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ROBERTA QUANDT

Mrs. Quandt is a resident of La Ronge who was involved in the CCF party in the 1950s. Her husband was a CCF candidate in that riding.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Personal insights into Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris.  
- Relationship between the government in Regina and the northern part of the province.  
Murray: I am speaking to Roberta Quandt of La Ronge. Roberta, you knew both Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady quite well obviously. Jim, in fact, lived with your family for six months. Could you describe first Jim and then Malcolm, you know, personally how you knew them and what kinds of people they were?

Roberta: Well when Jim first came to La Ronge, he had been maneuvered, fired, or what have you, out of DNR because of his politics. Because I think people like Wilf Churchman, you know, felt he was dangerous. And he had such a good mind. Well, when he came to La Ronge, he didn't have anyplace to live and had no money and so Allan took him in. At that time we

lived in our present home but it was the old house then. We had one bedroom and two children and I think a third on the way. But he came and the front room chesterfield made down into a bed and that became Jim's home.

Well, as a woman, I respected Jim's mind and I respected his philosophy about life and his analysis of situations but, as a woman, I disliked him because he was extremely chauvinistic. At that time, we were very hard up and Allan was working at the fish plant on a very low salary and we had, as I said, we had two children to feed. We didn't have any running water, electricity. So we heated the house with a wood cook stove in the kitchen and a space oil heater in the living room and a slop pail under the sink. Kerosene lights, gas lamps, and of course, water had to be brought up from the lake. So when Allan would leave for the fish plant in the morning, very, very early, Jim would still be asleep and I would get him his breakfast and get the youngsters ready for the day. And then Jim would get up and you would wait on him. You would get him his meals, you would do the dishes. When Allan came in at

night the heavy chores of the day that I couldn't manage such as emptying a five gallon slop pail and chopping wood was something I never learned... All these chores of hauling up water from the lake and emptying the slop pail and bringing in wood for the cook stove fell on his shoulders. Jim might never pass the time of day with me all day but immediately Allan came in, it was almost as if I and the children should exist no more and sit quiet and take none of his attention so Jim could talk to him. And he'd start a monologue. For a man his size, he had a high voice and he'd carry on this monologue. And Allan would go out and say, "Excuse me, Jim, but I have to get water." And when he'd go out the back door with the two five gallon water pails we used at that time, his monologue would stop. And the minute Allan opened the door and came up from the lake with the water, it would start again. The slop pail would be the same. "Excuse me, Jim," and away Allan would go with the slop pail. And you know, this is why I resented Jim Brady because he was chauvinistic. My role in life was to see that men were comfortable, that a well-prepared meal was ready on time and any of the domestic chores. I can never recall Jim ever saying, "Here, I'll help with that." And therefore, I resented him.

And he was also, you know, dirty about himself physically. I mean, he just wasn't clean. He was hard to have around because he did have this body odor and he didn't change his clothing. But like I say, obviously I was never fond of Jim Brady. But the only reason I wasn't was because of his treatment and, I mean, I wasn't used to it. Over the years I'd had consideration. I'd always, you know, I played the role of a mother and a housewife and a woman, yes, but I also played other roles in Allan's life and so therefore, I just...

And then I resented Jim taking all Allan's attention and there was no way that Allan could be anything but.

Murray: Jim never discussed any politics with you at all?

Roberta: Never. In fact, days would go by when he didn't even say good morning.

Murray: What would be a typical day spent by Jim at the time he was living with you? He was unemployed at the time?

Roberta: Unemployed. Well, he'd get up, let's say ten o'clock, and I'd make him breakfast and try and keep the children, you know, quiet. He was very fond of Catherine Anne. In later years when he wasn't living with us, he called her Raggedy Anne. I liked Jim a lot better when he wasn't living with us. But the resentment of his attitude towards me when he was with us. Oh I don't know how long a period it was - six months, eight months - it seemed like a very long time at the time.

Murray: What did he do during the day?

Roberta: Well he'd get up in the morning and have breakfast and he might go back in and lay down on the chesterfield. By this time I'd have made up his bed and he'd read and sleep. He usually was here for lunch when Allan would come in from the fish plant and then some days he'd go back down the settlement with Allan in the truck and drop off and go visiting. But you never really knew what Jim did. It depended on the weather and I mean, he never came in and said, "I've been here," or "I've

been there," or "I've talked to this person or that person." You know, he would, perhaps in conversation that evening with Allan he would say, "Oh, I saw so-and-so today." And so you knew that he'd been out in the community. But other than that, he was a secretive man.

Murray: Was he doing any political organizing at all that time, as far as you know?

Roberta: Not to my knowledge, no.

Murray: What year was that that he was living with you?

Roberta: Well, Catherine is 24 in November, that's what I go by. And it's 1976 now. So it would be about 1952-53, in that period of time.

Murray: What about Malcolm Norris, you knew him well as well.

Roberta: Oh, I knew Malcolm well. I can remember when we were married, Allan lived at the airport and we just moved into his suite. And Malcolm and Mary and the children lived at the airport and I became very close friends with Mary Norris. And of course, through Allan's relationship with Malcolm we often went to movies together, went to parties together, I babysat at times and so on. And yes, I've known Malcolm and his family. I'm very fond of his children and I thought a lot of Mary.

Murray: What was your relationship with Malcolm like?

Roberta: Very good because Jim Brady frightened me because I never said anything to him when I became annoyed with him. But with Malcolm I did. But Malcolm, which I find is a trait with Indian men, or you know, people of Indian ancestry, they are chauvinistic unconsciously. Or else it's their background. But Malcolm was much more sophisticated and he would listen and he would talk to you as a person. Malcolm would make an effort. I mean, you weren't just some sort of lump of clay in the background, and of course, a lot of the time Malcolm and Mary were together so I always had Mary. And of course Malcolm was much sharper, had more of a sense of humor. I don't think Jim Brady had a sense of humor. And Malcolm sort of, like when you were sitting in the living room of an evening visiting, we were all part of the conversation unless Mary...

Murray: Not so with Jim.

Roberta: No, never, never. But then too, during that period of time, if people came in to visit us and Jim was there, unless they interested him he would leave or he would sit and withdraw and maybe read. Whereas Malcolm could talk on any subject about anything and, you know, was a participant. But of course, Malcolm Norris never lived with us. I'm thinking primarily...

Murray: Malcolm would talk to everybody. If anybody sat down to talk, he would talk to them.

Roberta: Oh yeah, yeah. And he might argue with them and so on. It would depend on the circumstances but I've been to a lot of parties and social evenings where Malcolm has been

and he was capable of being very... he had a lot of charm when he turned it on. And I would never have liked to have fought with Malcolm Norris, mind you. Because I've seen him strip people that he felt were being intolerant.

Murray: What about the involvement of the two men in the CCF? Of course, they were both brought in there by the government. What was their involvement in the party?

Roberta: Well, I think Malcolm worked during campaigns and I think Jim Brady did. Visiting and talking with people but not as an active organizer or, you know, any set contribution to the election. But I know Jim...

Murray: But Jim didn't...

Roberta: No. I can remember one time Cham McLean was running for the CCF and Allan was his agent and it was a very sickening situation because we had no respect for Cham McLean. And yet Jim Brady was out in the bush and he walked in, I don't know how many miles, Allan could tell you, into a polling booth. I

think it was Stanley Mission he went. And he voted because he felt it was necessary, but it wasn't because he had any respect for the candidate. And that election Cham McLean was very badly defeated.

Murray: There was quite a bit of - if this is the election I'm thinking of - resentment because the candidate was forced upon you by Regina? Was that the situation?

Roberta: Oh, well this has always been the situation up until the last few years. When Allan ran in 1960 as CCF candidate

here, he was the choice of the people here. And Regina, wow, didn't want him. And I mean, they just allowed him because they didn't have anybody else to stand and I know, from people that were in the CCF central office in Regina, that funds were short. We went into debt for over, I don't know what period of time it was, to pay air bills. Things that central office would pay for a candidate but they wouldn't pay fully for Allan's campaign. I think it was \$1500 at that time that we ended up in debt after the election was all over and we just didn't have any money and it really, it was very hard on us.

Murray: What was the relationship then, after that election, between the local CCF and the CCF in Regina? Were relations strained?

Roberta: Well you see, Allan has always been a fighter and so his relationship in the CCF and in the present NDP is, the hierarchy does not like him and...

Murray: I mean the CCF in general, not Allan in specific. I mean the CCF organization in La Ronge. What happened to it after 1960?

Roberta: Well, it went on. Allan worked up until the 1971 election and he worked throughout the 1971 election but then when he saw that anything that we wanted here wasn't going to happen and anything that they'd promised and put forward, they didn't want any participation. They wanted to make the, you know, everything in Regina without any northern participation. And they lied. And so, he's withdrawn and is no longer

effective. But from 1960, you remember, there was only a handful of families in La Ronge that were CCF. There was people like Stonehawkers and Lindsdogs, people like this. But just a mere handful of people.

Murray: On a consistent basis sort of.

Roberta: Yeah. And I can remember, like the present NDP MLA. I met Hetty McAuley on the street and I invited her in for a cup of tea at Anger's Inn which was in existence at that time. And when I came home after we'd had a cup of tea and a piece of pie and she went home and I went home, she phoned me. And she said, "Roberta, don't you ever invite me out again. Don't you ever, ever put me in that position." And I said, "What

position did I put you in, Hetty, by buying you a cup of tea?" And she said, "I've just had two phone calls and I'm not to have anything to do with you and I don't want to have anything to do with you," and she slammed up the receiver. Today, her husband is our MLA. But I wasn't suitable because I was one of those, you know, communist CCFers.

Murray: So the local CCF never really had much influence with the party in Regina.

Roberta: Never. Because, of course, the north only had one member. I mean, why did they have to worry about half the province. Athabasca constituency was almost half of the land acreage of the province. But they didn't have to worry because, after all, what does it matter, one seat.

Murray: What happened at CCF conventions? Was that ever brought up?

Roberta: Oh yes. Many times and we would religiously go down from here, Allan and I or Allan and Morris Lindskog or, you know.

Murray: Did Malcolm Norris ever go to any of the conventions?

Roberta: Oh, yes.

Murray: Did he speak at the conventions?

Roberta: Oh, yes.

Murray: Do you remember any of the issues that he was talking about?

Roberta: Well, they were always northern. And Malcolm today... you know, he just lived thirty years too soon. If he were here today, you wouldn't have the situation we have in the north. I'm positive of that. Because the organization work would have been done in the northern settlements and they wouldn't be sitting quiet and accepting what they are accepting today. I firmly believe that. In fact, we've often talked about it.

Murray: How many conventions do you think Malcolm went to? Every one, he went to...?

Roberta: I would say, well, except in the latter years. Because he got like Allan. He'd got to the point where he dropped his membership, as did Allan, as did most progressives.

Murray: I read a letter from Jim where he dropped his membership in the early fifties, I think, Jim Brady.

Roberta: Yeah, well Jim never participated anyway, you know. As far as in normal participation in a political party. You get out and you organize and you take posters and you set up meetings.

Murray: Why was that? Was that a political position of his or was he just not that kind of person?

Roberta: He was just not that kind of person. No, Jim didn't have the ability. You know, there is a certain type of person that can organize and usually they have to have some sort of PR attitude. And Jim Brady wasn't one of these people. And of course it would bore him out of his mind.

Murray: So people didn't have any less respect for him because of that. It was just a different kind of...?

Roberta: No, no, in fact, most of the CCF people didn't want anything to do with Jim Brady because they considered him a communist. And of course, the old communist flag that was raised at every election, they didn't want to be tarred with that name and so they stayed away from Jim Brady. I can remember at one school meeting, Precam School, when Jim Brady came in and he was attending the school meeting and he was always quite interested in education. Norman McAuley was there and he was at that time a special constable with the RCMP. And Jim had had a few drinks and it was one of the only times I ever saw Jim, you know... because he never drank at our place. And Norman McAuley got up and went and got the RCMP because he wanted Jim out of the meeting because Jim had had some drinks. And Jim got up and quietly left on his own. But I can remember Allan being very angry about it because he was in no way

obnoxious. Today, it wouldn't happen. But of course, Norman McAuley disliked Jim Brady and so we felt he was in very bad taste. We felt he was overreacting but these incidents happened.

Murray: You said the CCF ran the party from Regina. Did they also run the government of the north from Regina?

Roberta: Oh yes, because we were governed from the south. And DNR, like, in the north what would there be, six or eight field officers in the various communities. There would be one at Cumberland House, one at La Ronge that would do a large area, and they just administered the laws.

Murray: Everything.

Roberta: Everything. But you know, the public health officer would come up from Prince Albert. This sort of thing but I mean...

Murray: But as far as policy, every important decision was made in Regina?

Roberta: Absolutely, absolutely. And the department of Natural Resources that administered the north was based in Prince Albert but the minister always lived in Regina as it is today. Our minister still lives in Regina.

Murray: Getting back a minute to the two men. How, from your observations, were the two accepted by the native people? Was there a different attitude towards the two men among the other people?

Roberta: Oh yes, yeah. Jim made friends with a group of people, like the Izbister family here. He didn't have a lot of friends but, you know, he'd meet them in the parlor and he'd sit and visit with them and possibly some of them would go back to his cabin. But Malcolm was always very busy. He'd come into La Ronge and let's say the Prospectors' Assistance Plan was in being at that time and so he got himself a cabin here because he was going to be here quite a lot of the time. But he was always doing. And so he had friends amongst the Indian people but not in the same sense as Jim.

Murray: Jim was more part of the native culture and community.

Roberta: Yes. Yes. And he had more of the Indian attitude of, you know, slow, today is today and tomorrow will take care of itself. You know, Jim's attitude was more Indian than Malcolm's. Malcolm was always very concerned about education, about his children having the opportunity of going on in school. He was always sort of striving and he also, his wife was about one quarter Cree, Mary Norris. And Jim didn't care about his surroundings whereas Mary and Malcolm - perhaps it's because Malcolm had a wife - I don't think so because Malcolm liked to dress well. He was always very clean and immaculate, no matter if it's summer tans and work boots he had on, Malcolm was always well groomed. And he liked nice things. I mean, his home was clean, his furniture and everything was coordinated. It wasn't a stereotype sort of middle class house. But it was a very nice home.

Murray: Could you speculate as to why he might feel that way?

Roberta: Malcolm?

Murray: Yes.

Roberta: I think perhaps he had more white blood. I think maybe his background, his...

Murray: Was it in reaction at all to native culture and the way native people lived? You know, they didn't pay that much attention to their surroundings. Would it be a reaction to that do you think?

Roberta: No, no. I don't think so. I think Malcolm lived the way he wished to live. I mean, there's all kinds of white people that like to live comfortably and there's other white people right next door that don't give two hoots about their surroundings, are quite comfortable in any kind of surroundings. I don't feel Malcolm was one of these. But of course, I mean that's my point of view. And they had bright children, talented children, the Norris children.



Murray: There was one other thing that I wanted to mention and that was the proposal for a single agency for the north which was developed in the late sixties or late fifties by a group of CCF people including... I gather Brady worked on it as well as Allan Quandt and others. Do you remember what year that was when they started working on that concept and what prompted it?

Roberta: No, I can't. Allan would have to tell you that because there were so many times that we worked on some project. And when I clear the house, Murray, I'm going to find all kinds of old documents. I can remember one time Jim Brady, Allan Quandt, Malcolm Norris, oh, who else was here, but anyway, we

had drawn up, I had done the typing for it because I was the typist in the group. It was a brief and we presented it to Olie Turnbull. Now he was the minister of, oh boy, what was he the minister of at that time? Allan can tell you this. And when we presented the brief he lost his temper and he started to yell and scream and shout. I was in the kitchen making coffee at this time and I just, you know, froze. And he rushed out here and out on the patio and into his car. No, he didn't have a car. Malcolm Norris had picked him up off the plane and so Malcolm left and followed him and picked him up with the car and took him back to the hotel. And Allan said, "Why did you do that when he put on such a display of temper?" And Malcolm said, "Allan, I brought him, I felt obliged." And Malcolm dropped him at the hotel and came back here. But Olie Turnbull lost his temper like you wouldn't believe. I was just shaking. It was like having a bull in your living room.

Murray: Was it because of the radical nature of the proposal?

Roberta: Yes, yes. And he was angry. Now Olie Turnbull is the principal of Western Cooperative College in Saskatoon and I went down a year ago for a course but he didn't recognize me. He doesn't know me. He's like Mr. Bowerman who comes into the office and whom I've known since 1946 and he doesn't know me either. Great people.

Murray: Can you think of any stories or anecdotes that might be interesting in terms of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris and telling about the character of the men? Other than what you've already said?

Roberta: I'd have to think about that, Murray. Because....

(End of Side A)

(End of Interview)

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