. I didn't want no pay anyway. The only times I suppose I would want to have a little pay if I was a qualified man, but I wasn't. I haven't got, I didn't have no education like you people have. But, oh I was working hard too. But I had a lawyer to help me out. That's how I happened to be the leader for quite a while.

Murray: Who was the lawyer?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: What was the lawyer's name?

Alex: Uh, do you smoke?

Murray: No.

Alex: Oh, my God, see.

Murray: Well, you think about it. You'll remember later.

Alex: Oh, the wife knows. Goddamn it. Hell of a nice fellow, that lawyer. He was a real friend of mine.

Murray: From Meadow Lake?

Alex: Oh God. He is dead now.

Murray: Oh, he is dead, eh?

Alex: He is dead, yeah.

Murray: Was he from Meadow Lake?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: He was from Meadow Lake?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: You say you worked hard with the Metis Society. What kinds of things did you do?

Alex: What?

Murray: What did you do? What kind of work were you doing for the Metis Society?

Alex: Well now, all I ever do. You see, we asked some Metis to bring in some problems, and stuff like that you know. When I was here before my (?). But I went to Meadow Lake to my friend, that lawyer, and he accept everything. He knows what I need to know. To tell you the truth, he's the man that did a lot for the halfbreeds.

Murray: But you would always talk to him and he would help you?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: You would talk to him and he would help you?

Alex: Yeah, yeah. And he would only charge me two and three dollars every time I see him. Yeah. A nice fellow.

Murray: What kinds of problems did the Metis Society try and help people with?

Alex: Well, about oh, a lot of things. We had the bylaws to go by anyway. It's about the land.

Murray: Land claims?

Alex: Yeah, about the land and about hunting.

Murray: Hunting rights?

Alex: Yeah. And we didn't want the white man here, especially the Americans. We were here and they kill all our moose and deer. There was a heck of a lot of these people, white men, would kill a moose. They will just take the head and leave the meat there, yeah. See, we were against that and the white men were against that too, men that were born and bred in this country.

Murray: But it was the people from the south?

Alex: A lot of other things.

Murray: Can you think of some other things?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: What were some of the other things that you worked on, some of the other problems?

Alex: Other problems? Oh, quite a lot. But I forget.

Murray: Was housing one of them?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Was housing a problem?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Was that one of the things you talked about?

Alex: The what?

Murray: Was housing one of the things you talked about?

Alex: No, not that. I remember. Yeah, we didn't know better. But it's only about license like we have to pay now. In the

olden days we would go to work and we would kill all we want. There was all this, and we don't leave the meat out like the white man does. And about fishing, that way, we work on this here more about Green Lake, fishing, fishermen. We didn't want the white men to come here and fish. Fish all our fish. You see, the white man has the money to buy material such as nets and stuff like that. Us, we haven't. And that is a small lake. We live on this here lake.

Murray: And the white man was coming to fish in it?

Alex: Yeah, the white man would come and fish. Yeah, and

hunting. I remember, there was a lot of people, a lot of white men that come from oh, God knows where. He said to a chap, "Watch them,"(?) and they brought more poison than traps.

Murray: They poisoned the animals?

Alex: This country was rich, you know, for all kinds of moose, deer, elk, caribou, and things like that. Foxes, silver foxes, black foxes and stuff like that. But now look today, none. It is all killed, you see. We were against that.

Murray: How long ago was that? How long ago were there lots of animals?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: How many years ago were there still lots of animals around?

Alex: My God now, I don't know.

Murray: Twenty years maybe?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Were there still lots of animals twenty years ago?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: So even after the war, there were still lots of animals to trap.

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: When did the white man start coming? After the war?

Alex: When did the white man start to come here?

Murray: I mean, the hunters and to shoot all the animals.

Alex: Oh, that was quite a while back. Yeah, way back. You see, we got that. We got that from generation to generation. The old, old people when they were alive. You see, before they die I suppose, they talked to their children how they made a living and this and that and all that. When the old people died the new generation will start to tell this what was told by their grandfather or father, you see. Right up to this very day. Yeah.

Murray: Does that still happen?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Does that still happen that way?

Alex: Yes. Yeah, I was told. I was told. They take it to the Eskimos. They have what they call, they have maybe

thousands of caribou, is that what you call it?

Murray: Yeah, caribou.

Alex: Yeah, yet there half of them... you see there were oh, a lot of the deer. Oh, a lot, a lot. Today, half of them is gone or more. You see, the white man came over here and kill them all and didn't take the meat. Just for the fun of it. Rich people, you can't do nothing with them. You can't put them into jail; they got the money.

Murray: They would buy their way out?

Alex: Yeah. All the old people now, they are gone. The old, old people that used to - oh, this was a beautiful country, yeah. The hungry thirties - they didn't give a damn. I wasn't here. They had whitefish, caribou...

Murray: Nobody here was hungry, eh?

Alex: Yeah. Oh, they were not hungry but the white man was hungry. God, that is too bad I can't explain myself.

Murray: You keep talking, I'll try and understand.

Alex: When I had the interview with the white man there, I got \$15. But that was alright; that was good enough for me. And then they are selling that book. The interview that I had with that white man was more for the children.

Murray: Oh.

Alex: Yeah, sell them to the schools. They sold some I figure at (?) there. My daughter got one of the them. I don't know what they were charging. But somebody told me they were selling for 50 cents a book.

Murray: It's just a small book is it?

Alex: Well, it was about that thick.

Murray: Oh.

Alex: By golly, the wife should be in now.

Murray: What kinds of things did the Metis Society do to try and solve the problems?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: You say the Metis Society tried to solve problems like fishing and hunting. What did they do? Did they write letters to the government, that sort of thing? How did you try and solve those problems?

Alex: As I was telling you, we have a meeting. And I wrote down what was said and all that and in broken English, of

course. I went up to Meadow Lake to my friend and he fixed it up.

Murray: And then you, what would you do with it then? Would you send it to the government?

Alex: No, I brought it back. The friend that I - he was a lawyer, yeah. Naturally, by golly, he was a pretty smart man. And the words, big words and all that. He wrote it; he fixed that for me. Then I sent it, sent it to the government. You understand?

Murray: Yes.

Alex: If it wasn't for the lawyer - shit. We done quite a bit but they start to fight against me and they were jealous you know, for fear I was making money and all that.

Murray: They were jealous of you because you were the leader?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Were they jealous because you were the leader?

Alex: Yeah. They didn't want me. Now look what happened.

Murray: So what happened, did you quit finally?

Alex: I quit. I quit. There was no use. Look what Roderick got. He done everything under the sun and he is a smart guy too. Well, they done the same thing with Roderick. Roderick done a lot for the Metis.

Murray: Why do you think they do that?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Why do they do that?

Alex: God knows. Every man, everybody wants to be a big shot. That's why; that's just the way it is.

Murray: Has it always been that way?

Alex: Oh yes.

Murray: Even before the white man?

Alex: Yeah, yeah.

Murray: So if someone has something, they don't feel good about that, they feel...

Alex: They get jealous, yeah. Oh boy, boy, once a halfbreed always would die the halfbreed. I am saying that we can't do without the white man. We want the white man, look about the

education. We get the education, what little education that some of the people has got, they got it from the white man. You understand?

Murray: So education, you want it?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Was that talked about at the meetings too?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Did you talk about education at these meetings?

Alex: Oh yes, yeah. I did. Yeah.

Murray: Did you have a school here then?

Alex: Oh yes, made of logs, yes. Oh gosh. It's awful, look, we had a guy here, he was a big shot and he didn't know his backside from a hole in the ground. And (?)...

Murray: Mervin?

Alex: Mervin (?) set him a bit. He thought he know, goddamn you know, he was Mr. King of here. He doesn't know nothing. (chuckles)

Murray: Lots of big shots around, eh?

Alex: Yeah. Oh yeah. I would be wanting with the big shots you know and you wouldn't be either. Got a match?

(Break in Tape)

Alex: They all want to be big shots. We never, never be able to be big shots as long as we have Green Lake here. Out in south of here, they have some pretty damn good people that was halfbreeds and Indians too. They are pretty well-educated. Yeah. But here, shit.

Murray: When those meetings were first going on...

Alex: Huh?

Murray: When the meetings were first happening with Malcolm Norris, did people work together?

Alex: Yes, at that time, yes.

Murray: So at first, people weren't jealous, everyone worked together. Is that right?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: At first, people weren't jealous, they all worked together, is that right?

Alex: Yeah, we worked together, yeah. Even when I was the leader. But shortly after, oh, they keep on talking and talking. You know, that I don't know nothing and all that. See that's where they're jealous, they think I was getting money. Shit, I haven't got education. By gosh, a man has got to be a qualified man, person, to be the leader. He has got to have at least a grade 12. Otherwise it's no use.

Murray: Who became the leader after you quit?

Alex: Huh? Joey(?) Laliberte.

Murray: He was the leader, eh?

Alex: Yeah, he didn't know nothing.

Murray: Was he one of the people who didn't want you to be leader?

Alex: Heh?

Murray: Was he one of the people who didn't want you to be the leader?

Alex: Well, I couldn't say that. I don't know.

(Break in tape)

Alex: Don't understand what she said.

Murray: How long did the Metis Society last here after you quit?

Alex: Didn't last long.

Murray: So people stopped having meetings?

Alex: Oh yes. We had quite a few members - oh, pretty near 100 at that time. They have those slips.

Murray: Memberships, eh?

Alex: Membership card, yeah.

Murray: You had 100 members, eh?

Alex: Round about. Pretty close anyway.

Murray: Is that around the time that you quit?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Do you know anyone who would have the papers for those?

Alex: Heh?

Murray: Do you know anyone who would have records or names of those people on a paper?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Who would have those papers?

Alex: Yeah, we had the records of the people.

Murray: Who would have those now?

Alex: God no, I don't know. I'm still in the Metis Society. I think the wife has got them. What do you think now? I don't think that the Metis Society will last very long. I don't put nothing in what I say.

Murray: No.

Alex: Or they will put me in the back place there.

Murray: How did Malcolm talk at the meetings? Did everyone understand Malcolm?

Alex: Hey?

Murray: Did people understand what Malcolm was saying?

Alex: Yeah, he spoke in English and Cree.

Murray: But did they understand what he was saying? Did he talk over their heads or did they know what he wanted?

Alex: Oh yes, he explained everything in Cree. What did she say? What is that..(Break in tape)

Murray: What kind of man was Malcolm Norris? Can you tell me about Malcolm? What kind of man was Malcolm Norris?

Alex: He was a hell of a nice man.

Murray: Could you tell me something about him?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Can you tell me about him?

Alex: My God no, I can't do it. The wife could.

Murray: How many times did you meet him?

Alex: Hey?

Murray: How many times did you see him?

Alex: Norris? Once, two, three, four, about five times.

Murray: And that was all in about one year, eh?

Alex: Yeah.

Murray: Where did he stay when he came to Green Lake?

Alex: Prince Albert.

Murray: Did he stay overnight here?

Alex: Norris?

Murray: Yes.

Alex: Oh yes.

Murray: Where would he sleep? Did he stay with you?

Alex: This house, but this house was way up, it was moved. Then (inaudible) and (inaudible). And, what was his name, he was back there, Dr. uh, you just mentioned his name. The fellow that fought against the Metis.

Murray: Oh Adams, Howard Adams?

Alex: Yeah. Then he came in. Oh, I thought he was an angel. And he used to stay here and (inaudible) and stuff like that you know. And he used our phone and all that. He still owes me about, I don't know, about \$25 or \$30.

Murray: For the telephone?

Alex: Yeah, he phoned and all that. He is a smart man.

Murray: Malcolm came first but then Adams came later.

Alex: Malcolm came first, yeah. Yeah, poor old fellow, he died. When we had a meeting at Regina, Howard was there. Oh, boy, it hurts me. He couldn't talk. He was....

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Alex: I have these pictures here after he died. And there's quite a piece about him. What I am saying here, does it go here?

Murray: Yes. I'll turn it off. (Break in tape) When did the Metis Society start up again in Green Lake or did it never start again?

Alex: I don't think so.

Murray: Just that one year?

Alex: Yeah. Oh, it was more than one year, I think. You see

La Rocque was the first one. It's more than a year.

Murray: La Rocque was first and then Malcolm Norris, eh?

Alex: Yeah. La Rocque was the first one then Malcolm Norris, then Adams. Yeah. Now we have another smart man.

Murray: Jim Sinclair.

Alex: Yeah! You know him, eh?

Murray: Yes. Did you ever meet Joe Amyotte?

Alex: Huh?

Murray: Joe Amyotte?

Alex: No.

Murray: No?

Alex: I don't know him. It's been a very...(Break in tape)

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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