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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Ms. Youens is a Metis, born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. She was brought up in a series of foster homes and is now active in both the Women's Movement and the native groups.
- How the Metis are treated by outside groups.
- Childhood - upbringing in various foster homes.
- Attitudes towards women among native societies.

Carol: Okay, first of all I will ask you when and where you were born?

Linda: I was born in 1954 in the North Battleford Notre Dame hospital.

Carol: Right in the city, did you live right in the town?

Linda: I didn't live in the town, I lived in Radisson but my mother went to North Battleford to have me because we didn't have a hospital there.

Carol: Is Radisson a native community?

Linda: No.

Carol: Was it mostly white?

Linda: Yes.

Carol: Were you identified by people around you and in your own family as being Metis?

Linda: Mostly, well, in my family naturally we were all Metis except my mother was treaty. My father, my step-father, was a white man. So, I guess us kids were, in the town, I guess we were considered Indian people. They don't really make distinctions between Metis, Indian, or treaty or anything like that. If you look brown, you are Indian.

Carol: Except that you look quite white so would that have made any difference in how you were treated?

Linda: I wouldn't say, especially since the rest of my family is dark. My mother is treaty and she is dark, and my brothers and sister are too.

Carol: So that you felt, when you were young, you felt as if you were Metis?

Linda: I felt Indian. I never knew what a Metis was until I came to the city.

Carol: Oh, I see. But that is an unusual situation being raised in a town that was mostly white. It is different from some people that were, like St. Louis for example, where most of the people are Metis.

How did the people treat you in the town?

Linda: Well, they treated us quite well, I imagine. We were poor too so that makes a difference you know, like, whether we were rich and Metis or whether we were poor and Metis too. But my step-father was a really generous person. He used to have big gardens and everything and he was always giving things away and he was quite liked in the community, so it really wasn't that bad.

Carol: Do you know where your parents were born?

Linda: My mother comes from Sweetgrass Reserve and my grandfather comes from Sweetgrass Reserve and my step-father comes from England and my father, I'm not sure who he is.

Carol: Do you know anything about the history of the town of Radisson, why it was established or...?

Linda: Just that Radisson was one of the guys that went up the Saskatchewan River in the old days. And that is quite close to the river. It is maybe about 16, 20 miles from the river.

Carol: What about the history of the Sweetgrass reserve, do you know anything about it?

Linda: I have never been on the reserve because since my mother married a white man, she lost her treaty status so she doesn't go back to the reserve. I haven't met my grandfather yet but my cousin, who is treaty, comes from Sweetgrass. He is going to take me out this summer.

Carol: Have you ever had any bad experiences or anything with the RCMP?

Linda: Not especially I wouldn't say. Like they don't stop us just because we are Metis or something. I've been stopped a couple of times and both times when I have said my last name, they've right away said, "Do you have brothers?" because my brothers have been in jail quite a bit. And because of that, the RCMP has sort of looked down on me or whatever you may say.

Carol: Do you think that in general there is any difference between how they treat whites and Metis and Indian?

Linda: Yes.

Carol: Can you give me some examples?

Linda: Well, I just think that, well, they are treated a lot different because there are so many reasons. Well, Metis people and Indian people in my opinion, there is no difference. Because if you look at some of the treaty people and you look at some of the Metis people, you can't tell whether they are treaty or Metis and they are classified as, well, they are Indian people. And then the only difference you can tell is by their treaty card which they don't stamp on their forehead or anything. But the Metis people have it rougher, I think, because the treaty people are looked after by the government with their treaty card. They get their education paid for and part of a house and furniture and they have their treaty rights. A Metis person, they don't have the treaty card but then still they look Indian so the white people still look at them that way.

Carol: What about the differences between the way the Metis and Indians are treated by the RCMP as opposed to whites?

Linda: Well, there is a difference, I think, but that is because many native people don't know about the law and they don't know about their rights. They come into the city from the reserve and there is such a big difference and they don't understand everything.

Carol: Do you think that is the only reason that they are mistreated?

Linda: What are you suggesting? That there is another reason?

Carol: Well, do you think there is any discrimination or racism on the part of the police?

Linda: Yeah.

Carol: Do you have any examples either from things that have happened to you or things you have heard about?

Linda: Well, there was a meeting here a few weeks ago and they had one girl down from Pine Grove that had murdered a man I guess. And she was with a white girl at the time that this guy was murdered and she got two years and the white girl just got off. I think that is discrimination.

Carol: Any other examples?

Linda: Well, when I was at a native youth conference in May, and I think that the police down there were acting quite badly. It was all native people from Saskatchewan. The delegates and

everything were down there and the police, were always around the building just for the mere fact that there was Indian people in this hotel. Whereas if maybe a white rugby team went down, they would put up with all the nonsense whereas they didn't with us. We were down one night. We were just, like, everybody was just picking up guitars and singing and we were down in the basement away from everybody and the security cops came in and just turned off all the power and lights and asked us to get out.

Carol: Without even asking you to stop first or anything like that?

Linda: No, they didn't. They just came and turned it off.

Carol: What about the way that the Indian and Metis kids are treated by the schools and the teachers and so on?

Linda: What do you mean?

Carol: Well, is there any difference between the way that you are treated by the teachers as compared to the white kids?

Linda: Well, from my experience when I went to school, I don't think I was treated too much different.

Carol: What about in general from what you hear from other people?

Linda: I don't know. There is a lot of Indian people that don't finish their school. But as for being treated different, I have never really talked about it.

Carol: Why do you think that so many don't finish?

Linda: Well, I think that there is quite a few reasons. Some

of our elder people speak and say that we have no need for education. That education is life and we should be living with nature, close to nature. You don't find that in books. Another reason is, a lot of the books that they have out really portray the Indian as savages.

Carol: That is for sure. Most of them.

Linda: Yeah, well, I think that they should be revised and they should be taught different.

Carol: What about the church? Do you think the church has done anything good for Metis and Indian people?

Linda: That is a hard question because I don't believe in God. Not the God from the Bible but many Indian people, they believe in a Great Spirit or as One. They say that there is all these churches and everybody is praying to the same person, so it doesn't matter which church you belong to.

Carol: What kind of an influence do you think the church has had on the Metis and Indian?

Linda: I think they have had a lot of influence because, well, I imagine especially the Catholics because they are the ones that really went out on their mission and they converted a lot of Indian people into the Catholic way and they told us that our religion was barbaric or whatever they said.

Carol: What do you think that that did to the Indian and Metis people, being told that, you know, that their religion was all wrong and stuff like that?

Linda: They converted a lot of people. They had these schools on the reserves and they were run by nuns and by priests and stuff like that so the children were forced to follow their religion. They really didn't have a choice. They were brought in from the reserves into a residential school and then from there on they had to stop speaking their language in a lot of cases, and they had to pray to the, to whatever religion had this school. And they were just brought up that way and they were away from their parents for so many months, like maybe ten months a year or something. So they didn't really have too much of their parent's influence whereas they had a lot of the church's.

Carol: And how do you think that affected them?

Linda: That is hard to say because I don't believe in it. I can't really answer that.

Carol: I mean, like, psychologically, do you think...?

Linda: I think that well, things might have been a lot different but I don't know. The churches still preach love and sharing and things like that, but I think that the Indian religion is a lot more beautiful than the other ones.

Carol: What about the Social Welfare Department, do you think there is any difference in how they treat Metis people as compared to white?

Linda: I don't know. My parents got divorced when I was 12 and I was made a ward of the government and so, like, I was put on welfare. I was put in different foster homes. I think that in the foster homes, I was treated different from the kids. I was always put in white foster homes and personally I felt a big difference between the white people and the Indian people. That is a place where I noticed it the most.

Carol: In what ways was it evident?

Linda: Well, I was in about four different foster homes so each case was sort of different, but I felt more that I was Indian in the foster homes than when I was just out with people. Except for one foster home, I had the mother in the foster home, she was a social worker and her daughter was the same age as I was and she was always trying to help me find myself, you know, like to be an Indian. She was always saying that I should try and get involved with the Indian people and that being Metis, it might help more.

Carol: Did you get involved at that point then?

Linda: No, I moved out for a year and I was sort of really mixed up and then after that year, like in the past eight months, I have sort of been getting myself together and finding out who I am.

Carol: So, your foster-father was someone that your mother married after these four foster homes that you were in after you were in these homes?

Linda: No. My mother was about 17 or 18 when she married my step-father and he was white. And since then, while they were married, she had children by another man. My step-father only had one child which is my oldest sister.

Carol: I see. These other foster homes, you say you weren't treated very good. You mean there was some difference in how they treated you as compared to how they treated the other kids?

Linda: I thought so.

Carol: How, in what way?

Linda: I felt that there was a difference that when I went into a foster home that I would be the one that would have to clean up the house. I would be doing the dishes and looking after the other kids while the other kids in the family, they had more privileges than I did.

Carol: You were the only foster child in the house, the rest

of them were their own children?

Linda: Except for the first foster home I was in. She took in a lot of little babies all the time and I looked after them quite a bit. Yeah, that is one thing.

Carol: Why did you go from foster home to foster home rather than staying in the same one?

Linda: I didn't like them because I felt this difference and I didn't like it and I wanted to move all the time.

Carol: So, you had no trouble, they just moved you when you said you wanted to move or...?

Linda: No, the first time I told them, I said that I wanted to move and it took a few months before she moved me. And then the second time I moved, I ran away to Toronto. Then after that I moved out and there was a foster home that my social worker wanted me to go into and I went and I saw the people, like we sort of had a tea together. I didn't want to move into there but my social worker said, "Try it for a couple of weeks and if you don't like it, I'll move you out." So I said, "Okay," and I moved in and I didn't like it and I asked to be moved out and she wouldn't let me go. I had to stay there until I was sixteen. He was a military, like he used to be in the army or something. Whenever I wanted to go out, I had to put my hands behind my back and say, "May I please go out, Sir, I would like to go here and there," and tell him where I was going and what time I would be back. I didn't like that place at all. Like, some things happened that I thought shouldn't happen. And my social worker, she didn't stand up for me at all. When some of the things happened, I would tell her about it and she didn't believe me.

Carol: Like what things?

Linda: Well, one time he tried to go to bed with me and I was really scared and I told my social worker and she didn't do anything about it. She said if I didn't stay there until I was sixteen, I had to go to a girls' school and I didn't want to go to a girls' school so I had to stay there. But as soon as I turned sixteen, I moved out.

Carol: Where did you go then?

Linda: I went back to my second foster home, where I was before.

Carol: Do you think that they were justified in taking you away from your mother?

Linda: Yeah. My mother was an alcoholic and she used to beat us up all the time. And my father, my step-father, he was in his seventies at the time and my mother was only in her thirties. So there is fifty years difference. It was really hard on the kids I think. I think it was better that they were taken away.

Carol: What do you think of the whole question of integration of Metis and Indians and whites?

Linda: It is really difficult. I would like to see the Indian people unite as one and keep their culture but I would like them to get along with the white people and work with them and for both sides to accept each other but I don't want to see the Indian culture lost.

Carol: Okay, now, we were talking before about the - you were saying that you thought there was a difference between the way that native men reacted to women?

Linda: Yeah, I did.

Carol: How? In what way?

Linda: I have noticed, well, it is kind of hard because I have been going to those women's liberation meetings. Then all of sudden, well, when we go up to pow-wows or something, without even thinking, the men will expect the women to get the food ready; and if I start picking up some of the tent posts to make the tipi, I will be told to put it down because I am a woman and I shouldn't be doing that and if the older Indian people see me doing that, it is wrong. You know, there is things like that, that you just sort of don't do. Like, I shouldn't go out and chop the wood or something. I will go bring it back but I am not supposed to chop it. And I have to wash the dishes and...

Carol: How is that different from the white society?

Linda: Well, maybe it is not different because a lot of men in the white society expect women to do certain things like do housework and look after the kids and wash the floors and everything else like that. It is just different from when you are at a pow-wow as to when you are in the white society in your own home. I think that is pretty well men in general. I was talking to some Malaysian people this week and I asked them how the women in their country were treated and it seems pretty similar, except he said the women are starting to stand up now.

Carol: What country was this?

Linda: Malaysia.

Carol: Oh, Malaysia.

Linda: Another thing that being Metis, like, I don't really have that many Indian features. You can tell I am Indian when I am with Indian people or when I wear my hair in braids or put feathers in my hair or something but when I was sort of living with white people, many people asked me if I was Greek or Italian or over from Europe or some place like that.

Carol: Do you think that that has made things easier for you or more difficult or...?

Linda: I can't really say because if anybody has ever asked me if I was Indian I always said yes. I have never been ashamed of being Indian. I am proud to be an Indian.

Carol: Some people think that even if you are proud, just the fact that you look white, makes it that - maybe you have problems that are slightly different but on the whole it is easier for you to make it in a white society; that the teachers probably treat you better and the RCMP probably treat you better and that, just in general, it makes it easier for you to be exactly what you want to be.

Linda: Yeah, I think so. I think that I have been accepted a lot more than if I was really dark. Then I would have more discrimination I think.

Carol: You have been active in the women's movement and also in the native movement. Do you see any relationship between the two?

Linda: Relationship, how?

Carol: Well, in the sense that both, well, that is what I am asking you.

Linda: Okay, when I was at the conference, the Native Youth Conference in Prince Albert, we had some people from the American Indian Movement. They came up and they spoke and one woman spoke on native women and their role, and she said that women are very sacred, which I think they are, but that it was a women's role - she really believed that it was the women's role to look after the children. It is the women's role to do the housework and to do everything that sort of, is expected in

our society. Like, away from the women's movement. She said that it was wrong to wear tight sweaters or to try and you know, like have any sexual appeal or anything like that. And that a man, before he goes out and does something, will always ask the woman. That means that the woman is sort of a stronger power than the man, but it is the man that goes out and does the work.

Carol: Do you think that is really true that men do ask their wives if they can go out?

Linda: I have never been married, I don't know. But, there is some other things that I disagree with. I don't know what to do about it because there are so many elder Indian people that it is disrespectful if I try and do what I really feel. Then they think that I am being disrespectful so it is sort of hard sometimes.

Carol: Well, did you agree with this woman when she was talking?

Linda: Not completely, but that is just from my personal view because I don't believe that I should have to look after the

kids completely and do all the housework and everything. I think that if I am married it should be the man and the wife both.

Carol: Maria Campbell in her book Halfbreed - did you read that?

Linda: No, not yet.

Carol: She talks about how in the Metis organization in Alberta, she was very upset because the higher-ups in the organization were always putting down women and they didn't listen to women when they talked and they didn't take them very seriously and so on and she was quite upset about that. She was quite upset generally about how the Metis men treat the women.

Linda: Yeah, I would be upset if somebody just sort of told me what to do, because I think that I am equal to a man. A man is equal to a woman.

Carol: When I asked if you saw any relationship between the women's movement and the native movement, I meant in the sense that they are both working for changes.

Linda: But Indian women aren't working for changes really.

Carol: No, I didn't mean Indian women specifically, I meant, you know, the women's movement as it stands now. Like, Women's Liberation for example, and the Native Movement as a whole, are both working for changes in society.

Linda: Yeah, that is right.

Carol: So, in that sense, do you see any relationship?

Linda: Well, the Women's Liberation is working for betterment of women in jobs, daycare and things like that. But the native movement is working for the betterment of native people, better housing, better education, more understanding.

Carol: So, you don't see too much connection?

Linda: Well, they are both working for the betterment of people.

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
ADOPTION				
-foster homes	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	7,8
ALCOHOL				
-abuse of	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	9

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES				
-and Indian religion	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	6
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES				
-attitudes toward	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	6
DISCRIMINATION				
-against Indians	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	4,5,7,8,10
EDUCATION				
-and cultural				
suppression	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	6
EDUCATION				
-attitudes toward	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	5
METIS				
-attitudes toward	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	3-5,7,8,10
NATURE				
-relationship to	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	5
ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE				
-treatment by	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	3,4,5
WOMEN				
-role of	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	9,10,11
WOMEN				
-work of	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	9,10,11

PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
RADISSON, SASK.	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	2
SWEETGRASS RESERVE, SASK.	IH-141b	LINDA YOUENS	21A	3