

CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED
Oral History Collection – Section 2
Collected by Oral History Researcher Meagan Gough
Louis Stetar Interview #1 2008 March 07

Catalogue No. 2.15.1

1/20

Conducted at Louis Stetar's Home Site (NE16 3 27 W3rd) South of Consul, SK

LS = Louis Stetar: Interviewee

MG = Interviewer: Meagan Gough

ET = Emmelia Taylor: Videographer

07 March 2008

MG - I'll let you introduce yourself. I'll let you tell me your full name and date of birth to start, and we can go from there...

LS - OK, well, my earliest memories are going through the thirties actually when I was four, five, six years old.

MG - What year were you born in?

LS - 1931. So I remember...

MG - Oh and your birth date?

LS - January 26th. So, I remember some of the early things that happened out here - I remember they had a fence around the yard here when I first started to ramble around to keep me from going too far!

MG - Did it keep you in?

LS - Well, I don't remember that part. I remember we kept geese at that time and the gander would just come out of nowhere and just bowl me right over every time! I'd go out there the second time and be really careful walking and he'd come out of nowhere and bowl me over again!

MG - Oh really!?

LS -Yeah, again and again he'd bowl me over. He was as big as I was. They get their wings out there and fluttering.

MG - You were born right here?

LS - Yeah.

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MG - In this house, or?

LS - No, there was another house. Back then, you just couldn't jump in the car and drive to the hospital. There were neighbour ladies who came and helped in those days. They called them midwives. And the road to Maple Creek, that was just a trail to begin with and then it was graded into a dirt road. Man, it was a journey in those days, like in the late 30's and 40's, up until the 1950's. I started school in Sunshine Valley, about three and a half miles southwest of here and my first teacher was Mable Taskey. I remember I couldn't speak a word of English when I first went to school.

MG - What is your first language?

LS – Slovak. My father and mother came from Slovakia and started homesteading here in 1912, and so he started off with four horses and he was here. Well, he didn't get married until 1930. And I don't remember how I learned English – it just kind of seemed to come into your head. So, here's a picture.

MG - Wow, it (the picture) says "Tom Stetar, homestead, day five, approximately 1912".

LS - That's about the time that picture would have been taken in about 1912, 1913, back in Coleman, Alberta, where Dad worked at the mine. This is my father here; these are the other family who lived out west of where we homesteaded – that boy there died in the flu epidemic and the mother did, too. And um, I have some pictures here of them in about 1914.

MG - (to Emmelia) you can bring the camera over to film these...Wow! Handsome! He looks like a very proud man, strong.

LS - He had his convictions. This is the house that they homesteaded in, this family to the west –Kompan. Here they are finishing it off. Dad is helping her, and there is the boy, Louis Kompan, and that's the house where they got sick and died. They got sick and died in that house.

MG - And where was this house?

LS - Where was the house located?

MG - Yes.

LS - Northwest 16 3 27.

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MG - this one (picture) says: "Tom Stetar, whitewashing J. Kompan log house about 1914".

LS - That was before the flu hit – the flu hit about 1918, and that's when he died. Back in those days, there was no such thing as the undertaker coming out and taking care of things. Bodies were wrapped in blankets and laid down – people came together and dug the grave, someone made the rock boxes, because there were no coffins that I knew of – I don't know, you might want to talk to Mary about this. I don't know if she would have remembered it, but Helen, she was just only about a year and half, two years old, when her mother died. The rock boxes would have to be made, the bodies would have to be placed in them, and, you know, it took time. You had to ride out, call the neighbours, tell them about it and ask them to come and help do this...internment. And uh, that's what I would reckon would have happened at that time, because the only communication that they would have had out of here at that time would have been telegraph – CPR telegraph. There were no phones, and the roads were, well, they were pretty rudimentary – trails, mostly trails into town. That was later on, probably about 1923. See, the girls were already growing up by then.

MG - How many siblings did you have?

LS - There were six in the family – Alex, Ruth, Joe, Helen, Mary and Aaron. Only one is living now, Helen, and she is in her 80's – 86 or 87. Mary, she died here just a few years ago in 1997.

MG - So you are the baby?

LS - I wasn't even around at that time!

MG - Oh no, I meant how many siblings are there in your family?

LS - Oh, there was two. I have a sister. She just had her 75th birthday last fall, so it creeps up on you after a bit. Now my dad bought their half section in 1930 – they called them "half-sections"- that was after all the Kompan kids had already left home; he was the only one left there. He moved east here and bought another half section here, and dad bought that half-section in the 1930's. Then, the dirty thirties hit and he couldn't make any more payments, so he didn't make another payment until 1942. So, he, my dad, was here until, well, we worked together here on the farm until he died in 1968.

MG - Oh, really?!

LS - Yeah, and I was here for another 17 years by myself until June came along.

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MG - That's so neat that you got to work together until 1968. So, you would have been...37 years old...

LS - 37, yeah, when he died.

MG - So, you probably got to learn a lot working with him.

LS - Well, I grew up with everything around me on the farm, stayed connected to farming and ranching. I grew up with all that. I am lucky I am still alive! I had a lot of accidents, falling off horses, getting bucked off, and everything else. I remember we used to ride to school. Annie had a black mare called Sadie, and I had a little pony that I rode, and she was the most stumbliest thing. She stumbled three or four times on our way to school and I would get pitched over her head. I didn't have a saddle – Annie had the saddle. I had just this kind of a stirrup over the head, like a girdle, and she wasn't very high, so she wasn't hard to get on. Hold her with one hand, put my foot in the stirrup, and off we'd go. I remember the first - this is going back a little bit now, a year or two - but I remember in Sunshine Valley School, the second year we went off to school, we rode a big horse named Nick, with no saddle, bareback. We were just leaving the school yard and some kids were walking along with us, and Annie, she tripped and made a big noise with the bucket, the lunch bucket, and the horse jumped and was rolling and hit the ground. And Annie, she broke her arm, right there, just above the elbow. And it was hours before she got to the hospital. I had to go get the neighbour, Earl Nash, and his car, and that means driving over horseback, and in the meantime she laid there until Earl Nash came with the car and then took her into town. It must have been, from about the time it happened, it would have been about 4 o'clock, or a little after three, and she didn't get to the hospital until about 8 or 8:30, and then she was in traction. I remember we went to visit her a couple times; she had a cast. When she came back home, she couldn't straighten her arm out, so to straighten her arm out, she was told to carry a pail of rocks for 15 minutes each day. Well, we kept going to school on horseback and well, on foot sometimes, too, until 1946 when that school closed, and then we went to Lammermoor, Lammermoor School. We went there and my first teacher there was Hilda Kufferner. It was her first school, too; she was only 17! Wow, I remember some of the things that went on there. We had a barn there, two horses, two outdoor biffies. There were no indoor toilets in those days. And like I remember, back at Sunshine Valley School, the teachers were quite strict. You had to be quiet in class – no running around, no yacking. If you wanted to borrow a book, you held up one finger; if you wanted to go to the bathroom, you held up two fingers. Everything was quiet. Not like now where there is even yelling.

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MG - Talk about a change, eh?

LS - So anyways, I remember the first inspector, school inspector, who dropped in was a Mr. Henry. He was a jolly fellow. He dropped in right at the end of school one day, and he had a little brown dog. And the second was Mr. Penny, and I remember he was an austere, strict-looking fellow, and he would show up when the class was in session; everyone was in school, in class. And let's see now, the teachers - there were Mrs. Taft. She was the first one, then there was a Mrs. Wilson. She taught there for a while, then there was an Eileen Curtis, then, I can't remember off hand. Then there was Mrs. Wagner taught there, too. There were lots of teachers there. I went there 1947 to 1949, then I went to Consul High School. It wasn't easy in those days. There were no buses. It wasn't until, I don't remember exactly when, but it was after I quit. It was just a two-room school house in Consul; a high room and a low room. Let's see. I don't know if it's still there. I think the library might be the only part left; I'm not sure. But anyway, Mr. Lionel, Mr. Rodgers, were the teachers. Then I finished my high school by correspondence.

MG - How did you find it learning the language?

LS - You mean learning English?

MG - Yes.

LS - I don't remember. It seems kind of like a fog settled in and I seemed to know it.

MG - They say children, before the age of six, are really able to master many languages, and then after six it becomes really challenging. It's interesting how you describe it, like a fog...

LS - Yeah. I remember in school, like at home there, I started off being left-handed, and my mother and father were quite unhappy about that. They used to say at the dinner table, "Get the food over here with that hand".

MG - It's the same in a way in our family. That generation, they tried to switch it around.

LS - Yeah, they sure didn't like the left-handed part. Anyway, I grew up left-handed, but I now write with my right hand.

MG - Which way do you bat in baseball or hockey?

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LS - It's all left-handed, but I just write with my right hand. You know, there are a lot of people who are gifted who are left-handed. You know there are a lot of people who are decent hand writers who are left-handed, but....

MG - Well, they say that left-handed people are the most creative.

LS - Well, I don't know about that; it could be. Here, look at this. Take a look at that picture.

MG -Oh my gosh!

LS - That's a little model I made.

MG - Wow, you made this? Oh my gosh, look at it! (To Emmelia) I am just going to hold it up so you can zoom in on it. It's beautiful. So what is it a replica of?

LS -It's a covered wagon. But you know, there was an auction. I donated it to the Red Cross, and they held it up for auction, and it only got one dollar.

MG - Wow that must have empowered you?

LS - One dollar, Delores Walburger bought it. I don't know if she still has it.

MG - Have you always had a penchant for building?

LS -Yes, I built several boats, a Western Style saddle, a reflecting telescope, several clocks. I kind of got into the clock business, and I built several clocks for people. I like to read as a hobby. I do a lot of reading. I find it really amazing. Say you can't travel the world, you have it right here.

MG - Yeah, it is amazing. Did your parents, or your dad, teach you how to make those things?

LS - No, see in those days there was no such thing as a curling rink or skating rink. You didn't even have lots to do in the wintertime. You were really cooped up here. You couldn't get out very easily; the road was snowed in. We used to go into town with a sleigh and team when the weather cleared up, and it looked like it was going to be nice weather. I would bring in the horses and take a team. But sometimes, it would get pretty darn cold. Your face would get cold, and it was a good half a day trip, you know. You'd go in and fiddle around, and with a horse and sleigh, that didn't happen very fast. Days were short in the wintertime, too – the horses all sweated up...

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MG - So, your parents must have been very brave to...

LS -Well, all those people who came out here to homestead were. It took a lot of courage. You were a long ways from a doctor. You were a long ways from anything - miles and miles. In those days, even to Vidora, from Consul or from here was a long journey. It was about thirteen or fourteen miles, and the road didn't take a shortcut like it does now. You went on the square. I remember the road from West coming into town - like West coming into Consul - and the railroad ran east to west, and the roads came from the South, and let's see, you had to make two turns to get into the Main Street. See now, the road just goes right through town. In those days, you make it with a team and wagon quarters didn't mind. You just negotiate it with them. But it's funny how things have changed. Attitudes, even of yourself, you know. For instance, when you'd go with a team and wagon, it was wonderful. You get off, you stretch...there is a big difference from those days. I remember we used to go to Senate once in a while, which is about nine miles from here, so quite a ways. Coming in from the south, there were two curves right above the bridge, just like that. Right through Reesor's yard. Right through the middle of Reesor's yard. The bridge was right about here, and there were two corners there, in fact that one corner is still there, right through Reesor's yard, and sometimes you would stop and visit with him for a while.

MG - Pete Reesor?

LS - Pete Reesor, yeah.

MG- I found out that my family in Ontario had the farm next to Pete Reesor's father's place.

LS - You mean here?

MG - No, Ontario.

LS - Oh, in Ontario?! Wow.

MG - We couldn't believe it, so we have been looking at the family history, we are tied together there.

LS - Well, there you go, it's a smaller world than you think.

MG - I couldn't believe it that I ended up here last summer sitting across the table from people who were relatives.

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LS - Who would have thought?

MG - You do end up being where you need to be.

LS - That's right.

MG - So, this is your family? (*In reference to a picture, image is on video*)

LS - No, this is my father. That's the only one that's family. The rest of the people - those are neighbours. This little boy was the one who was 17 when he died, and the mother, I don't know exactly what year it was she passed away. You know, it was pretty scary – you know, a lot of people died. Some people - like this boy here - the two of these boys were brothers in the same house, and only one got sick. It depends, I suppose, on how much resistance you have at the time.

MG - So, that flu, it had a really big impact around here?

LS - Oh, terrible. (inaudible part), they did the proper thing, but they had a hard time getting back to take care of the funeral and everything, so it was quite a traumatic, quite a bad situation.

MG - So, before we continue, I would like to make sure we record your parents' names.

LS - My mother's name was Anna, her maiden name was..(spells it)

MG - her maiden name was, Klukkluck?

LS - The European pronunciation was the same as German was "Huh", "K-L-U-C-H-T-A-K".

MG - Huhchtak? That was your mom's maiden name?

LS - Yes.

MG - And her first name?

LS - Anna.

MG - Sorry, I mean her middle name, if she has one.

LS - I don't know. (*Shows a picture of mother with geranium – image on video*)

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Here she is, with a geranium. I remember that geranium.

MG - Aw, you do?

LS - Yeah, we had it for quite a few years after.

MG - Look at her. When would that have been taken?

LS - That picture? I think she is in her wedding dress, so probably 1930. I had a picture of her wedding day, but I guess I left it in the other room.

MG - She looks so sweet.

LS - I got another picture of her here where she was more elegant, before she was married. I don't know what happened to it. It's lost in the house or something.

MG - You remember the geranium, that's really neat.

LS - Oh yes. She had that for quite a few years.

MG - Was she good at growing things, like plants?

LS - Oh yea she did. She died of tuberculosis in 1939, and she was only 37 when she died. I remember she was at the Fort San for awhile, and she came home, and she wasn't supposed to do any work, but she had a garden, and when she would garden, she would carry water from the creek when dad wasn't around. Because if he was and he would see that, he would get mad like the dickens, saying, "You're not supposed to do that! You're supposed to rest!" But she wanted to keep her plants going, I don't know...

MG - Strong willed...

LS - Yes. There is a picture of Sunshine Valley School in 1943. There is me there; there is my sister right beside me. There are four people who are dead already out of this group. You have Bill Parsonage, Joe, or John Godich, Maloa Wagner, Alec Parsonage, Skimp Parsonage. That's him there, too. That's Larry Sawden, Lona Sawden, Harry Wagner. This is Ken here. He got killed in an accident a long time ago. And Lona, she died here. That was the Wagner family. The two Godich boys. That school had the windows fairly low, so that when you looked out from your desk, you could daydream out the window, but I remember just the opposite at the other school. They knew. They had the windows fairly high, so when you sat down you couldn't look out the windows.

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MG - Oh no! Nothing to daydream about! That's no fun for school!

LS - But I can still remember that familiar smell of the schoolhouse. It had that dustbane floor, and it had that chalk smell, a wonderful smell. And the inkwells. They used to have those desks with inkwells. They'd have a big bottle of ink in the library and you would fill it there.

MG - Oh, the smell.

LS - You know, some of the regiments that the different teachers had, too, were pretty interesting. But I enjoyed school. Art was the last class for me of the day. I enjoyed art. It was last period. And like these schools here, I don't know whether Lammermoor had this, but Sunshine Valley ran until the end of, like until Christmas, and then it shut down for two months, because in the wintertime it wasn't easy to travel. It was just too tough to travel to school in the wintertime. So then, we started again in March, and we had one week of holidays in July - the first week - one week then back to school again. Yeah, it was not easy travelling in the wintertime. That was out.

MG - Wow, no.

LS - I remember I froze, frostbit my fingers, one time coming home from Lammermoor, in a strong wind that turned right away.

MG - It would feel cooped up then for kids, to be in all winter like that when school was out.

LS - I guess depends on how big the family might be. A big family might. I always had to have something to do in the winter time, because you would go crazy just sitting around. I built a saddle one winter, several boats for different people. I always had to have some sort of project to work on or you would go stir crazy - get cabin fever! Especially in winter, we had a lot of snow.

MG - Who is this? (referring to photo)

LS - That would be that boy here in that picture, in 1934. That's him before.

MG - Louis, you had wanted to before, to tell the story about this family before we first hit record. Do you want to maybe share that story?

LS - Well, I wanted to tell the story because I don't think anyone else knows about it. There's only one left living, like I said. There was Helen, she was the

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one with baby, and you know, what happened to them? You know, that was a tough time. He took over for his mother.

MG - Joe?

LS - That's right. He was a stepson to these other boys, like there's Alex. You know, Joe, he washed diapers and everything – he took care of the little baby for a few years before he left home. At that time, at that time, they owed a lot to him.

MG - And it's like back in Italy how they have Mama Mia's, the man who sometimes steps into that role.

LS - Yeah, what else can you do? It had to be done and they were certainly fortunate that he was there. His hobby was photography. He got like a kit from Eaton's to do his own, printing and you know, in those days. Photography was his hobby.

MG - Wow, so they were hit very hard then by the flu?

LS - Darn right. You know, all of a sudden the mother and the son died. Especially the mother, you know, there was a young family to take care of. And then in those days, like I say, no coffins; it was kind of fortunate that it happened in the cold time of the year because they wrapped the bodies and carried them out in blankets and lifted them and put them out there.

MG - In a stone boat?

LS - Yeah, they took them just a couple hundred yards from the house, but you know, they had to get the neighbours together; they had to dig the grave; somebody had to build the rock boxes, you know, to put them in, so I don't know. I don't know how they would do it. Pneumonia was what killed them, not the flu.

MG - So, was your family very close to them always?

LS - We were. We were neighbours and were together quite a bit, dad and them. They helped each other out. He used to go over there and visit, and there was the one year that they had a real good crop that was about 1921 or 1922.

MG - So, when did it get really bad here in terms of the crops? Oh, that's a great picture! (Reading caption of photo out loud) "Joe and Mary and Helen Kompan, and the bumper crop of '19, question mark". That's a really neat picture! So, Louis, when did things get really bad - 1930's, late 1920's?

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LS - 1931, and then for the next five or six years, even seven years. That's the monument we built around the grave. It's up on the hill there.

MG - Oh, it's beautiful. It's for the Kompan family?

LS - This boys' ashes are here.

MG - Oh, that's beautiful.

LS - He built that, and now his ashes are there. He died in 1989 and the next year the family came out and they threw the ashes there.

MG - So, Joe built that?

LS - Yeah, it was built in 1949.

MG - And it's just up the hill there? That's beautiful.

LS - If you care to see it or take photographs, I would be happy to take you up there. In this photo, that's Mary and Louis. Louis married in Ontario in 1939 and spent all of his life there.

MG - Hmm, I wonder where?

LS - Pardon?

MG - Do you know where?

LS - Kitchener.

MG - Wow! My family is about 20 minutes from Kitchener. They are from Kitchener.

LS - Wow, he worked for Burns Meats all his life.

MG - (*referring to the photo*) "Mary Kompan and Louis Kompan, 1922." That's a great picture. You have some really great photos, and you have kept them in really good condition.

LS - Oh, I have had them for years. Here is one of my dad ploughing.

MG - So, tell me about your dad, what was he like?

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LS - Well, he was a very good father. He treated us real well. He brought us up after mother died. I was eight years old and Annie was seven when Mother died, and he was left with a lot of hard work.

MG - So, he was working and raising you.

LS - And you know how kids can be. We didn't give him such an easy time. You know how kids are. They can't help it. He gave me a strapping a lot of times, and I am glad he did. Here's another picture. 1942. That's me, that's my sister, and that's my dad. I'd grown out of the suit. We couldn't afford another suit, so I used the old one. If you could still get into it, you used it.

MG - Aw, yeah, you probably just had a growth spurt. What a cute kid! Aw! So what are you dressed up here for?

LS - My first communion and confirmation, 1947. The other part of the picture is the rest of the crew – there's Annie, these are the Geiger girls and they are still living in Maple Creek. I don't know what happened to her. I even put an ad in the paper there that even her or her relatives might contact me if she was still alive. She might be long gone. Who knows? There's dad and his neighbours, the ones west of here, Kompan, when they came home from the bush. That was a three day trip in those days...from the west block, you took one day with two teams to go up there, one day to cut and load, and one day to come back.

MG - So you learned to farm from your father?

LS - Oh, I grew up with it. Growing up I had to do the chores, lots of chores and all that stuff. Everybody did the same thing. That's the way kids grew up then.

MG - Is there a difference you think between ranching and farming?

LS - Oh, there is quite a little difference, yeah.

MG - Probably a naive question to ask, but...

LS - Oh well, no it's not. You know, you are dealing with livestock all year round with ranching. Farming is a kind of segmented more – you seed your crop and then you do summerfallowing and then, the harvest would come along, but most people had some livestock, like cattle. It was a lot of work, a lot of work for people back then in those days. I remember Herb Wilcox homesteading out here.

MG - Herb Wilcox?

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LS - Yeah, Herb Wilcox. He used to go and see his girlfriend on bicycle in Gull Lake, and that's a long ways from here – and in those days bikes didn't have good rims, too. I remember what he said one time - well, this is in our local history book - but he said that he built his first sod shack on the prairies. It was a lot of hard work but it didn't cost much! You know, they had to turn the plough for the sod with a plough. They would lay them like bricks for the walls and then he would have to put on the roof. I know my dad had to. When he first started, there were two dugouts and a coulee by the bank there, one for the team and the other one for him. Later on they moved it over to the chicken house and that's where it was for years. One hole was still there for the team. That's a lot of work to dig that out by hand, and it's still there. Then, what they had was a horse helped dig out that hole and then finally built there.

MG - It was interesting hearing when you were speaking about how they took care of their deceased – Laura Parsonage was talking about that too – it was really different back then, wasn't it?

LS - Do you remember what she said about it?

MG - She said she can remember them coming and keeping the body on ice there, and that it was always a short funeral and a march, but that it wasn't – you sang a couple songs – but it wasn't huge and elaborate like it is expected now. I think for that generation it is very overwhelming how much funeral costs are now, because it used to be “ashes to ashes”.

LS - Well, see like, I think Mary said that when they were interred – her mother and her brother – there was a minister, and they probably just said a prayer and that was it. Because, you know, travel in those days was a big undertaking. Travel was by team then, in the twenties. There were a few cars, but like the road to Eastend, I remember we used to wind over every hill – there was no cutting through the hills to make a road. The road just wound around every hill. That made the trip a lot of miles – even before they built the paved road you know, the one going through town that heads east. You used to have to go north and turn past the creek, and then there was about three corners before you got back to the junction on that road. And if you got caught out in a heavy rain, even in the summertime on that road, you were in trouble. You know, we used to put a pole right through the rear wheels of the wagon and just skate down the hill. That's what we used for a brake it was so steep.

MG - Oh my gosh!

LS - We just used to put a pole in there - we did have brakes - but the pole would act as a lever for brakes. Then, the flats where Gilchrists are, it used to be

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Louis Stetar Interview #1 2008 March 07

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terrible. We used to cross it and there would be water and mud and everything else. They used to have to have two teams just to drag it across. A lot of these people though, where they came from they didn't have anything, like from the old country. They had nothing, so they would come over here, get a quarter section of land for ten dollars and even that quarter up at the top of our hill there, the pasture, it used to be a Mr. Wigham (?), that was his name, and he had a dugout. He put his dugout on top of the hill there, and he went in the First World War and lost his life and never came back. There used to be hundreds of people here in those days. They would have a quarter section here, a half section there. There used to be hundreds of people, and then they found out, like these people here, it was hard to scratch out a living. The men had to go to work, even in the wintertime, to the mine, to earn a few bucks.

MG - Sounds like a lot of people survived the thirties, too, just having their garden or a little bit to trade with other people.

LS - Well, in those days, the relief was ten dollars a month for a family. It was five dollars a month for bachelors.

MG - For who?

LS - For bachelors, things were a little cheaper then. But then, if somebody was seriously ill, that really hurt – hospital stays, bills, a sick parent away from home - that was awful. My mom, she spent lots of days in the hospital, and...

MG - That would be so very hard for a family...

LS - Yes, and we went to see her, in the Weyburn Hospital, in December, over one week. The week before Christmas, and that was the last I saw my mother. I still have the telegraph.

MG - Oh, you do?

LS - Yes. She died in '39 and I have the telegraph and I still have the postcard from when she arrived in Canada on the "S.S. Montcalm" ...that was in the 1930's – the ship left Hamburg for St. John – she arrived on the "S.S. Montcalm". I can remember her being home here, and had TB in her lungs. She would cough up blood. She was a bad case in those days. Penicillin would have cured her – she was a bad case. What they did was keep them in the hospital under complete rest, no exertion of any kind. So, she ended up in the hospital, and she became so depressed, she became kind of mental – she didn't want to cooperate with anyone. Of course, she was in a strange land, couldn't speak the language.

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MG - From what I hear, TB was one of those ones that could affect your brain as well?

LS - Yes, you can imagine being in her shoes - don't know the people, don't know the language. Like, she was ill, couldn't see any kind of hope and just fell into a depression. I still have the telegram Dad got in the spring – it came in March. Steve Kisell brought it out on horseback on his way home, but you know, later on things got better. I mean in the fifties, my father and I farmed and ranched together and things improved. But, you know, we don't know now how hard it was in those days. We've got it pretty easy. You get into a car now in the winter and go down to wherever you want. In those days, you stayed home and kept the team inside and you had to do a lot of shovelling because sometimes you had to dig out a trail to the main road there, and that was not easy either.

MG - So, Louis, what are some of the lessons – I have been asking this of other people, too – what are some of the lessons your parents instilled in you?

LS - Well, to be thrifty and do your good share of work, and be honest, be fair, be good to your neighbours, and things like that. I know I have had experiences with lots of different people, but the story I should tell is the one about my father and the neighbours to the south here, but I guess I shouldn't bother with that. Dad had a hell of a time with them, they just wouldn't co-operate with anything, you know. Trouble was, the road runs along here and the creek cuts into it, and so there is a gate here, of course. Well, Dad built the house so he had access to the creek here, and dad had a fence, placed along the road here where his land was, and the neighbour didn't have a fence here, so he claimed it. You were not supposed to do that, so of course, his horses and stuff were coming in here, and he and dad even had a fist fight over it!

MG - I wouldn't want to fight him – your dad – even though I have never been in a fight, he looks strong.

LS - Oh, he was kindhearted; he was strong.

MG - He must have just been pushed to his limits to do that, eh?

LS - Oh yeah. The neighbours got together in this shack, and dad as well, and worked out how to settle this, you know, because they figured it would cause even worse trouble. The families all went to school around here and of course, you had to go around the creek and open the gate. Big trouble.

MG - Sounds like they had strong values, your parents?

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LS - I didn't even get to know my mother that well. She was, like she was only around from 1931 when I was born and she died in 1939, so that was not very long. I didn't really get to know her that well.

MG - Part of what I find so fascinating is the stories of the people like your mom and dad, who came and were not only dealing with the land, but also language, culture shock, missing their own family probably back home, and it took real courage to do that.

LS - Yes, well, the biggest courage was their coming to a land where there was no communication – no telephones, no electric power – and being a long ways from anywhere. Maple Creek is sixty miles away from here, and that is, with a team and buggy, a long ways. And like, in the winter, if you got sick or hurt, got a broken bone - to get to a hospital - that was quite an undertaking. They did have a hospital that was in Robsart for a few years. I can't remember the years. It's in our history book, but I can't remember the years.

MG - That building still stands, too, right?

LS - Yeah, it still does. The picture of the grand opening of the hospital is in the history book.

MG - Sometimes I find being out in this country, the environment is so harsh, and unlike Ontario which is a little less in terms of weather. Here it seems like the land almost swallows up these old buildings. Like, the wind and elements just hammer some buildings until they disintegrate.

LS - Well, here in the winter, the wind comes mostly from the west, and that's why buildings lean – constant pressure. There was a fairly big house here at one time. It was a two-storey house. 1917 was when they built it and finished it - and about four years ago lightning hit it, and it just went up in smoke.

MG - Is that one Don Kisell's property?

LS - Yeah, that would be just next to it here, where that was. It was unreal.

MG - So, did your family use Battle Creek as your water source?

LS - Well, we do for cattle and I have a pipeline that goes into the pressure system and then down into the water bowl, and we tap that for flushing the toilet instead of using the cistern water, and you have to haul water for the cistern once every two months to fill it for the house here, but you know, in those days, we

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used to drink water right out of the creek! And we are still here! You hear stuff about that E Coli, but we used to drink water right out of the creek. And there were snakes in there, beaver, muskrat, water bugs, and ducks swam in it, and people swam in it up above.

MG - Tougher bodies?!

LS - Yeah, you got used to it, I guess. But that was all the water we had, and I remember in 1937 when the creek really dried up, there were just potholes!

MG - What year was this?

LS - 1937.

MG - Oh, I have heard other people talk about this!

LS - Oh, yeah. There would be just these low spots, hundreds of fish in there, just for a little while. I remember Dad using a stone boat and barrel and getting the water from the creek and hauling it to the house.

MG - How did they cope when there was no water like that?

LS - Well, some people did have wells – like further north here – in and around Robsart and Consul, there was some wells that produced a fair amount of water. Like this Kompan family, they dug several holes right near that gate near the coulee, and I guess one well did produce a fair amount of water, but I remember Lou talking about chasing the cows down the creek every day in the wintertime - once a day and then back again. Now, here, we just sit back and watch television!

MG - I know, go microwave our dinner.

LS - We don't know how easy we have it now, I tell you. Like then there were accidents, you know. You would get kicked by a horse or whatnot. I know Dad had two or three experiences like that. We would find him and he would be all smashed up or something, and he would admit that it was his fault at times...things would just go wrong sometimes. One time, he took a stick to hit this gopher, and like they had a real nervous horse, Shorty, in the four horse team, and when he heard the "swish", he took off! I remember another time, we used to help dad unhitch when he worked that cultivator with his horse team. One time, somebody, I don't know who, forgot to unhook one nut and when he let the horses go to feed and drink, they dragged the whole thing and, wow, that was close!

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MG - Holy smokes!

LS - Well, that's the way it was, but there are still accidents now with machines. You can back up into something, so it's really a matter of if you are careless, accidents happen no matter where you are. Like for instance, I was christened in Havre, Montana, but in those days there was just a dirt trail leading down there, and that is quite a ways to go to Havre, Montana for church. I think that church is still standing, in fact. My records are down there, and we took a 1921 Dodge car - it was an open top with leather upholstery. He had a lean-to, and he kept it inside here in the lean-to. In fact, parts of it are still kicking around here! Then the dirty 30s hit and everybody made better things out of them. We took the motors out and hitched the team to them! I hope those tough times never come around again.

MG - Wow, I have never heard of that before! So, people would just take the motor out of their car and hitched a team to it?

LS - Yeah, put a tongue in front of it. Oh yeah, you see pictures of it. I remember Dad also made a buggy out of the rear end of that car, like the rear wheels and so on. I remember we went to Senate one time with that thing, and coming back the bearing went out on the one wheel, and we stopped at Wilcox's, and that was late in the day, and I don't remember what happened after that or how we got home. I remember another time we used another buggy and team to get to school there, to Lammermoor School. You know how a buggy is put together – it's got kind of a seat in the back there, and we had nothing to hang on to, really, so if the horse jumped, down you go and hit the ground!

MG - Wow! Big changes...

LS - Yeah, and to survive the thirties, wow.

MG - Sounds like a lot of people from around here went out to BC then...

LS - Yeah, they left.

MG - One of things I am really interested in hearing from people is what do you think the best thing about this life is? Like, when your parents, or you, decided to stay here, what makes this a good life here?

LS - Well, in comparison to other lives?

MG - Well, like, farming here - it's such tough land, so what would you say to

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people who are not from here, makes this such a special place?

LS - Well, some of the more obvious things are you have peace and quiet. There is very little crime – we never worry about burglars, we never lock our doors, but touch wood, maybe someday that will change, but you have room, you have privacy. That means a lot. I dread the thought of retiring and moving into a town or something – you have to be quiet. You can't go out and shoot your gun or anything like that!

MG - Freedom, I guess that is part of what attracted the older generation here, was it?

LS - In part, but I think it was mostly economic. Where they came from, where my dad is from, there was about seven or eight in the family, and what they used to there, they had no money. What little land they had, they divided up. One would get this little two yards of ground and so on. Pretty soon, you run out and you just can't do anything with it. That's why there was a flood of immigration from those countries. It was economics. The land just could not support them, those big families, and then everyone flooded in here. And then they came here to this area - none of them knew what the weather was like, what the productivity would be like. They just gambled and hoped they would come out ahead. It took a lot of guts, you know. No doctor anywhere, there was no...Well, 1914 was when the railway came in, so I guess they had the telegram, but um, boy I'll tell you, to get around, I can remember some of these people walking to Havre and back on foot! I don't know how they could get there from morning until night without having to camp out somewhere out on the prairies, but that was the most common thing, was their sense of adventure. They just took their chances. It took a lot of work.