Norm Fleury (NF) Interview – Alex (AA) and Bertha Allary (BA).

AA. My name is Alec Allary. This is my wife Bertha Allary. I was born twelve miles south of Yorkton on a little farm in a small community called Crescent Lake.

BA. And I was born in Boggy Creek. It's about a hundred miles north of Yorkton.

BA. It's about eighty miles from here. It's north of Roblin.

BA. It's twenty-eight miles north of Roblin.

AA. Boggy Creek and St. Claire are about four miles apart. Yeah, we are all the same Michif people living in that area. Yeah, we are all relatives and friends that live in those communities.

AA. My father's name was Fred Allary and my mother's name was Philomene Pelletier.

AA. Well my family, they moved around quite a bit, in Canada and the States, and I don't know if my father was born in the States, he might have been born in Canada.

AA. My mother was born in Saskatchewan. I think she was born in Crooked Lake, Saskatchewan. Years ago, they used to call it ***"la Croche***".

AA. Well, some of my memories – things that I recall – we had hard times. It was very difficult, but my father always worked. He sold hay, he raised cattle, he had horses and he always had a garden. We had everything we needed. My father had his machinery and he had his cattle and horses, but we still had a hard time trying to make a living.

AA. My father rented land and money was rare. It was hard to get money, and people were hard working people in those days, and I have to say it this way "when the seasons changed that's when people went out and did different things, seasonal things". Like one thing is digging Seneca [snake] root. They'd leave for about three days or a week and whatever they got for Seneca root, then they'd come home. Sometimes you could sell that Seneca root for about a dollar a pound. We used to sell the Seneca root, there were Jew, Jewish people in Yorkton, they'd buy it, and they made medicine with it. There was a lot of medicines that were made with Seneca root and this Seneca root, they'd send [it] to Toronto, and in Toronto, where they sent the Seneca root, it was refined and or made into medicines. And the English people used to, were the ones that converted Seneca root into medicine. They dried this Seneca root and sometimes you'd get a dollar a pound, sometimes you'd get ten cents a pound. You got more money for the dry Seneca root than you did the green because the buyers would have to dry it otherwise. Then it all depended on the price sometimes you might get fifty cents a pound, sometimes you might get five cents a pound. The price always fluctuated. The price went up and down. [If] (Y)ou got a dollar a pound for your Seneca root, you made some good money.

AA. Then when we went out digging Seneca root, there might be four or five families that we would go out digging Seneca root [with] and we all went with wagons and

teams. And sometimes we might go alone, our own family. You'd go with the wagon and the tent, and you'd be gone for a few days, you might be gone for a week.

AA. And in those days, you took your water anywhere, in the slough, or in the marsh. It was very, very clean in those days. You took your food along. You had potatoes. You had meat. You cooked it right in your camp.

AA. And in those days, we lived off the land. We ate wild meat. We eat partridge, rabbit or whatever we can get. You never worried about meat because there were all kinds of wild life. There was always something you could eat. There was a lot of ducks, and there were even gophers. I ate a lot of gophers and many times, I would have starved if I didn't eat gopher. That's what made our livelihood, and all the wildlife, all the wild game was clean in those days. Everything they eat was clean, and today now it's not the same way. The whole country was clean in those days. Today, I wouldn't drink water out of any slough or any marsh. You'd get poisoned.

AA. My wife's sister got sick drinking water that she wasn't supposed to. Her husband was working in the mine so she ran out of water so she went and got some water. And her sister went and got some water in the slough, and that same evening they had to rush her to the hospital. It made her very ill.

AA. Oh yes, we ate a lot of eggs – wild bird eggs such as duck eggs, mud hen eggs, partridge eggs, whatever kind of eggs we could get. Oh yes – we were real thieves – we used to steal all those eggs to survive. I even stole a rabbit. Well you had to do all these things to survive. Another thing we used to buy was salt pork or salt meat and that lasted a long time because the stores weren't too close to wherever you were, so you had to do something to make out for the food that you had. I still make salt pork. I still use all that stuff. It gives the food a lot, a good flavouring.

AA. Like years ago, everything was pure. The food was really good. There used to be good cooks, years ago. I remember my mother [was] making bannock outside in the cast iron frying pan, and myself I could probably still survive today because I know how we used to live at one time. I could still survive without electricity because that's the way it was. We used to use coal oil lamps. We used to use grease lamps.

AA. Kerosene in those days was about ten cents, twenty cents a gallon. And this kerosene, it sometime lasted you about a month –two months – a month and a half. It all depends on how much you used. You only used your lamps when you had company, but most of the times, if you didn't use the lamps you used the fire light from your stoves. You'd open the doors on the side of the stove and that's where you got your lighting from, and if people wanted to read, you could just sit down close to the stove and use the light for reading.

AA. They used their lamps when they used to play cards. They'd play King **Pedrole** , rummy, "***la barroche***" . One card game that we never had until about thirty years ago was called "***la barroche***". It seems to have been blown in from Manitoba, and when, as it blew in from Manitoba we grabbed it and brought it into our homes.

AA. And as a young boy, my chores were to take care of the cattle. We fed the cattle. We milked cows. So, we always had some chores to do as young men. We also used to sell wood. We'd bring it to Yorkton. We'd use the wagon box and we would sell it in stove length or we'd just bring it in pole length.

NF. We've turned over. Now we are continuing the interviews with the Allary's.

AA. We used to bring in wood into town and we'd get, sometimes we'd get a dollar or two dollars a load. We'd bring our wood in with wagons and with sleighs. I remember hauling wood into town when I was a young boy. We used to use horses all the time. My father also sold wood and also hay in Yorkton.

AA. I remember us bringing eggs to town. We sold eggs, we sold butter and we sold cream. I remember when we used to sell cream in Yorkton. It was very hot in the summer time and with the movement, by the time you got to town your cream had also turned, already turned into butter. So, you couldn't sell that cream. So what they used to do was go to town, and they'd buy about five cents worth of salt and they'd put it into the butter and that way it kept to [and] also give it a taste. And that's how we took our cream back home in the butter form. They sold the eggs for about five cents a dozen, and those are some ways of how we made our livelihood. That's how we made our living.

AA. I had two brothers and five sisters. I lost two sisters and two brothers. I lost a little sister when she was three-year-old. She had heart problem. And one of my brothers who used to live beside me, we had each a farm, and coming home from town he died in my vehicle, he had a heart attack. He was my oldest brother. If he was still living, he'd been eighty-four years old. It's been about twenty years a go since he's been gone now. And [since] I've lost the other brother. It was Christmas Eve, and he died of cancer.

AA. I lost my father when he was fifty-nine years old, and I remember when my father died. I those days they used to keep the bodies in the house, at home. So they laid him down on what we called boards, "*li plawnsh*". That means boards. They'd put a white sheet over the boards then they would lay the person there so they'd get stiff. So then, once the body was in that form then we'd lift the body up, and then we would put, and then we'd put the body in the coffin. I remember my uncle, my mother and my brother. They prepared my father. They shaved my father and they did whatever had to be done to get him ready. In those days, you kept the body at home for three days. You had a wake for three days, and on the third day, it was time to bury the body. And I remember we took my father to Yorkton and that's where he is buried. I remember my uncle had a truck, and that's where they loaded the body, and we followed the body with horses. We came in with teams to Yorkton. Something else that I'd like to say is, we remember because they kept the body in the house for three days. I remember my brother had shaved my father and two days after his beard was still growing. We really didn't realize that that's what happens.

NF. Now we are continuing from tape five to tape six.

AA. Yeah, what I was trying to explain to you when we were talking about people dying years ago, you didn't give people a shock, you just slowly told them that that person was buried. You just didn't go and tell them well that person died. In those days, people had a lot of respect for each other and that's what basically it was all about.

AA. Yeah, we found it pretty difficult when my father died because he was the boss of the house. He told us when the cattle should come in, he told us when the horses should be fed, he also told us when we should cut the wood and when we should bring the wood in.

AA. My dad had a wood-sawing outfit. Then after my father went it was just my mom and the kids so we had to learn to survive and get a long with one another. When my father had passed away, ah two of my sisters were already gone and one of my brothers. So, I was the oldest one in the home. The older ones were quite a bit older than I was you could say that it was just like two families. Most of everybody was about two years apart except for one of my sisters. She was six years older than I was. And then when my father died we had what you'd call a meeting to discuss things and prepared for the winter and see what we would do.

AA. My mother could be a little awkward. I never went to school. So then, I had to try to upgrade and educate myself. I never went to school. Everybody else went to school. By the time I, [it] was my turn to go to school, we lived about six or seven miles away from school, and I was too young to go to school.

AA. Since I am a very young man I've never had [any] problem looking for work. I always had a job. I started off working for farmers. We were thrashing, but also stoking during harvest time, and when I was already at the age, we used gas engines; the steamer was already gone. My father and my brother, they used steam engines for thrashing.

AA. I used to get a dollar eighty cents a day. That was with my rack and my team of horses and myself. That's what they used to pay in those days. That price wasn't too bad at all because we got room and board, and our horses were also boarded [at] that time, and we'd also get oats and feed for our horses. We lived in barns, or we slept in granaries or sometimes we slept under our racks. We had mats, we had blankets and the straw was clean so we just slept wherever we could. We had to get up early, or we would freeze in our beds, and this was happening in the fall so it was already cold. As soon as we got up in the morning, the first thing we did was curry the horses, put the harness on and we got them ready, and we also fed them. And as soon as we were done in the barn, we'd go to the house, we'd have our breakfast around seven o'clock. We were out of the house again, and we had to go out to the field and start hauling the sheaves in. When noon came around, we went in for dinner, we fed our horses and when the hour was up, we were back in the fields. And there were times we were thrashing till nine, nine-thirty at night and sometimes it was so dark that we had to use lanterns to see what we were doing. We didn't have to use the lanterns when we were going to the fields 'cause we knew were the sheaves were. And when we came in with our loads of sheaves then we used lanterns so we knew where to drive by the thrashing machines. Another place we used the lanterns is where the feeder was. The grain

would drop down so we had to pick all that grain up and put it in the granaries. And there were times when we were thrashing until about eleven – eleven thirty at night and that was to finish this one farmer and then early in the morning you moved on to the other farmer and the same thing happened again.

AA. One of my best runs in thrashing was I worked fifteen days in Saskatchewan then I worked fifteen days in Alberta. I used to ride the freight to get to Calgary to go to work, and when I did this, I didn't know where Calgary was. I really didn't know where I was going, but I knew that I had to ride a freight to get to where I was going so I could go to work. [The] (P)lace that I rode the train was, I jumped the freight was in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Then when I got to Calgary I'd never seen Calgary before. So, it was a huge place compared to places that I'd seen before. When I first got to Calgary, in those days you could've walked around Calgary in about four hours. That was the size of Calgary. I worked for fifteen days. I made eight dollars a day, and in those days, that was a lot of money. I was very happy. I put some of that money in my pocket and some in my mouth and I took some of that money home. I bought myself some clothes.

AA. I think that I could honestly say that I was one of the first people from the Yorkton area to wear cowboy boots, and I still like wearing cowboy boots today. I found that the cowboy boots were safe when you were riding a horse. It was not as easy to get hurt caught in the stirrups as with other shoes. There were some cowboy boots with laces. So, I bought a whole outfit for myself. It was a cowboy outfit and then when I got home I was feeling very proud because people saw that I was dressed a little differently, and they were probably envious of the way I dressed. Another thing I mention, is I think some people were a little not only envious, but they were kind of jealous, and today I think that was one of our downfalls is jealousy. And it is still happening today and that's one thing that's going against us.

AA. You could buy tobacco in those days. It was about five cents a package and they even included your papers for making your cigarettes. The name of the tobacco product at that time was "Archer and McDonald's", but "Vogue" didn't come in until about the forties. I tried snuff, and it burned the heck out of my mouth, and there was also another tobacco it was called chewing tobacco. My mother's father he also used to chew tobacco. They used to spit all over the place, I'd say "oh that pig". My dad used to smoke plug tobacco. My father had a little knife and he'd cut up his tobacco put it in his hand then he would put it in the pipe, and that's how he smoked his tobacco.

AA. They used to smoke what we call "Kinikinik" and that's tobacco from the red willow. We used to go to the bush and cut this red willow, cut all the branches off, and you'd just bring the stick back. And how you would prepare this, you take the bark off, and then you take your knife and you peel the white of the willow and that is your tobacco. And once you got all this white part of the willow, you take a plate, and we used to use a metal plates at one time and you'd either dry it on the stove or you'd dry this tobacco in the oven. And the tobacco, "Kinikinik" was a very strong tobacco. So if you bought some of those modern type(s) of tobaccos, the tobacco that you bought, you'd mix this with the Kinikinik and it wasn't as strong, it wasn't as powerful. And the tobacco that the Old People used to smoke was called "Old Chum". I still got some tins of that at home

yet. There were different names of tobacco, and some of the tobacco names I still remember. There was one tobacco called "*Torrette*" and there was another one called "*Laflèche*". You'd pay ten cents for a package of tobacco.

AA. I started smoking in the forties. In those days, you could buy cigarettes. That's when I say the tailor-mades came out. There were about fifty cigarettes to one package. The cigarettes were fifty cents a book. You paid about one penny for one cigarette, and the cigarettes were about one twenty-five cents, thirty cents. They were the same thing, about a penny for one cigarette.

AA. When we got married, we had nothing. My mother gave me a feather tick and that's what I had. This wasn't really a feather tic it was more like a blanket. It was sewn about every four inches apart and there were feathers in between so that way when you were covered, you didn't, the feather(s) didn't move on you, they kind of stayed where they had, where they should be. And the other one that's a feather tick, its more like a bag and that's where you put your feathers in, and that's what you sleep on. The mattresses were made with bags and you even used straw. You filled straw in the bags with straw in those days, and that's what you slept on. In those days, you used anything to keep warm.

AA. I bought a 1929 Chev(rolet) and it was converted into a truck. I was very proud. Oh, I could go wherever I wanted to go. I used to go working. I'd go stoking. My wife and I, and my son, we'd go around working.

AA. We were married in 1950, and we have seven children. Our oldest, our oldest is forty-eight. We have another one that's forty-six, and then we have twin girls who are forty-four. We got another daughter that's forty. Then we got another one that's thirty-six and our youngest is twenty-eight years' old. We have three girls and four boys. We got two working in Prince Albert. Our son is the manager of Remco Memorial and his younger brother is working for him. Our oldest son works in Regina for CKRM, the radio station. He's not a radio announcer, but he's a sales person and our youngest one, he sells insurance in Regina. He's an insurance salesman. Our kids were all raised on a farm. They went to country schools and when the country schools were closed then they came to school in Yorkton. And then we moved to where we are now. We bought the small farm, and the other kids finished their high school in Esterhazy – two boys and one girl.

AA. I think it's save to say that we made a good living. We made a decent livelihood in comparison to the way that people lived in one time and they had such a hard time. I think we did not [make out] too bad. We always worked, I worked ten years in the potash mine in Esterhazy, and my wife worked seventeen years in home-care.

BA. I worked in home care taking care of the sick, and I really enjoyed it. If you don't like the elderly people, don't go work with them.

AA. I'll tell you how I got into the mine. I had to go and lie in order to get in to work in the mine. One of my sons went to work in Chibougamau, Québec; he worked in the gold mines. So this son that was working in the gold mines he said to me, he says 'dad

I'd like to go and work in Esterhazy in the potash mine'. So I took him there and he did get a job.

AA. My son got along very well in Québec with the Frenchmen [word on video was "*Kenayaens*" or French Canadians], because he could speak both languages.

AA. He didn't work very long in the mine in Esterhazy, but he says to me, he says 'dad why don't you work there?' But he says '[the] only drawback is that you need a grade twelve'. So, they gave me this application form at the mine. I got the doctor to fill it out for me. Then I took it back to the mine. And two days after I filled my application, I got, I received a phone, a telephone call at home. So the phone call that I received they said to me 'Allary come to the mine, fill out the papers for you to start working in the mine'. So I jumped in my vehicle and I went to the mine, but I, well I was driving there I was saying to myself 'well how am I going to lie my way trough this one, cause I don't have an education? I couldn't fill out those application forms'. So, they asked me to go into the personnel office. So, what I did was that I took my hand and I put it into my shirt as if it was sore. So the secretary says 'how are you Mr. Allary? I want you to fill this application out'. And I says 'I'm sorry I can't fill this application because I really injured my hand this morning'. But you know I was fibbing her, I was telling a lie. So, I asked her if she could fill out the application form for me, and I would sign it. So she did. She had a good education. She had grade twelve. I presume so she did a good job. She filled out the form for me. So, she hands over this application form to me. I really don't know what she wrote on that form, but she handed it to me. So, I had to sign my name. So I had to use my left hand to sign, but I had to keep this other arm hidden so she wouldn't know that it wasn't hurt. So I went home and she says 'you'll start the day after tomorrow". So I did get the job. Right away, I got a job. So they gave me all the outfit [that] I needed, and I started working as a carpenter, and I knew how to do some carpenter work already.

AA. Well I worked there [for] about six months, and then I was called in the personnel [office], and it was the big boss that called me into the office. So he says to me 'Allary come in the office with me'. So I followed him, but I was kind of wondering – there must be a reason why they called me into the office. So, I told him exactly what happened. I told him that my form, the application form was filled out by the secretary, and I signed it, and that's reason I'm here. So, that's how I worked there for ten years, but then I had little hard luck. I had pneumonia, and I caught it four times. I felt very bad when I had to quit. I, as a matter of fact I cried, and I was making good money. I was making about fourteen dollars an hour, and everybody seemed to be getting along with me. I was well liked on my job.

AA. Then after I quit work there, I started racing horses. There used to be horse races and I took part. I even went as far as Winnipeg for the horse races.

AA. Oh we always had horses. My father had racehorses. My brother had good horses. We raced our horses. I raced in Yorkton. I raced in Melville, Saltcoats all these small towns in this district. We made as much as eighty-one dollars in one day, and that was a lot of money during the Depression. And after I was married, I went out west and I worked for a registered cattle rancher, and but during that time, while I was working for

this rancher, I'd sneak away sometimes and I'd go and race these chariot races. I was an outrider in the chuckwagon races, and I also rode horseback, and I rode in the races. Then when I came home from the west, I bought some thoroughbred horses from the States and then I also had these pony wagons. I still have pony wagons, and as a matter of fact, I've got trophies at home that I won through my horse racing days. My father used to own horses. He had Percheron horses, but they were working horses, and he used them on the plough, doing farm work.

AA. Well I know I have two daughters and a son that would really like to be able to speak the Michif language. I knew for sure that three of our children would be very happy to speak Michif, but the other ones we really never gave them the chance because we never spoke to them in Michif. When I started school, I didn't know one word of English. When I said 'yes' I'd nod my head, and when I said 'no', I'd move my head the other way or I would shrug my shoulders when I said 'I didn't know'. And that was the extent of my English.

AA. My grandparents spoke French, but then my grandfather says "never throw away your language, you always keep your Michif language". So then, everybody started to speak the Michif language again. When I went to school, they both spoke English and French.

BA. My father's name was George Paul and his father was Solomon Bercier, and my father's mother was Mary Bercier, Marie Bercier. My mother was Marie Langdon, and her father was Jean-Baptiste Langdon. My mother's mother was called Marie-Anne Pelletier. My mother's parents came from St. John, North Dakota. When my mothers parents came to visit in Canada, they came to File Hills, and that's where my mother was born, was in File Hills. There was a Métis community in File Hills. That's where she was born. My mother's mother died then. So that's when her uncle took her and raised her in Manitoba and when she grew up, that's how she met my father and they got married.

BA. We called our language Michif. Oh we sometimes speak to one another in Michif, but not very often, and we still use some words in Michif when we communicate with one another. When we want to argue that's when we speak our Michif language, and then nobody understands what we're saying. I didn't want my children to be in the same predicament as I was, when I started school I didn't know any English. So that's one reason why we spoke to our children in English.

BA. We have forty grandchildren and seven great grandchildren or are it thirty-eight? Well I don't know. We have too many of them and I can't really keep up.

AA. Well I thank you very much. I guess we lied quite a bit, but no that's just joking, because everything that I told you was the truth. Like, for example, when I hid my hand to get the job, that's the way I had to do it in order to get my job. I really enjoyed myself here, and I had a good time last night, but the only thing is; I ate too much chicken last night, and thank you. I thank you again very much.