

Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, and Ron Laliberte:

Métis Political Activist Interviews (April 17, 2004)

Tape 1

**Start Clip: 2:50:17.03**

**JIM DUROCHER:** A lot of people used to come into our communities, there was, you know, a lot of people we have to talk about, old Vital Morin for example, he was a Second World War veteran. There was a Leo Belanger, you know, he was, he was, you know, he was active in the, in the sense that he would never, you know, he would never sit back and accept the way the powers that be were treating our people for example. You know he was a Second World War veteran and so he had this fighting spirit with him all the time and he wouldn't accept an RCMP person or a, you know, Hudson's Bay person coming to tell him what to do. And you know he would fight back and so in that sense you saw that, you know, people were actually, you know, who were being cornered. You know, they were being pushed into, into trying to be submissive or trying to get them to be submissive.

**RON LALIBERTE:** Was a lot of that over hunting rights?

**JIM DUROCHER:** Yeah, a lot of it was, yeah that's right, yeah it was hunting and fishing and you know...

**RON LALIBERTE:** Because you mentioned that if you want to go shoot a moose you shoot a moose, you know...

**JIM DUROCHER:** ...yeah, yeah hunting and fishing and you know...

**RON LALIBERTE:** That was going on?

**(Video Tape: 2:51.25.00) JIM DUROCHER:** ...just ya, just trying to, trying to live the traditional way of life, you know. And there was people there trying to control how you do that and people were fighting back and they were saying no you can't, you know, we want to do it our own way. Then of course we had people like Jim Brady who use to come to the community once and a while. Then we had another gentleman that nobody ever talks about and that's old Joe Martin McCallum was his name. He died years ago, but he used to go around talk about rights, you know rights issues. And then of course, you know, we were, you know the, the, the North was you know really, really...

**JIM DUROCHER:** Ross Cummings too.

**JIM DUROCHER:** Yeah and old Ross Cummings, that's right yeah. Those folks, and then there was old Chaffy Morin from Turner Lake and his wife. You know Chaffy Morin and his wife, his wife never said too much, you know the old lady, but she always when we had a meeting, when we had gatherings, she was the one that made bannock and used to make soup, duck soup or moose soup or something. And, and she, she contributed to that sort of thing, you know, in her own way. There was a lot of ladies that did that very quietly on the side.

**(Video Tape: 2:52.32.50) RON LALIBERTE:** Were there any women that were actually politically active in terms of speaking up with the men in the community that you can remember from back then?

**JIM DUROCHER:** Yes, there was a, a you know Rose Schneider and those folks.

**JIM SINCLAIR:** Later on they became greater spokespeople of course.

**JIM DUROCHER:** Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

**RON LALIBERTE:** But they were always in the background doing what they could?

**JIM SINCLAIR:** No they weren't.

**JIM DUROCHER:** No they weren't.

**JIM SINCLAIR:** They were the leaders of the locals and more women presidents than we had men.

**JIM DUROCHER:** They were leaders yep, that's right.

**RON LALIBERTE:** Is that right?

**JIM DUROCHER:** That's right.

**RON LALIBERTE:** So, what year are we talking about here?

**JIM SINCLAIR:** We are talking again in the, talking up into the '60s and '70s.

**JIM DUROCHER:** Yeah, late '60s.

**(Video Tape: 2:53.04.20) JIM SINCLAIR:** But I think if you, when you go back and talk about again the North, we always heard stories about the Northern people not going hungry because they could fish and hunt and trap. And we were in a position where we were closely, more closely watched by the police because we, we, again we're, we're not allowed to do any of those things. And I think that's, later on that played a big part of my fight for Métis rights because they already at that time, I considered them, or we

considered them as having a certain right to hunt and gather because when they started giving welfare out in the '50s, they gave more to the people in the South than they did to the North and the reason they gave more, more money to people in the South than the North is that the Northern people could live off the land. So that became a factor in my Constitutional position to say that they already recognize these people the right to hunt and gather.

**RON LALIBERTE:** Yes, absolutely. That's an interesting point. Exactly.

**JIM DUROCHER:** Exactly.

**(Video Tape: 2:54.02.03) RON LALIBERTE:** When you think about political events during your, you know, I'm trying to figure out, you know, like what shaped your political perspective when you were young? I mean Jimmy, you pointed out that, you know, you didn't know your identity, or sorry, you know, they defined you as, as Scottish and so that was an aspect that, you know sort of spurred you on. Is there anything else, any other political event or anything, any leader that you knew in your community that, you know inspired you and were there any issues that you wanted to pursue, other than you know, what you mentioned already?

**(Video Tape: 2:54.31.10) JIM SINCLAIR:** Well, I think the first thing for me was the fact that when I started to wake up, I was born in 1933 and the war began in 1939, people started to gather, to join the forces. And I found that up to then there was so much poverty and racism amongst our people and we didn't have a voice. We couldn't live in town in Punnichy and we couldn't live just on the outskirts of the community. We could live by the nuisance ground and nobody recognized us. But as soon as the war broke out that changed everything. I have pictures and I think you have in the archives too, pictures of maybe, thirty, forty people that were outside of Punnichy at the time, they were recruiting and people volunteered. And that was Indians and Métis and half-breeds in those days of course and they, they

joined at that time to go fight voluntarily overseas and I remember the troop trains set up passing through Punnichy because that's the mainline between Vancouver and Montreal, CNR. And the troop trains would always stop and pick up soldiers and let them off and we were quite involved in that. And that, that was beginning for us to see our people go to war and finally some money coming in to feed our families. People went to war, not because they were brave, but many of them because they were hungry and they had nothing, nothing else to do and they wanted to fight. They said "Look we'll go and help." They never were afraid to help and that was my first, my first taste of what you could call a reason to start thinking some pride in ourselves because they could see that happening. And I watched these people move away. And I think the big thing that happened, that really made the change in my life was when these people came back. The same people that got on the train, the ones that came back alive were a different kind of people. They were more vocal, they, I remember I guess the bar, the beer parlour was no more than 200 yards from the station at Punnichy. The soldiers got off the train there, that I knew came from Lestock, came from different places. They had bars across their chests. They had sergeants, corporals. They were well dressed, they were neat and they were very vocal and the first thing they wanted to do was go and have a drink in the bar and the first thing that happened was the door was barred to them. And I thought to myself how could these people go and fight for so long and come back and be denied the right to have a drink and that started the whole movement. There were riots in Regina, of course again because the, the Indians and Métis were, were unhappy with things that was going on and as that, result of that I think the feeling of the real movement started to begin with that because my argument that, I used to be fairly militant when I was young. I didn't know why I got kicked out of school so many times for not saluting the flag, or not participating in the morning prayer. But I felt that again, you know, this kind of racism, if my people can go bleed for somebody else overseas, why can't they come home and bleed for us at home if we have to, you know fight our own struggle.

**RON LALIBERTE:** So you saw the racism of the system and...

**JIM SINCLAIR:** Nothing changed, nothing really changed.

**End Clip: 2:57:39.20**