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DUCK LAKE, SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
TRIBE/NATION: METIS
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 04/16/84
INTERVIEWER: BRENDA ARNAULT
INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: HEATHER YAWORSKI
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- recollections of school, working during World War II, farm
life as a child and as a widow
Brenda: April 16, 1984, I'm doing an interview with Delima
Ouellette. Delima, would you tell me what it was like going to
school?

Delima: Oh I liked to go to school. Used to walk, used to
walk three miles.

Brenda: Three miles, is that one way?

Delima: Two ways, oh no, one way, yeah, three miles one way.

Brenda: Three miles one way.

Delima: In the morning, come back three miles.

Brenda: And this was in St. Laurent?

Delima: St. Laurent, yeah.

Brenda: How old were you when you started school?

Delima: Seven I guess.

Brenda: Seven years old and you went...

Delima: I really don't remember.

Brenda: And you went to what grade?

Delima: Pardon?

Brenda: You went to what grade?

Delima: Eight.

Brenda: Grade eight. The school that you went to, were you ever shown any discrimination or people, did people discriminate against you? Did people ever show you that they didn't like you or... Were the people good to you in school?

Delima: Oh no. You mean if people got along or...?

Brenda: Yeah.

Delima: Well, we all got along over there.

Brenda: At St. Laurent?

Delima: Yes.

Brenda: How many, how many students were there?

Delima: Everybody knew everybody else.

Brenda: Was it a grade one to grade eight classroom?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: One classroom?

Delima: Just one classroom.

Brenda: How did they heat the school, with wood?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: And your teacher, did your teacher allow you to... excuse me... Do you speak Cree too?

Delima: No.

Brenda: Do you speak French?

Delima: French and English. Well, we had an old teacher, she came from Quebec, I guess, talked French, almost right then we had some books, the new course in French was nouveau cours, in French anyway. In English the new course, I guess. There was one, on one side was French and then on the other page like it's English. That's the way we learned English.

Brenda: You had one page was written in French and the other page was written in English?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: And that was how you learned how to speak...

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: Did you speak French as a child or did you speak...

Delima: Oh yes. Only French.

Brenda: Only French and you learned how to speak English...

Delima: From this book.

Brenda: What was the teacher's name that taught you English?

Delima: Dorval.

Brenda: Mrs. Dorval.

Delima: You've heard of her?

Brenda: I've heard about Mrs. Dorval. Was she a strict lady?

Delima: Pardon.

Brenda: Was she a strict lady? Was she a strict teacher?

Delima: Well, I didn't think so.

Brenda: She was a good teacher? Did you like her?

Delima: Oh yes. I liked her.

Brenda: What did you enjoy about going to school?

Delima: I don't know. Everything, I guess.

Brenda: What kind of, what did they teach you at school? Did they teach you...?

Delima: Well, they had to teach everything.

Brenda: Did they have handicraft classes, like did they teach you how to knit, and cook?

Delima: I suppose you don't make -- you have no imagination how it was over there.

Brenda: No, I haven't seen...

Delima: (laughs)

Brenda: Well, I have some idea of what it must have been like in the early 1900s.

Delima: That's a long time.

Brenda: Did your, did your parents encourage you to do well at school?

Delima: Me? I suppose. I used to read before I went to school. My dad used to teach us.

Brenda: What did he, what did he teach you? What did your dad teach you?

Delima: He teach us to read French a bit.

Brenda: From a book?

Delima: Yeah, well he teach us to write and to read.

Brenda: You have fond memories of your parents?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Do you have fond memories of your dad before he passed away? Your dad passed away in 1915?

Delima: Well I was 7. I guess he'd be 73 maybe. Well he used to take us to school in a buggy, but after he died, well, we had to walk.

Brenda: Was life difficult after your dad passed away?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Was life hard for you after, for your family after your dad passed away?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: What kind of, how was it hard? Not having your dad around, how was it hard?

Delima: Well I don't know, everything, everybody was poor out there. We were all the same. But some worse than the others. Like us, well we didn't have no man of the house.

Brenda: So your mom had to do all the work?

Delima: Oh yeah.

Brenda: How about for meat and that?

Delima: Had to work, make a big garden.

Brenda: You helped your mom?

Delima: Yeah. And rent the land.

Brenda: You rented the land? And you had your garden.

Delima: Yeah. Well it wasn't, it wasn't that much either. So I don't know. Can't tell you very much.

Brenda: How was your experience at school?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: How was your experience at school, did you like school? Did you like school?

Delima: School?

Brenda: Yeah.

Delima: Oh, I liked going to school.

Brenda: And after, after you finished school you left home?

Delima: I left home. Well we used to go and work. Every kid had to go to work, well, to help, eh.

Brenda: You were in Ontario during the war.

Delima: That's work. On the farm we used to go and work on the farm. Well we didn't mind.

Brenda: That's, that's what everybody did for extra money.

Delima: Yeah. Not very big pay either.

Brenda: What was, what was it like in Ontario when you were working there?

Delima: Fifteen dollars, I think, was the price a month.

Brenda: Fifteen dollars when you were in Ontario?

Delima: Well you, you could get a lot with \$15, even 50 cents. You can't imagine, now everything is too expensive.

Brenda: Oh yeah, everything, a can of milk then would be maybe 10 cents.

Delima: Because you're still young, you can't imagine how it was.

Brenda: No I can't. Unfortunately.

Delima: (inaudible). I can't tell you very much, really.

Brenda: What sticks in your mind about St. Laurent when you were a young girl? What do you remember most about being a young girl?

Delima: What I remember most. I don't...

Brenda: Did you have fun in those days? Did you go to dances and...

Delima: Oh sure, yeah. That was before and that wasn't when I was going to school.

Brenda: After school?

Delima: After.

Brenda: After you left school.

Delima: Oh yeah.

Brenda: You liked going to dances, and you attended the dances.

Delima: Wintertime. Not summertime.

Brenda: Oh yeah. Why, why not during summer?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Why not during the summer, too much work?

Delima: Too much work, everybody was away.

Brenda: And during the winter it was...

Delima: It seems like everybody came home in the wintertime. There was dances and... That was fun.

Brenda: Did you, did you, did you know how to jig?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Do you know how to jig? Did you know how...

Delima: Oh no.

Brenda: No.

Delima: No, no.

Brenda: The other dances, square dances?

Delima: Oh yeah.

Brenda: Did you, did your family...

Delima: Square dances and... Pardon?

Brenda: Did your family have musical talent in the family? Was there anybody that played fiddle or violin?

Delima: No. Not, not my family.

Brenda: Did the, did the church play an, an important role in your life?

Delima: Pardon.

Brenda: The church, did the church play an important role in your life?

Delima: Church? Well, yes. Used to go to church.

Brenda: Were most all...

Delima: We used to go to church in Batoche.

Brenda: How far was that from your home?

Delima: Well, six miles.

Brenda: You travelled by buggy?

Delima: Not every Sunday. When we had rides. Well, after they built a church in St. Laurent, well, we used to go there then. I don't remember the year either.

Brenda: Did the priest ever go and visit your home?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Did the priest ever go and visit your home?

Delima: Well, they used to come every fall.

Brenda: Just in the fall?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: What did they want?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Did they just come to visit in the fall?

Delima: Oh yeah.

Brenda: They didn't come for any particular reason, eh, just to go and visit?

Delima: No.

Brenda: Were you ever, were you interested in politics?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Were you interested in politics when you were younger?

Delima: No.

Brenda: Were you ever a member of, of Metis Society?

Delima: Oh my God, no.

Brenda: No, eh.

Delima: (laughs) No I wasn't. I never did anything like that.

Brenda: How long have you lived here in Duck Lake?

Delima: Eh?

Brenda: How long have you lived here in Duck Lake?

Delima: Four years.

Brenda: Four years.

Delima: Well, three years because the first year I just came and went. I used to live on the farm, I used to live all by myself over there and I used to come, well, every weekend. Come to church here.

Brenda: How far did you live from here?

Delima: Seven miles.

Brenda: Seven miles from here. And you lived there by yourself.

Delima: Well, I have a cousin up here now, but I'm going to lose her pretty soon.

Brenda: Do you drive yet?

Delima: No. Well I learned only after my husband died. We had a new car and I didn't want to sell it, so I got to learn to drive. And I learned how to drive when we had the course in Batoche. I knew how to drive, I drove for eight years without a license. (laughs) Just stayed behind.

Brenda: They had a driver training course in Batoche?

Delima: Pardon?

Brenda: They had a driver training course in Batoche?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: And you took that course?

Delima: And I took that.

Brenda: Then you got your driving license?

Delima: Oh yeah. Well I had my learner's before I went there and I had no trouble getting my license.

Brenda: And this place that you lived at by yourself for a while...

Delima: Um?

Brenda: This farm, was it a farm?

Delima: Yeah. I was there four, four years, I guess, all by myself there - well, I had neighbours.

Brenda: The neighbours would help you out?

Delima: Oh yes. That's, that's half a mile. From each side of my place.

Brenda: So it wasn't difficult for you to manage by yourself?

Delima: Oh no. It was home.

Brenda: How did you heat your house?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: How did you heat your house?

Delima: How did I live?

Brenda: How did you heat it, with wood?

Delima: For money? Old age?

Brenda: Did you have wood in your house or...

Delima: Um.

Brenda: Did you have wood or did you have propane?

Delima: No. Oil.

Brenda: Oil.

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: So you didn't have go and chop wood or...

Delima: Well, I sold my house now. If it hadn't been that I would have gone back, I think.

Brenda: Do you miss your house?

Delima: I sold my house to my brother. He bought the other place we used to live. It was sold so he bought it, and he bought my house and make a bigger one out of it.

Brenda: You and your husband owned that house, eh?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Did you and your husband own that house? Or you bought it yourself?

Delima: When I sold it no, no. I sold it only a few years ago after I moved here.

Brenda: Was that - you and husband bought the house, eh?

Delima: Oh yes, well, we built it.

Brenda: Oh.

Delima: It was a new house. He couldn't work, eh, he had to get a early retirement. He was 60, I think.

Brenda: How did he pass away?

Delima: Well he had a crisis and then they operated on him and he had a blood clot and they couldn't get that down; so finally it went up, see he had a stroke, like, and he died. So I'm glad he wasn't in bed for long.

Brenda: He wasn't sick long.

Delima: No. Just took him during the night and at eleven o'clock he was gone. Some they have strokes and they come back and they can't move, eh. He wouldn't have liked that. So I thought it was better that way. They couldn't do anything with his blood. Well, he had a blood clot in his leg and it went up.

Brenda: Since you've been, since you've been here in Duck Lake, since you've been here in the last four years here in Duck Lake, what do you see as the community's problems?

Delima: Oh, well we got a senior citizen hall here and they got bingo and they go somewhere sometimes. But last winter I

didn't go anywhere because I was sick all winter.

Brenda: What were you sick with all winter?

Delima: I had shingles and that lasts a long time and it hurts, oh. I hope you never get it. (laughs) You know, I'm used to staying home so I don't mind.

Brenda: When you were living in Ontario was it a large town, or was it a small town?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: When you were living in Ontario was it a small town?

Delima: Well it's in Toronto really, but it's like little places. They are all together, aren't they?

Brenda: Oh yeah, kind of like suburbs.

Delima: Yeah, well there's Toronto and there was New Toronto, and there's Longbranch, and Oakville, they are all...

Brenda: Just a bunch of little communities around...

Delima: Yeah, just like Nutana and Saskatoon and Sutherland, just like that.

Brenda: How did you find life was like different in a big city and like in a small city?

Delima: Oh I'd rather live in a small city.

Brenda: You'd rather live in a small town. What...

Delima: I'd rather live in P.A. than Saskatoon.

Brenda: So the smaller the town the better you like it. You wouldn't live in Toronto again?

Delima: In Toronto?

Brenda: Yeah.

Delima: Oh no.

Brenda: Big city, eh.

Delima: You don't know nobody. Well in P.A. I know lots of people there. Well we lived there eight years.

Brenda: You and your husband?

Delima: Yeah. Well he was working there.

Brenda: What years were those?

Delima: The C.N. was working at the shop there and they closed the shop and he was transferred to Saskatoon, then we lived four years there.

Brenda: In Saskatoon?

Delima: After that, well, he couldn't work any more so we went back home. So when we were in P.A. we used to travel every weekend go home.

Brenda: Come home to here?

Delima: St. Laurent. 'Twas nice. I liked that.

Brenda: Do you miss your husband?

Delima: Pardon.

Brenda: Do you miss your husband?

Delima: Well of course.

Brenda: How do you, how do you see the community's future -- Duck Lake?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: How do you see the community's future, Duck Lake, like how, what do you think will, what do you see happening to Duck Lake? Do you think it will get larger, or think there will be more Metis people coming in?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: The community of Duck Lake, how do you see it? Do you think it will grow quite, quite a bit?

Delima: I don't know. They're building houses but to me it's always the same. (laughs)

Brenda: Did your family do things together when you were a young girl?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Did your family do things together when you were a young girl? Did you go picking berries with your mom and your family?

Delima: Oh, no. No more. We used to.

Brenda: When you were younger.

Delima: No, I'm no good. I'm no good in the bush. (laughs)

Brenda: When you moved into...

Delima: Well I, I can't walk. So I got to take care of myself. So if you go in the bush, well, you got to walk.

Brenda: So you didn't go berry picking...

Delima: Um?

Brenda: You didn't go berry picking when you were a young girl? You didn't go berry picking when you were a young girl?

Delima: Oh yes. All the time, even when at home there.

Brenda: You still like berry picking?

Delima: Yes.

Brenda: Do you go out there berry picking every year?

Delima: Well, there was lots around, around home.

Brenda: How about this summer? Would you go out picking berries this summer?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Would you go out picking berries this summer? Not now, eh?

Delima: Maybe there won't be any. (laughs) There was hardly any last year except cranberries.

Brenda: There was lots of cranberries left? What was, how about blueberries, are there a lot of blueberries in the bush?

Delima: Blueberries? No, not here. You got to go north to P.A., north of P.A.

Brenda: You mean you have to...

Delima: Oh, oh no, there's some at Prince Albert there but I never go. I never went blueberry picking. I don't know how to pick the blueberries like that, but I never seen them in the bush.

Brenda: Saskatoons?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: How about saskatoons?

Delima: Oh yes, there was lots at home. Right behind the house.

Brenda: Did you know... you must, you had a lot of responsibilities when you were a young girl, when you were

young. What were some of your responsibilities at home? Just helping with the housework, helping with the housework?

Delima: We did it every... we all did it together. Some have their own little chores to do. It's not like, it's not like now, it was all different.

Brenda: Tell me about, tell about it. How was it different?

Delima: Oh, it was different.

Brenda: Spark my imagination so it will really go to work.
(laughs)

Delima: Eh?

Brenda: Tell me what it was like, what, what was it like during the Depression? During the 1920s and 1930s.

Delima: 1920, well I was working out then.

Brenda: Pardon me.

Delima: I was working out then, farm.

Brenda: You were out working already?

Delima: Yeah. There you do the work. Some places there was lots of kids because I like taking care of the kids, the small ones.

Brenda: Is that the kind of work you did when you went...?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: Is that the kind of work that you did? You'd look after young ones?

Delima: Yeah.

Brenda: How was the pay?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: How was the wages? What was the pay?

Delima: Twenty-five, the most I had on the farm was \$25, \$25 a month.

Brenda: Oh, that's good money, for those that need it.

Delima: Ten dollars. No I don't think, I think I start at \$15 a month. And then later on it would go \$25 a month.

Brenda: You had, you worked for a rich farmer?

Delima: Um?

Brenda: You worked for a rich farmer?

Delima: A rich farmer?

Brenda: Yeah.

Delima: Supposed to be rich but I don't think they were.
(laughs)

(END OF SIDE A)

(END OF TAPE)

INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
CHILDREN				
-work of	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	5,16
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES				
-attitudes towards	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	8,9
DANCES AND DANCING				
-social	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	7,8
DISEASE AND ILLNESS				
	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	12
EDUCATION				
-accounts of	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	2-5
HOUSING				
	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	11,12
WORK				
-for wages	IH-SD.37	D. OUELLETTE	156	6,13-14, 16-17