

Rabbit, Provost, Fox, Fox, Fox

Katie-Jo Rabbit (KJR), Wayne Provost (WP), Charlie Fox (CF), Dan Fox (DF), Jenn Fox (JF)

Q: Katie, tell us a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?

Katie-Jo Rabbit: I grew up on the Blood Reserve. I lived in an area called Lower Standoff. As my mother was remarried, I moved to Bullhorn. Between that I also lived with my father. What's that area called? St. Mary's Dam area-- and also where Uncle Charlie lives. I grew up mainly in southern Alberta. Growing up in southern Alberta, I went to elementary school, Standoff Elementary. I actually went to one year of day school, because when I went to Standoff Elementary it was still considered a residential school. I do actually remember an old nun being a substitute teacher, and a lot of the students treated her very poorly. That was my first memory of school. In school I learned how to play cello and saxophone, clarinet. I did a lot of different instruments while I was there. I was there from Grade 1 to 6. Then I went to Fort MacLeod, which is kind of neighbouring town, for my junior high. In that area I learned that there wasn't a lot of Blackfoot being taught; it was mostly French. Being the person that I was, I always would go; well, of course, I had to go to French class. But I'd always try to speak Blackfoot in that French class. So they took me out of that French class and put me into a study hall, basically detention. From there I learned to speak out at a young age. But part of my aggression was also put into basketball and rugby. Into high school I went to F.P. Walshe and played a lot of rugby there, which I enjoyed, and basketball. My name is on a banner at the school there, which I'm very proud of. Then Grade 9 to 12 I came back to the reserve and attended kind of high school, where I had a big focus on basketball and being a Lady Warrior. Part of my basketball career led me to places like Hawaii. We went down to the States to a lot of places. I was recruited from that school to Medicine Hat College, where I became a Medicine Hat Rattler, so played basketball for Medicine Hat, which was a learning experience. That was kind of my first year off the reserve, living mostly on my own. I had lots of support from both my mom and dad coming to see me and supporting me through that. After my year at Medicine Hat I did not like the town. So I

decided to move on to Grant MacEwan College. I...there for a little bit, but basketball was pretty much done for me and I started focusing on journalism. I did my first two years of a Journalism Diploma at Grant MacEwan College, but unfortunately I was put on the crime beat for my practicum. As a result of that, I had to sneak into a funeral for an East Indian mother who had just lost both her children--no sorry, the husband had lost his wife and his two children to a drunk driver who was actually a police officer. So that was a really big eye opener for me as to what I thought journalism was going to be. It was a very disheartening experience and I thought to myself: I cannot compromise my values for work. So I didn't finish my practicum as a result. The lady that I was studying under was very aggressive: get in their face; get the story. Who cares about the emotional side of things? If it bleeds, it bleeds. Different things like that. I just didn't want to be that kind of journalist. So I stepped back. I lived my life in Edmonton for a while. I stayed there for about five or six years. In that, I ended up going to University of Alberta and worked as a copy shop manager. I really loved that job; it was fun. I took some art classes and from there it led to volunteering at CJSR, the University radio station. I was able to get into interviewing bands, interviewing Indigenous people that I thought were interesting, learning how to promote different things, different events, and that type of stuff. My interviewing skills were put to good use there. I sang a lot of their jingles and a lot of their commercials that I sometimes hear and I'm really proud of. Then I had to return home. Once I returned, I thought I would try again for the University of Lethbridge. I got into a program that actually got me a scholarship to go to the University of Missoula. I thought I was going to be the David Suzuki of the Blood Tribe, and use environmental science and journalism to develop a career from that. It didn't turn out. I think I spent half a year, eight months in Missoula, and I was able to do a genetic study of the Grand Teton bison in Yellowstone National Park. We did a non-invasive genetic study which kept me four months camped out in an isolated area in Yellowstone following a trail of...head of buffalo. That was an amazing experience; I learned a lot. Then from there I found out that in order to work in Canada, if you have any education from the U.S., because I'm a dual citizen, I would still have to take additional schooling to qualify to work in Canada. So I thought, I'm just going to go to Canada and go to school there. So I came back, did three years towards an English Lit degree, and then I just completely burnt out and was just done with school. U of A at that

time was not as diverse as it is now. So it was a really hard struggle dealing with covert racism, systematic racism, discrimination. It was just a constant struggle. Because I was the only Indigenous person in my program, it was a lot to become that token Indigenous person and take on that weight of having to speak out against injustices, speak out against biases, be an ambassador almost for the culture. Anything that came up in history, I had to be the one to always speak to that. It was a lot. While I was at the university, though, I started volunteering at the radio station. I had my own show, called “Aboriginal Voices.” We spoke Blackfoot on the radio; we had people call in. We listened to all different kinds of Indigenous music. It was a really good time. It was the only Indigenous show at that time. When I quit, I thought nobody listened to my show. But I found out that I had three loyal fans; so I was really proud of that. When I started working at the Friendship Centre, I went to an employment centre in Lethbridge and was trying to get some help. It wasn’t as helpful as I thought it was going to be, and I was kind of disappointed. As luck would have it, I ended up getting a job at another employment centre geared toward homeless people, and I started off as a data entry clerk. From the data entry clerk, within a span of four years I became an assistant manager for an organization helping the Indigenous population of Lethbridge. In that capacity I was able to meet my community; I was able to liaison. Because I had gone through the system myself, I knew exactly how to help people help themselves. That was basically my goal – to empower people, to understand that being Indigenous you have a lot of resilience, a lot of strength and power. It might not be recognized in the non-Indigenous world, but decolonizing employment is important because we need to indigenize everything that we do. I was able to do that with the community, and as a result I was very successful at my job. A lot of people would come to me, and it would be generations of families. I’d help out the daughter and the husband, and I’d help out the husband’s mom and dad and the daughter’s mom and dad. I’d help out elders. I’d help out high school students. I started to know families and how the dynamic of the Indigenous population was surviving in Lethbridge. As a part of that, I was developing programs in response to helping them move forward. Then the pandemic happened, I had a COVID life crisis, and I moved on. Now I’m returning to school. I just finished an Indigenous Language Culture diploma and I’m currently pursuing a degree, hopefully back at the University of Alberta, come full circle.

Wayne Provost: Hello. I grew up between the Piikani Reserve and Fort MacLeod. Where I grew up at Fort MacLeod is about maybe a ten-minute drive. So it was always in and out. My early years I went to school on the reserve at the Piikani Elementary and I forget that. I believe those were the first years of day school too. When I started Grade 1 I did part on reserve, and then I switched to Fort Macleod, and that's where I did the majority of my schooling from Grade 2 right up until I graduated. I did some schooling in Lethbridge. My dad went back to school for some education. So there were a couple years where I did Grade 3 and Grade 6 in Lethbridge. That was an experience, just to have that inner-city school mentality and stuff and going back to the farm school. It was kind of different. The family was just myself and two younger sisters. We grew up on a farm, ranch. I did a lot of the work and stuff just being I was the only son. My sisters would help here and there, but it was the majority of me. My early years of everything were just farm life and doing ranch stuff. I really enjoyed it and it was quite the experience. Some of that led up to my first jobs as a young kid doing ranch hand work for local farmers that needed help during the seasons and stuff. At Macleod school I did a lot of basketball, a lot of sports. My father was a basketball player. He was in tournaments and stuff that I always used to participate in as like running the canteen, and sometimes I even had to ref. It was very terrifying, a young 12-year-old boy refing men's tournaments and telling them that they're doing stuff bad. So it was tough, but at the same time I learned a lot and gained a lot of experience through adults playing basketball and then playing against kids. I really gained a lot of experience that way. I played basketball for Fort Macleod for two champion seasons. We won two titles with them, so it was fun. From there I went on to do some schooling, continue my schooling. Then I started working and just getting a paycheque. I wasn't getting paid going to school; so I started working. I worked for about four years for one construction company. Then that company got bought out by a bigger company out of Calgary. So I worked for a company called Wesco, which was for four years, and then they got bought out by this company, Rite-way Fencing. So it was more geared to the fencing, not the construction. Working with them, I had a combination of my farm fencing to kind of like the same farm fencing but in a different capacity to chain link fencing. I started young and I just caught on to it really fast and moved up the ranks really high to become

a senior foreman. I enjoyed that for 14 years, working with them all over southern Alberta just by Calgary to the U.S. border, Cranbrook to Medicine Hat. I had that whole southern Alberta range; I did a bunch of fence all over the place. It was fun, different areas here and there. It was kind of an experience too, being that I was First Nation and I was running a crew with non-Native people. I was the one that had to go do the work and stuff. It was interesting going to certain places. They'd walk past me to my labourer and they said, no, he's the foreman. It was a different challenge, but my work stood up; so they understood the quality of what I did for them and what they wanted. As that got going, around that 14<sup>th</sup> year, I started hitting a peak of where I was going to be, and the challenges weren't coming anymore. The economic turn was getting scarce. A lot of companies were merging. So I was just a liability, I wasn't an asset at the time. So I decided to go back to school, and I went back to school as a mature student. I was twice the age of some of the students that I was going to school with, which was kind of strange. But I kept going with it, and out of it I got a degree at the college, Lethbridge Community College, in Accounting. I kept on going to university, I switched over to university. That's where I was going to do Accounting, but some family problems happened. So I switched my direction to General Business Management and got a minor with Indigenous Governance. That was kind of like in the pandemic where it was switching, and I had to switch to online learning, which was very difficult sometimes because I had some professors that their dialect, it was hard to hear them. It was challenging but I got through it the best way I could. From there, there was a program through the college that they'd have these symposiums. One of them was through CFT7, this organization out of Calgary that helps students get jobs. One of them there I got to interview with Service Canada and I got a job with them, Service Canada out of Gatineau, Quebec, as a program consultant. So I switched from online learning to online work, and I'm currently doing that now since 2021. My second year is coming up in August, and it's not too bad. I might be making a career change, but yeah, that's me: a little bit of a scramble there. So thanks.

Charles Fox: Okay. I was about seven years of age when I went to school. I really wanted to go to school because my sisters would come back home and they taught me how to read and write. I just couldn't get enough of that. So, by the time I went to school at the age of seven to the St.

Mary's Roman Catholic School, which was approximately six miles from our home place, I think about ten minutes after my folks left, I sort of got the gist of what treatment we were going to get. The nuns pretty much just dragged me up the stairs and I had to strip. Then they started cutting my hair. The part I remember the most is there was a stool I had to sit on before they started cutting my hair. Once I was at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, and they had a display of residential schools. I'm sure that the same stool that I sat on--it pivots--,and I'm sure that was the same one I was sitting on at that time. We were in a sewing room and there was the smell of mothballs in the whole place. It really triggers a lot of things for me. So I got a bit of a shock from that kind of treatment to how I grew up, from a really loving, caring home with a lot of self-esteem, a happy-go-lucky kid, to ending up in a place where I was so afraid. I was in shock to sometimes see what happened. I couldn't even cry, the stuff that I seen. So we were at a-- back then they called it beginners, and I kind of got lucky there because we had a band member that was related to me that was teaching us. She could use her language to teach us, and it was really good. I started catching on really fast and I really enjoyed that. Her name was Vena Russell. At the time we were at residential school, we stayed there 24-7 except for the summers, when we got to go home. That went on for three or four years, and it just seemed there was a total change. We got to go home on weekends and it got really slack after that. But a lot of severe discipline procedures. We couldn't speak our language; we had a lot of rotten food. You had to fight every day amongst us. If you didn't fight, you were subject to a lot of abuse from your own brothers. I think you develop a lot of habits, because you had to learn how to survive. So schooling, even though we passed and managed to go from grade to grade, it wasn't a big thing. Everything we were experiencing was really negative. Everything of course was centered around we got as much training about praying, even in Latin. We had to serve mass. For some reason if you made a mistake in the Latin prayer, we got disciplined really good. The disciplinary action came quick with getting hit with something. Most of the time it was a thick ruler, and they didn't use that to hit you on the palm of your hand. They banged your knuckles, and then you can't feel your hand anymore. Same with speaking our language. If you got caught speaking your language, it was quite often there's always a handful that would squeal on you. That was their job, to be out there. So the whole thing was just a real negative experience. When you teach

people about a loving and caring god and all that, then they turn around and treat you with extreme cruelty, I'm thinking there's a lot of anger just developed from that, and the hate for discipline. When I left from there, just seeing a policeman would, I would be calm, but from the time I see a policeman I would be anxious almost like a hundred; it was that instant. You'd be wondering if you were doing something wrong, when in essence you're not doing anything wrong, you just see somebody that reminded you of those nuns and the priests. So the punishment was very severe. They made a punishment so you would not do that. There was a lot of backstabbing. The teachers weren't all that great. You just developed ways to protect yourself. I think you spent most of your time being on guard about a lot of things. We fought for no reason. If somebody thought they were tougher than you, then they would take on a challenge, and if you backed down, then you would get picked on. I got to be a good fighter; so I protected my younger brother and most of my cousins and nephews. I fought for all of them. I have a picture of me in 1959. When you have a close look at that picture, I've got a fat lip and a black eye. So that was my yearbook picture in 1959. From there, the priest thought I worked harder than the students. For a while there I really enjoyed going to school. I mean doing the academic part of being at the school. By the time I was 14 years old, I don't know where the decision came from, but I ended up in a place called College Saint-Jean in Edmonton. It was a French school, and from what I know it was probably one of the best schools in Alberta. It was an all-boys school; I really enjoyed the sports part of it. But speaking French: I still had a little bit of hatred around speaking French, because all the disciplinary action we got was from French people. I think I passed all my grades except for Math and speaking French; so they failed me. I was glad to leave from there; I didn't want to go back there. So I ended up the following year and redid my Grade 9 at St. Francis Jr. High School in Lethbridge, and I stayed in that school. I went from St. Francis to Catholic Central. So we stayed right in Lethbridge and were billeted to different families, all of us, including my younger brothers and sisters. We stayed in different homes and went to school from there. I was playing a lot of sports, basketball and mostly football. I really enjoyed doing that. I recall in my 12<sup>th</sup> year I was offered to play for the College of San Jose in California. The coach that was there showed us if we could make it down there and train for the spring training, that if we made it on their roster of 75 players, they would pay for all our

education. They had good subjects there. But I didn't even have money to catch a ride on a bus, let alone try to get to California in Grade 12. So I went to a lot of people and Indian Affairs, but nobody was going to sponsor me. The boys I played football with, I was a year older than them, and I was a much faster and better player. They all made it. Those four boys that got selected, they all made it on the football team. But I could run circles around them. I was one short of being the most tackles for that year. I enjoyed that a lot, playing football. I went to Lethbridge Community College and enrolled in Business Administration, because all I could see of successful people on our rez was people that worked in the office. Business Administration was kind of big. But after I got into studying a little bit about Economics and Law, Business Law, I just had no interest in that. It just so happened that Indian Affairs introduced a new program called Social Counselling. I got in on that, and into Sociology and Psychology – I just couldn't get enough of that; I really enjoyed that. So I did my practicum with the Solicitor General's department with Adult Probation. When I got my, I think back then it was just a diploma for Social Counseling, we got done with that. It was a good program because it was offered to students across Canada, and I went to school with 15 other students from Manitoba, from up north. The first year university course was geared for Indigenous peoples. After I got done with the college I started working for Gulf Oil Canada just a few miles west of here. I had other jobs. For the summers I did a lot of ranch work, primarily for my older brother, who ran a big herd of cows and horses. Growing up in that area, we had horses and cattle in my childhood years, but my dad was much older when we sold off quite a few of our stock. I helped my brother work and did everything: rode on the tractor plowing fields, combining, baling hay, and working training horses. That kind of led on to other activities like rodeo. I enjoyed that. One of the things about being in high school, I really enjoyed playing basketball. I got on several teams on the rez and we played basketball in these tournaments. They were in the state of Washington, and we went there a couple of times for the North American All-Indian Championship Tournament. Those were really good games. Coming back here, when I was in college we put a team together; we had a really good team. We just dominated that for two years; we never lost a game. So we had a lot of fun. Going to school, that's what kept me in school, playing sports. I think playing sports also curbed me getting into social issues. Then they were introducing alcohol to the rez, and



everybody was using that. But if you're trying to play sports, you can't do both. I aspired to playing basketball for a long time. When I was with Gulf Oil Canada, the men there were telling me, you don't belong here; you need to get back to school. They were always harping on me about that, which I did. But before doing that, I went to Calgary to seek employment on this one occasion, and ended up in a place called Atco Mobile Homes. We were working in a hangar up west by Currie Barracks. For two weeks I was pushing broom, and from there after two weeks I got to be the foreman of the whole floor, because I was the only one who could communicate with immigrants from Czechoslovakia. Around that time, Russia took over some of the country and a lot of the immigrants came to Canada. They ended up in that hangar where I was working, and I was able to communicate with them, and ended up being the foreman of the one whole floor. I really enjoyed that. Some of my friends were also living in the city, and after a couple of years working with Atco I switched to their business that they'd started up. There's five of them that started up a company called Alaskamer Products. They were putting a urethane pump and selling it to the farmers. This pump was a submersible pump and it was a slurry pump that could shoot a lot of manure fields out, clear up big lakes, and stuff like that. We were putting that pump together but it seemed like the man for that product was on the barges on the coast. We couldn't expand to do that, to move to the coast. So we ended up folding up. It was a good learning experience. So a job came up and I applied for that and became a probation officer for the Solicitor General's department in Calgary. I was covering Siksika, Tsuut'ina and Stony, Morley. I did that for about six years, and I really burnt out from that job. They had an employee freeze and I had a caseload of over 200. They wanted to keep me on, but I think it was politically motivated. If there was anything that went wrong in that whole thing, me working for them, there's a lot of things they could've easily fired me for. But they kept me on. So for me to get help, they were sending me to a shrink in Edmonton to help me get over my burnout. But when I got through with that little bit of a leave for six months, I didn't want to go back. I acquired some land; my grandmother gave me some land, and I moved back. I had a little old house, and it burnt to the ground. But there I had a family, a little family, and we eventually moved to where I'm at. I worked for Kainai Industries during that time and going back to university at the same time. With the money I saved, I bought cattle. I was running about 65 head of cows at the time. I

couldn't do all three. So I ended up quitting the university. That was in 1976. So I just stayed with my employment with Kainai Industries. I lost my land base and had to sell out my cows. That left a really bad taste in my mouth. All the people that were working at Kainai Industries were encouraging me to run for council, which I did, and I got the highest vote on council that year, 1978. So I was on tribal council for two years and in that two years I somehow got involved in these discussions to do with our oil, our oil income. The people were coming in to lease on the rez. So I didn't want to just follow how Indian Affairs did that all these years. So, through a lot of discussions amongst all of us, somehow the rest of the council followed my suggestion and we ended up declining those bids for oil leases. Everything was sent to Calgary at an auction there. It was a little bit risky, but the results were that instead of making \$9 million we quadrupled that from all the oil bids. I was there to approve that sale. So we got a big oil windfall. About a week after, the people here on the rez felt that they wanted to get their point across. So they barricaded us in council chambers and wanted us to distribute half of that money. We had offered a bunch of suggestions to them to save money, but people wouldn't step up. I got up and left. Even though they had everything barricaded, I just walked out. So I lost my seat again on council for two years, and in the two years I switched to working for the School District #51. I think I was the first person to work as a Native-school liaison for all the schools in Lethbridge. I really enjoyed that. I ran for council again and when I got back into council the millions we made was all distributed and there was nothing to work with. At least some of the projects that we put together, like BTAP, that forage project, is still going. The potato project went under; the big feedlot went under. This Highway 509, we put that through. A lot of the other things, including Kainai Industries, went belly up. I was on that board when we left that place and it went under. It was quite a learning experience. So, coming back for another two years, we made a few improvements but we didn't have the capital to put together projects. Me being on council on the education committee, we did a big study in the two years. We called it a five-year masterplan, and in that masterplan it was a conceptual plan. When one year's gone, another year would automatically kick in. So the plan was five years. In looking at the reserve here, it's primarily agricultural, but we were not fully utilizing our agricultural potential. You don't see any greenhouses; you don't see any dairy operations; there's no hog operations, poultry, you name it,

ag mechanics. So we tried to set that up at the high school. All the plans and everything were in place. In fact they set up an addition to the school that was doing ag mechanics. We were going to take over the St. Joseph's farm to teach our students. They did that at the onset of the residential schools. They were teaching industrial farming and work like that. We wanted to revert back to something like that, but to help our students at an early level. Every two years when there's a new council steps in, any plans that were done, they just throw them out the door. When the two years came up, some really aggressive people stepped in. I recall being on tribal council, I think I made \$200 more than somebody that was receiving social assistance. But when the younger people came in to the tribal council, they upped their salary to what the band manager would be getting. So that was a lot of money. Then it just became like a lottery to be on council, and it's still like that today. I worked with a lot of the old councillors, and they had really strong principles about how we should do things. But it's not like that today. You don't hardly see any changes on the rez here. In fact, when I was on council there was 75 percent unemployment; 15 percent of our people worked for the tribe, and the rest elsewhere. There's only a handful of people now that run their own operations. Those kind of industries are barely going today. It's not that good. It seems like all we do is respond to social issues today. We're having it pretty tough right now. I don't see anything bailing us out. Our agricultural base is not being fully utilized. When you look at the people who are setting up the school, they think everybody will be university material. But I don't think that's the case. We need some more realistic planning to make things work. But that's just some of my experience on tribal council. I worked for child welfare for ten years. It was not a good experience, because I broke a lot of their policies trying to make things work from an Indigenous perspective. Quite often they took me to the wringer, the managers that we had, and I left there almost in the same way I left with the probation. I was off for six months, and I didn't bother to go back. The cases that I had, some of them were precedent-setting cases in courts. They're still being utilized today, some of the stuff that we changed. When you look at some of the things happening, you would think Indigenous peoples are being treated a little better because of this Truth and Reconciliation that stemmed from residential schools. But I don't think it is; very little is trickling through. This Truth and Reconciliation, there's calls for action there, and people need to utilize that. It's sort of

like the roadmap to help Indigenous peoples get a foothold and for things to start improving again. But it's a really slow process. They're not being fully utilized. Even though there's a lot of work that's been doing that, and you see that in the media, it's not happening as fast as it should. There are a lot of good suggestions there to do with how things would help our people to get ahead. But it's not happening that fast. I worked for the tribe; that's the first time I ever worked for the tribe. This was like for seven years, and I started out in the helping agency with Blood Tribe Health Department as a counsellor. But I ended up being the coordinator for the prevention of violence, alcohol and drug abuse. I did that for five years and it was probably the most stressful job I've ever had, how to convince our people to seek ways to help themselves. Our success rate was very minute. We didn't have the resources to help us. I got sick and quit working in 2014. Today I'm being utilized as an elder for primarily the Government of Alberta and the College of Medicine Hat and the surrounding schools on the rez. They really value my input as an elder and helping them out. They really gravitate to the stuff that we teach, and there's a lot of sincerity around that. People want to know. First Nations people and the stuff that we have to share is very, very valuable knowledge to them. I feel very, very appreciated today in the work that I do. It seemed like when I started, it was with one school; now there's probably about 30 schools that I work with. Not all at the same time, but over the course of this past five years. It's a good experience. So I'll end there for now, and answer any questions later.

Q: Dan, do you want to give yourself a bit of an intro for everyone?

Dan Fox: Okay. My name is Dan Fox. I was born and raised on the Blood Indian Reserve. I went to school at St. Mary's School right from kindergarten to high school. I was just telling my family here: I got kicked out of kindergarten because I didn't know how to struggle. But that was because the nuns, when I went to school there, the nuns were still there from kindergarten to Grade 6. They didn't teach us; they just beat on us. But after Grade 6 I went into junior high, and me and another relative of mine were quite active in just about every little thing. They said we had ADHD or something like that, and they told our parents, we need to discipline these guys. So they sent us to North Battleford, Saskatchewan for one year to an all-boys school. It was called

St. Thomas College. It was a 500 all-boys school, and that's where I grew up fast. I had to learn how to fight the first six months there, because there was two things going against us. First of all, I was Native and the white kids didn't like us. Then the second was, we're Blackfoot and the Crees didn't like us. So we had to fight on both ends. Just about every recess my cousin and I would fight. But it made me grow up, and I saw the outside world at a very young age. Then I came back to school, and they call it high school now. But I went back there to St. Mary's and went to day school. Then, the last four years, I went to high school there and graduated out of there with a football and a basketball scholarship. I played out of Medicine Hat College for the football team. They were involved in the Prairie Junior Football League, and they were called the Medicine Hat Rattlers. I was a starting halfback there for the years that I played there. Then, from there I got an invitation to go try out for U of A Golden Bears football team. I went and I made the final cuts. But that weekend they asked us, they let us go for a weekend. It was Thursday afternoon when they told us who made the final cuts. So they let us go for the weekend and be back Monday. So I came home. It was in August, late August. Crow Fair was happening in Montana just south of Billings. So a group of friends and I all jumped in a vehicle and went to the powwow. But we didn't make it to the powwow; 32 miles north of Billings this lady drove us off the road and we got into a really bad car wreck. Long story short, they ended my football career there playing football. But after that, when I got back here, I started looking for employment at the time; and that was around '79 or '80. I got hired back onto the high school that I went to school at as a counsellor, but I was mostly hired there for football and basketball coach. So that's where we developed a lot of good players from there. We had a lot of players that went straight to university basketball. So for the longest time at St. Mary's School they were called the St. Mary's Warriors. We were probably the number one team in Alberta. We beat some of the biggest teams. We were only a Single A school and there were only less than a hundred students there. We were playing so much basketball they moved us up to 4A basketball, and 4A basketball is high schools that have over 500 students. We dominated that league or that high school for ten-plus years. We won a lot of provincial championships here in Alberta. But after I quit working there in 1985, I moved back into the city in Lethbridge, and I worked on the streets with troubled youth. I was a community youth worker for about three years, and at the same time

I was working also as a native liaison for the Catholic school districts and the public school systems there at the same time when I was working as a community youth worker. That really opened my eyes, working with the youth. While I was a coach at St. Mary's I saw a lot of the hurts and the things that these Native kids go through, especially these dysfunctional families. They get sent there, and a lot of these kids just get pushed to the side. We had some of the hardest-nosed kids that people didn't even want to deal with. We ended up making great athletes out of them. Like my brother said earlier, it was sports that kept a lot of these kids in school. But just like for myself, the St. Mary's School, I guess the educational system was a lot lower than the non-Native system. When I graduated out of high school when I went to Medicine Hat College, I had to do a whole year of upgrading. I was at a Grade 9 English and I was at a Grade 9 Math, and that was pretty discouraging. I could've just walked out when they said that's where my levels were. But I stuck it out, because of sports.

Q: Do you think the lack of education was because the teachers didn't care, or were they just not good teachers?

DF: The teachers were not good teachers. It's not that they didn't care. There were a lot of good teachers there that tried to help out. I'll give you an example. This one teacher: all we did was play cards all morning right until noon. All he did was sleep at his desk. But he was a guy that really helped out in other sports events too. A lot of that stuff that I experienced that I went through in high school I saw all over again when I worked there for 5-1/2 years.

CF: I was just going to add to what he said earlier. The funding that we got for the First Nations schools was nowhere equivalent to what the provincial schools were getting. When a teacher is out there looking for a job and the pay is so much lower than what's being offered as the starting wage, was way below, where would you as an individual go and look for a job? You're not going to go on the rez because it pays so cheap. So that contributed to getting that quality of education that you needed. The reason I know about that is because I was serving on the education committees. We tried to get access to better funding and what not.

Q: Do you think some of the abuse was due to the teachers not knowing how to respond appropriately to kids acting up? So when they compete for jobs in the city they're not considered, so that's where they go.

DF: They didn't put effort into teaching us. If there were troubled kids there, like I said, the teacher that we had, rather than fight with, us he just gave us cards: here you guys, play all morning. Then they just socially passed you right into high school. Also, when I was working there, some of the teachers, the school buses hadn't even left the yard and they were already gone. I'll give you an example. This one teacher, like you said, Raymond High School was one of the toughest high schools around for football. This guy worked there for 8-1/2 years and he never once helped out in the football program. But then he turned around after he got all those eight years of experience, he moved to Raymond, and he was the top coach for ten years at Raymond. Raymond High School was one and still is one of the top football teams there. But at St. Mary's I remember him. He would make fun of the team and say, oh you guys got beat 65-nothing; oh you guys got beat; you guys don't know anything about football. But he turned around and... They hired a lot of. . .

CF: Yeah, and some of them weren't qualified to teach. They were there to get the experience and at the same time try to teach.

Q: Was it disappointing to find out that they hadn't taught you enough to qualify for university?

DF: Well, they encouraged us to continue our education and stuff. But we didn't have the skills; they didn't teach us the skills to do it. In fact, at the time I was there, all they called it was a sports school: go to St. Mary's; you'll get a scholarship. It's just a sports school; they don't teach you education. Plus Native people are naturally talented. You could get a child that's from an abusive home and you work with them on a one-to-one basis and you'll pull the best out of that child and he'll turn around to be one of the best athletes. That alone will help him strive over a

lot of the dysfunctions that he went through in his own home. I saw that a lot because I worked there. I went through high school like that. So I was pretty well trying to help turn things around when I was working at St. Mary's. But, as I went on the streets, the same thing happened. A lot of the kids that I worked with as a community youth worker over the years, when I quit working as a community youth worker back in 1989 or the fall of '88, Kainai Correctional Centre opened on the reserve. It was a minimum security facility and it was open for 24 years and I worked there for 24 years. The kids that I had worked with on the streets were the result of St. Mary's School. Those kids were the ones that just graduated to the streets, then from the streets they graduated to the judicial system, to the correctional system.

Q: What kind of streets – Calgary, Lethbridge?

DF: It was mostly in Lethbridge. When Kainai Correctional first opened up, it was to help the Native people that were incarcerated. Back in the '70s, because of residential school, a lot of the older people just followed suit. The residential schools were run the same way as the correctional centres. So a lot of the people that went to school there fell into corrections. It's just kind of like a domino effect. A lot of the kids that we got were from this area. But after four years of the correctional centre being open, they opened it up to Alberta. We had people from way up north; we had people from Hobbema, Edmonton, Grande Prairie. They sent a lot of people to us from different places. It didn't matter if a guy was from Grande Prairie and a guy was here from southern Alberta, they had the same problems on their reserve: lack of education, lack of knowledge to lead a good life. So they fall into the system. They just graduate from youth homes to group homes and then to juvenile detention centres and then to the correctional centres. Then they send them back to us to Kainai. But that was a good place I worked at; I learned a lot from there. In fact myself, I was able to break down an addiction that I had. I had a strong alcohol addiction. I was a functioning alcoholic until 1996. I was able to start turning the table around because I was working at the correctional centre. All our programs were culturally based and they were all based on our ceremonies and spirituality. I didn't know anything. I didn't even know how to use smudge, sweetgrass or anything like that, until I started working with the



elders. Within that 24 years that I was there, I ended up being able to help out with a lot of ceremonies. We held onto some of the sacred bundles that were passed to the Blackfoot ceremonies. That's where I really gained my inner strength and let go of a lot of the residential school shit that we went through. Like my older brother said, we had to fight. We went through all the abuses that they mention in the TRC. A lot of us went through it, but we held it back; we held it inside. The only way I could suppress that was drinking all the time. But in '96 I went through so many ceremonies that it just naturally wiped all that stuff away. I did a lot of crying; I did a lot of healing. The sweat lodges helped me out. I turned into the real person that I'm supposed to be, and to this day I walk that way of life. I follow that traditional way. A lot of times when I do presentations at different schools or colleges, I always tell them that I'm a recovering Catholic, because of the residential schools that we went to. I even spoke to my mother about it when I told her I was going back to my cultural ways. She was all for it, because she was really strict Catholic. We did everything the Catholic way. But when I went back to my own culture and my spiritual ways, it helped me open up and see a lot better things in life. To this day I can say the stuff that I have developed in my own personal way comes from a strong knowledge of my own cultural ways. Even today, right now I run a bison ranch, and that bison ranch, we don't boast about it. We try to help the community. We help these schools, we help these younger people try to learn about the culture and history and our strong relationship with the natural world. That's what we strive for every day.

Q: Is the bison farm for cultural practices only, or is it for bison burgers at a ballgame?

DF: It's right here; that's what it's all about. It was my mother and I and a few other aunties and a couple of old ladies I'd worked with when I was in corrections. It was health issues. There's so much diabetes and so much cancer on every reserve. You can go down to Arizona and you can go up to Tuktoyaktuk, and they have the same issues. Every reserve, the cancer rate is high because they're eating the western foods, the refined foods. The diabetes, you go to Browning, Montana, two year olds are having type 2 diabetes, just children. It's because they took away a lot of our natural ways of food. That was my issue too, was I really trying to be an athlete but I was eating

all the wrong foods that my body's system didn't like? So I got really sick. I ended up almost having to have a major operation on my stomach. But because of the direction and guidance of my grandmother, my mother and elders, they taught me a way to go back to the buffalo. I bought my first buffalo in 2003 and now I think it's over 20 some years. I still run buffalo, and my kids and grandkids and wife, they all help. We help the community with the elders to ceremony. People come and they get tongues for ceremony; they get blood for ceremony. They use the skulls. In fact, we get our bison robes tanned. The elders, they're in very high demand for bison robes. Everything that we do, every part of that buffalo is used. To this day we try to take that lead role so we can teach it and start trying to bring back the buffalo in a healthy way through healthy eating. But I know the price of meat has gone sky high. Buffalo meat has been so researched that it's one of the healthiest meats around right now. So it's a really high-priced meat. But we just try to share it. We try to share it with the community whenever we can. In fact, when COVID happened, we harvested a couple animals and we helped the reserve; we helped people. We distributed hamburger and a lot of stuff to the elders, especially the bone broth. Any part of the buffalo was used during that time to help the community. But still there's a lot of resistance still coming from there.

Q: From the community?

DF: Yes. Back in the early '90s the Blood Reserve had a big fallout politically. The one chief tried to bring buffalo back onto the reserve, but some of the councillors were against him because he didn't go through the proper channels of acquiring the buffalo. So they had a big political fight. The chief got ousted and there was fist-fighting on the reserve. Clans were at each other's throats. So the buffalo got a bad name; nobody wanted the buffalo. You ask some elders; we're going to bring the buffalo. Oh I don't want those damn animals here because I just got beat up because of them; my brother got beat up; my auntie got slapped around. Because there were different clans fighting against each other. So the buffalo were again tossed to the side. People didn't even know that I had bison for the first 10 or 15 years. People would say, well, let's bring the bison back. I'd go to community meetings and they would say, well we haven't had bison

since the last 1800s. But they didn't even know that I had a herd here. We ran about 80 head of buffalo until two years ago. The drought hit really bad here in southern Alberta. So now we have about 40 breeding cows right now and two good bulls. So a lot of the stuff that we go through happens amongst us Native people. There's that lateral violence and all that jealousy that happens, and we're our own worst enemy sometimes. Like Charlie said, he had some ideas way back in the day where the reserve could move forward with all these millions of dollars coming to the reserve through their oil. But the people, all they wanted was instant gratification. They got \$2,000, \$3,000 or \$4,000 and that money was probably spent within a couple days. It all went to Lethbridge, Fort MacLeod, and Cardston; nothing came back to the reserve. So it is bad politically right now. I feel there's nothing moving forward right now on this reserve. You look at it right now: we've been averaging two to three deaths a week through the opioid crisis. These people live in despair; they don't have anything to live on. So they turn to drugs and anything that they can get a hold of to suppress their negative feelings.

Q: Do you think that despair is related to work opportunities in the area, or is it more from dislocation from cultural teachings?

DF: Historically they disrupted all Native North American Indians' way of life by taking away their way of life, the spiritual part. Like I said, I was a functioning alcoholic. I would've never changed until I went back to the basics, learning the basics of our cultural ways. It started turning my own way of life around. It wasn't despair for me; it was all the hidden stuff that happened to us. Now there's four or five generations of residential school. Just like Charlie said, the government, now with the TRC, there's very little change to make things happen. They're just now going to start teaching it in the elementary and the school systems. If we don't know where the root of the cause came from, we will never change. Like I say, it's just a domino effect. It gets worse with every generation.

Q: Do you, Charlie and Dan, find that there are similarities of experiences in terms of students turning on students, Indigenous on Indigenous violence, when you attended day school in Standoff?

KJR: There was definitely attitude of if you stood out in any way that you'd be deemed like trying to kiss ass or like being a teacher's pet, that type of stuff. I know for myself I got teased a lot because I liked to read, and I was into Science and things like that. I got picked on a lot for it, especially because I played instruments and did other things. That was kind of the mentality when we were there.

DF: I think too that a lot of smarter individuals were bullied a lot. They were quiet and they didn't have a lot to say. A lot of the homeless people, they're smart as a whip. Some of them are really smart people; they're just put in the wrong situation and sometimes those different groups hindered them as individuals to try to strive harder. So I know there were a lot of different gaps like Katie-Jo was saying, and you were ousted because of certain things that you said or did. It caused a lot of rifts in different areas of your age group. Especially some people, mature students, would go back to school and they would have problems because they didn't have trouble going back to school when they were younger, and they have kids and stuff like that. So there's a lot of different generational knowledge gaps.

Q: Is the bullying a symptom of these generational effects?

DF: Look at Charlie. He went to school back in the '60s. That's all he did, was learn all that stuff. Like you said, even your own cousins and your own brothers you'd have to fight. Twenty some years later, I went through the same shit. My daughter is third generation. She went through the same stuff. But us guys right now, my grandsons, we're not going to send them to rez schools. I don't want them to go through that same stuff. I want them to learn a healthy environment where school is meant to get you a good life. I have no confidence in the reserve school systems right now. Like Charlie said, the government doesn't put money to the same level

of teaching out there. I know back in the '60s and '70s that St. Mary's School over there, people that graduated out of there were going straight to university, like Leroy Little Bear and all these other guys. A lot of these guys became teachers and became successful people. But then after that things went down in the '70s when I went to school. This one cowboy was a teacher; he'd come in drunk on Monday mornings and he'd just put his feet on his desk and go to sleep and just lock the doors and say, you guys do whatever. That wasn't teaching. I'll give you another example about how the reserve runs. There's Cardston, Mountain View, Pincher Creek, Fort MacLeod, Lethbridge, McGrath, and Raymond. You go to these places in the summer on any Saturday morning, and in all their playgrounds there'll be soccer, there'll be slow pitch, there'll be baseball for young kids maybe from four to ten years old. Seven o'clock in the morning all the teams would be playing. In the afternoons, the older generation, the teenagers, they come out and fill these playgrounds, the gyms. There are basketball camps, football camps, everything going. Then late at night these teenagers and these adolescents are so tired. They've been part of a team; they feel good about themselves. You come to the reserve on a Saturday morning. There's six gyms on the reserve; they're all locked. There's a skating rink that's locked. Nothing's happening. You don't see kids playing around. There's no recreation, no sports happening. But 2 o'clock in the morning you drive through the townsite at Standoff, the small community at Moses Lake, the Laverne community here – little kids four to adolescence are all walking around at 3 o'clock in the morning trying to find activity. It's mostly the bad stuff that they're looking for. So you can see a big difference between the reserve activity and the non-Native activity. That's why there's so much alcohol and opioid abuse right now on this reserve. That's why all these young people under 25 are dying on the reserve.

WP: And that was one of the things, like I said, I attended school for the first part. My parents knew that some of that stuff might come along, because they've seen it as they grew up. So that's why I went to MacLeod School. When I went to MacLeod School I had a different point of view of different activities. Like Dan was saying, I was more privy to the softball, soccer, and baseball on weekends and stuff. I tried harder there. But still I was a part of the reserve. I still had cousins and everyone else that would go to the reserve schools. The dynamic was very different growing

up, but yet I still stuck to the stuff that I was taught in how to approach different things. That's how when I went to work I approached it with a happier... And I do think because I went to an off-reserve school I was part of that mentality, but I did see it in some of my friends at school. They were not pushed to try that. I knew they were good players. Some of the time I wanted to play on the high school team so I would have more Natives playing with me and stuff. But they just didn't have the drive and confidence in themselves that they could do it.

DF: I laughed when I went to Medicine Hat College. When I first walked in through those hallways, when I walked down the hallway, all the non-Native students were walking alongside of me like, what's this Indian person doing here? They're all just kind of walking. I just cleared the hallways. I felt so bad; I just could've walked right back out and gone home. But because I had some good big brothers that told me, if you come back home I'm gonna kick your ass, and other coaches and my parents, they told me not to fall into that way. But once they found out I made the basketball team, the football team, the Medicine Hat Rattlers, everybody wanted to be my friend. I'd go in there and people were, can I help you with this? Can I help you with that? We were the heroes of the college. But we feel that prejudice and stuff that happens in these schools.

Q: Is there anything else as far as the intro goes? It's Jenn's turn, I guess.

JF: I was born in Edmonton and I lived there until I was seven. I started my elementary journey on the west end of Edmonton. Then we moved to a little town called Rimbey just by Ponoka. Once my grandfather got sick, we moved in with them and kind of became a multigenerational family for a little while. I went to Rimbey Elementary School for the remainder, from Grade 2 to Grade 6. Then in Grade 7 we moved back to Leduc. My dad at the time worked in Nisku. So he was commuting to Nisku that whole time for work; he was a master electrician. Then, for junior high and high school, I went to, actually for junior high I went to a private Christian school through Grade 7 to 9; then Grade 10 and 11 I went to Leduc Composite High School. My dad passed away. So then we moved to Lethbridge after his work accident, as my mom's family was

down here. So I finished Grade 12 here. My first job was the summer after Grade 10 I worked with a contracting company called Petro Contracting. My mom was a day home; so she knew this family that had their own contracting business. They needed some help with the book work. So I was literally inputting invoices for them all summer and earning money towards a student exchange in Germany that I went on in Grade 11. I spent six months in Germany during my Grade 11 year.

Q: Were there other students who also went on that exchange?

JF: There were, except we were all spread all over Germany. We were all in individual host homes. We all flew from Calgary, no one flew from Edmonton airport at the time to Frankfurt, and then from Frankfurt we just disbursed into our assigned host families.

Q: Were you the only one of the group who had worked to earn their own way?

JF: I think so. My family was definitely in a lower-income bracket than some of the other kids that were participating. But I think I felt a sense of accomplishment for having earned a lot of that money myself. That's how I was raised, that if you wanted something you had to earn it; it wasn't just going to get handed to you. So then I did Grade 12 in Lethbridge after we moved. Through there I was able to go to Japan for three weeks with the Japanese class. There were some of us that went with the volleyball team that went as kind of language translators for them. That was a short little exchange and that was a group trip. It was a lot of fun but definitely a different experience than being in an individual host family sort of thing. Then for a year after I graduated from high school I moved to Calgary. I attended some courses part time at Mount Royal but wasn't quite sure. I was thinking of getting into Engineering but found it was very, at the time, very masochistic. I was not a strong enough person to advocate for myself as a woman at that point, and ended up meeting the father of my older two children and got married young. I was 20, and ended up moving back to Lethbridge. I had my oldest son and then started at the University of Lethbridge. I originally started off in Management Accounting, but after one

semester I switched into Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. After doing two years of that, I switched into Social Work and completed my Bachelor of Social Work through the University of Calgary but at the U of L campus. In the meantime, I had had my daughter. So I had two children under the age of five when I finished my degree. I worked in social work from 2005 until 2014. I had a lot of different life experiences along the way. I spent a lot of time working with the homeless population in Lethbridge that were addicted and had severe FASD. A lot of them had come from the foster system, and the system kind of failed them along the way. But I got to a point where it was too hard to leave work at work, and I was bringing it home with me all the time. So I decided that I needed to change careers just for my own mental health, for my family, so that I could be more present for my own kids. So in 2015 I actually went back to school and went to the Lethbridge College and did my Agriculture Science diploma. At that point I moved out here in 2015. So I was commuting every day to school. Being mom, I was still bringing my kids to the Lethbridge schools at that point – driving them every day, then going to school, then picking them up and coming home. A two-year diploma took me three years. I was fortunate enough to find a student position with Agricultural Financial Services at that point in between my second and third years, and found a really good group of people that I really clicked with. Once I graduated in 2018 I was looking to see if they had a permanent position available. I started with them as a field adjustor or crop adjustor. So I was going out to farmers' fields doing plant counts and checking hail damage for insurance purposes. Then in September of 2018 an office position came available, which I took. As an adjustor, I was traveling the whole province. So there were times where I'd be gone for two weeks at a time. With kids, I leaned a lot on Dan. When the office position came up I'm like, yeah, I'll take it, because that means I get to stay home. So I was still commuting to Lethbridge every day – that's an hour drive from here – working there from 2018 to 2020. Then when COVID hit March of 2020, the opportunity came up for a promotion, but it also meant that I was driving to Taber every day. That's an hour and a half. But the increase in income was such that I couldn't turn it down. With the promise that they would try to find me a position closer to home as soon as one came available, I took the position in Taber. I worked out of Taber for ten months. So it was a lot of driving.



Q: Were you then able to find something closer?

JF: I now work out of the Claresholm office. I've been out of the Claresholm office now since January of 2021. I'm now a relationship manager of insurance. My role has progressed; my status in that role has progressed, and now what I'm working towards is helping the lady that teaches the whole province of employees. I'm not helping her helping teach, so that's kind of where I see the future going a bit.

Q: What is a memorable work experience for yourself in Alberta? Wayne, you mentioned that when you became a foreman, you had to work with some non-Indigenous people. Were there growing pains for that, or did they have understanding of Indigenous relationships?

WP: Yeah, they understood Indigenous relationships. A lot of them were from the area. When I came on, there was uncertainty if I was going to keep the job. Some Indigenous people will only work so long, and they're not committed. But coming from the background of what the job was, which was construction and fencing and labour, I just started doing stuff where I was working for a ranch hand where I was doing all the fencing and doing ranch work. So going into this construction I was just like a pig in mud. I was just doing the stuff I needed to do. Some of the foremen would just click in to me; they'd give me these responsibilities, and I'd just take it and run. So they understood that my skin colour wasn't the fact of the matter; it was my work. I was able to stand above it. I tried to get other Indigenous friends and family to come in and work.

Q: I'm picking up sound from Dan's mike; they're very sensitive.

WP: Yeah, so doing that I excelled really far to the point where I was training people, even non-Indigenous workers. I grew really quick, really fast, because of my background of the work experience with a non-Indigenous farm owner that lived just off the reserve. I learned a lot of practical knowledge through cattle work through him, and how to do different things here and there. But at the same time, the duties of running tractors, farm fencing, and all the other stuff, I

knew it as I grew up. So the transition was really easy for me, even though it was still a taboo thing – oh you have a Native working for you. There were connotations when I would do something wrong that I was a Native. I know that one of our trucks broke down and we had to bring it to the Calgary branch. We brought it there and they said, oh it's because of your Natives, the way they're driving. He said no; it's actually a white guy's truck that's broken down; they don't use that vehicle. So I was kind of geared to where I'm always going to do something wrong. I really had to prove myself and stuff like that, and I did. So, when I moved on to go to school, I knew I could prove myself that way, and I had that confidence.

Q: What about you, Charlie?

CF: I wanted to say that growing up in our community here, my father was a very hard worker. I wouldn't really call it work, because a lot of the stuff and how my dad taught us to work was in a really good atmosphere. Growing up, in my early years, even though I grew up in a house with no amenities, the way my father treated us through songs growing up and hearing our Blackfoot name and all that praise we got really made a huge emphasis on our self-esteem at an early age. I think if it wasn't for that, I think I would've succumbed like the rest of my brothers and sisters. They're no longer here. The residential schools pretty much killed their spirit. But my father instilled this work atmosphere in a good way. The way he talked to us all the time, it was always with kindness. We were working on a barn roof one time when I was six or seven years old and he said, there's five of us sitting up here. We know you're the fastest runner. Why don't you run to the house and pick up this hammer? So I got all that praise, not only from my father but his hired hands and my brothers too. So the work that we did was always good, was always a lot of fun, especially with my mother being a really good homemaker. She provided us; we didn't have a lot of things, but she was a really good homemaker, great meals. We had chickens and horses and cows, and we did a lot of work around. I knew how to work at the age of seven before I went to school; I knew how to do a lot of things. A lot of those work ethics and how we did things came from my father and my mother. We had good work ethics because we enjoyed that. I enjoyed working on the ranch with my brothers and whatnot. But if you're in an agricultural

environment today, it just takes one guy to farm so many thousands of acres. In the past, it wasn't like that. Everybody worked together to get a good crop. It required a lot more people. A lot of the transitions that the tribe went through had an effect on us.

Q: Do you think that technology has kind of separated the community a bit?

CF: Yep, yep.

JF: My son got scouted for the football team because of his big shoulders, and I swear it's from tossing bales.

DF: Yeah, that kid can work. I'm at the age now where about 40 bales and I'm stiff for five days. He loads 40 bales and he doesn't even seem sore the next day.

Q: At what age do you start to feel those bales?

DF: Twenty years ago, I was telling my wife, one day I loaded that trailer four times, and there are 420 bales in every load. I loaded that all day. I just took my time loading bales and stacking them. I said, today I can't even load 40 bales and the next day I have to go to a masseuse to work out my aching body.

Q: Is baling still a hand-bombing experience?

JF: Especially if you're making small bales, yeah.

Q: What is a small bale versus a large bale?

JF: A 70 or 80 pound bale versus a 1400 pound round bale.

Q: Are those round bales the bushels?

JF: No, they're just called large rounds. They look like large Wheaties out in the field.

Q: I knew an old guy who used to call them bushels.

JF: Most grain crops are measured in bushels. Bales are measured in pounds; so I'm not sure why he would be calling them.

DF: We still do it because there's a lot of guys that own horses. So we still carry the small bales.

JF: They're easier for transporting.

Q: Is rodeo work something that a young person can make a living at, or is it more of a hobby?

JF: I have a sister that trains horses. She doesn't do rodeo but she does the rating shows. It is definitely a side gig, as much as she'd like it to be fulltime. She earns a living wage with a car salvage place.

Q: Is she in northern Alberta?

JF: She is, yes. She lives and works out of Leduc, so central I guess.

Q: What do you consider northern Alberta?

JF: From here Leduc is northern, but having grown up in Edmonton, it's central.

CF: There's a lot of differences. I had one grandson that lives in Pocatello, Idaho, and he's a pro rodeo cowboy. He does that fulltime.

Q: How much money does that involve?

CF: There are so many variables in pro rodeo these days. If you're mounted good, and now rodeo really came back. It's now what they call Cowboy Channel. You open your TV and you can see all the standings. You can get caught up on who's doing what. If you go to a rodeo now in Texas, it's a sold-out crowd now. Those cowboys down there, they make a cool million in a year. The purse is so much higher and there are a lot of sponsors. My grandson just started into that, and he's winning just about every other rodeo. He hasn't won a big one, but he's placing. There's a trick to that when you're starting--if you can just be consistent winning all the time. That's what he's doing right now.

Q: Is he placing in the top 10?

CF: Depending on which rodeo you're at. Some places have six places; some amateur rodeos only have up to three places.

Q: In North Battleford I visited the Saulteaux First Nations, and they had Indian relay races. Is that an event that goes on down here as well?

WP: It's an extreme sport right now and it's really growing. It's really big in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Just in the last five years it's come here into Alberta. But the U.S. Blackfeet are big-time into it. They go to meets where there's \$10,000 purses. I've got a friend down there, him and his grandkids just make a living out of that all summer long. They come up to Calgary Stampede. They were kind of against them for a while because they were the top team in the U.S. They won last year and they won the big races in Billings, Montana. So when they tried to come here to compete here, they sanctioned them. He said that wasn't fair, because all Indian tribes are Indian tribes in North America. So they eventually allowed them to compete at the Calgary Stampede, and they won the Calgary Stampede.

Q: Does sanctioning mean that you can't participate?

WP: Yeah. Because they said, you're Americans, and he said, no we're Blackfeet tribe. Blackfeet tribe is Piikani, ...Bloods, Siksika, and Piegan.

Q: Is it difficult for the Blackfeet south of the border to carry on with other communities?

WP: The Americans, our brothers, the U.S., they're really patriotic. They compete against us, especially when we play basketball. If we beat them, it would be a total disaster in their community. For us it's just a game to go there and communicate with them. When we went down there to play, sometimes at night we'd try to communicate and be part of the crowd. We'd end up with guys trying to fight us, trying to kick us out of their community. But when they came across here we'd roll out the red carpet for them and treat them special. We wouldn't beat on them. So there's always that Canada and U.S. jealousy thing. . . .

Plus they lost a lot of their culture. They come across here into the Blood tribe, and the people here are generous and very helpful to bring some of the sun dance rituals back to them. The difference between the Blackfeet in Montana and the Blackfoot here in Canada, over there when they have their ceremonies they say it in English. None of them can speak Blackfoot. But here in the tribe we sing our own songs; we pray in our own language. Over there they have to listen to a tape first and then try to sing that song. The Blood tribe was considered to be one of the strongest tribes that held onto their ceremony. They hid it back in the '40s and '50s. My mother was telling me from Waterton down to Lethbridge along the river they held it in different places so the Indian agents wouldn't find out, because it was outlawed.

Q: In North Battleford I met someone who was teaching the breaking down of buffalo in schools, to show the kids what each part meant. Does anything like that happen around here?

JF: We kind of do that with our harvest. In October every year we kind of open it up to anybody who would like to attend. We've had kids from the age of two all the way up to elders that are almost 90 years old come out. The old ladies have taught the youth what each part is for. They've taught them how to clean the guts, and by the time the harvest is done the only thing left in the field is the grass from the inside of the stomach. The rest of the animal gets used.

DF: We have elders from South Dakota, elders from Winnipeg, elders from up north, elders from B.C. come, but our own tribe doesn't support us because of the jealousy that happens. They think we're just trying to show off with the buffalo and stuff.

Q: Do you see a way around that?

DF: What needs to be done for them to start seeing it is we have to be persistent and not let that go. A couple of elders that always just laughed at it – oh Dan, you're just playing that part – finally he was able to come, and he was the leader of the Horn Society and participated right from morning to the feast. Three months later I saw him and he was saying, Dan, that was a ceremony in itself; that whole day was a ceremony. I'm still feeling that high energy, I'm still pumped. I was able to work with the buffalo, I was able to work with the elders and work with the old ladies. We had laughter; we had a feast. My mother taught my family, yes, we always give back. When we have our feast, we give our elders and our visitors little gifts.

JF: We always end the day with stew and bread and berry soup and a giveaway. The members of the community that come always enjoy it. It spreads by word of mouth that way. It's the people in power or people in influential positions who are the ones that are the naysayers.

Q: When you opened up the harvest to other individuals, did it get easier as more people participated?

JF: Sometimes it's easier when there are less people, speaking as a person that has tried to coordinate everything. But it is amazing to see, like we've had as many as 150 people. Everybody wants to get in and try it. It's amazing to see that thirst for that knowledge.

Q: Is it difficult sometimes to involve everyone when there's 150 people?

DF: It's like all ceremonies. If there's a sweat lodge happening or a pipe ceremony happening in Arlene, Montana, the word will go out. It's up to the individual. If I hear of a sweat lodge going on in Montana or a pipe ceremony, it's gonna be my personal interest to get there to be a part of it. That's what we do with our harvest. We don't put it on Facebook; we don't advertise it. It's through word of mouth. A lot of people say, oh Dan's just having a harvest. But when they do come, it really opens their eyes.

JF: The biggest thing: we've changed how we handle our animals a little bit when there's so many people, just in terms of the safety aspect. When he does the actual shooting, we keep them at a distance. Then, once the shooting is done, then we allow them to come and be part of it. So it's been a learning experience for us as well. We did have one year where it got quite dangerous just because everybody was pushing. The bison pick up on that energy. So they start running around a little bit more.

Q: How many are harvested?

DF: One year we did ten.

JF: But on average, two to three animals at a time.

Q: How much meat do you get from that?



DF: A lot of people buy the animal a year prior to, because we harvest our animals from 18 to 30 months, maybe a year and a half to three years old. That way, the meat is at its prime. That's the recommended time. But we've put animals down at 10 and 14 years old, and they're still the same quality of meat.

JF: Once it's dressed out, we usually get around 600 pounds of meat off of one animal.

DF: And a family will buy it prior.

JF: What often happens is the older part of the family will purchase a bison and then they'll distribute it amongst their family.

Q: And they don't have any qualms with the cultural knowledge, like inviting people that are not going to get the bison?

JF: They're usually there to take part.

Q: Are they locals?

DF: Locals make up almost 50 percent of the people.

JF: They either met Dan through work or a family member through work, like they've met Charlie through his work with the schools. It's been a network, kind of like six degrees of separation.

DF: We have a popular family member that is a retired Queens Bench judge. He never misses; he's here every year. He has friends that come out. Sometimes we do ceremony here too. We get our faces painted or we'll get transfer of...the buffalo rock to whoever requests it. Naming ceremonies.

WP: Naming ceremonies are a big thing. I've got a video on my laptop I can show you; it's about five minutes long. It literally talks about the whole harvest and it shows pictures of the ladies. All us men do is just shoot the animal and we hoist it up and they harvest the blood, and they take over. We're not allowed to help.

Q: Is the idea of the men stepping back a cultural thing?

JF: Traditionally I think the women were the ones that took care of the animal. They were the ones that tanned the hides and took care of the meat. It's been a learning process for me too, because I'm as white as they come. And yet I don't feel white anymore, if that makes any sense.

DF: The community doesn't see her as white.

JF: I often feel out of place sometimes in conversations, especially if I'm in a room with non-Indigenous people that don't have contact with that culture, just because I don't fit.

DF: Even my little grandson, he's seven years old, and we were getting everything ready. What happens is we have a breakfast from 7 to 9 here, and all the people that usually come, they come and they have breakfast and we just all gather and socialize. Then from 9 to 11 we have a teepee set up here and elders do a smudge for the day, and if anybody wants to get their faces painted. At 11 o'clock we go out to the kill site, go out to the paddocks. We field dress the animals out there, and it's usually done by 5. Everybody comes back here at 6 and we have a feast here until 9 o'clock.

Q: Is this line of work what you consider your job?

DF: It's not a job; it's just our way of life. My mother was the one that headbanded everything and started us. She showed me the iniskim ceremony and we've been doing that ever since that

first year that I shot an animal. It was a disaster. Then she did the iniskim ceremony, so every year after that. She was the one that gave back to the community, especially after we had the feast. She was always giving blankets and tobacco.

JF: His connection with the bison, though, has led to him doing school presentations and presentations for different social workers.

Q: Did you say your mom was the headband?

JF: She was the matriarch.

Q: Is that a Blackfeet word?

CF: It isn't really a Blackfoot word but in essence that's what it is.

DF: She headbanded; she took the lead role, took the lead role to teach us what to do and how to give back to the community and how to invite the people and show them this was our way of life; this is how we're supposed to be healthy. Teach the young girls how to take the intestines and what to use: the tongue, the heart, the intestines. How to boil them, how to cook them for ceremony. Then at the end, show them that they're appreciated by giving them a feast feeding them back. At the end of the feast she would take out piles of blankets and little gifts and give them to the people that came from far. That's just our way. That really unites everybody and has that close community feeling. When people walk out of here, they'll call us three months later and say, Dan, I still feel good about the ceremony. I'm still feeling that connection you guys have with the bison and your culture.

Q: Are ceremonies being revitalized around this territory?

DF: They're still running the same way. It's just that they used beef cows in their ceremony. They used beef tongues;, they used beef blood; they used beef hides.

JF: The ceremonies were never lost here.

DF: But now we brought the buffalo back, and they're the original ceremonial animal that they used.

CF: I think to some extent our ceremonies are coming back. When alcohol was introduced to us in the early '60s, there was nobody interested in our ceremonies. The group that held those bundles and sacred items did not transfer them to the next group for a period of about 24 years. What happened was when things subsided a new group was formed. It's a natural organization for organizing process that happens... to be the caretakers of these sacred items. So the group that holds onto them has to agree to transfer them and install them in ceremony. It's a lot of preparation; a lot of things come into play. So the next group that had those items had them for 14 years, and then after that it was like five years, and now it's almost like every five years. One group had it for ten but they were just demanding to keep holding onto them. But I wouldn't be surprised if they held them for two years, because there's a lot of people requesting to be caretakers. The interest is coming back. The young people have their own societies, and they have their ceremonies at the sun dance. I have a little granddaughter; she's 14 years old, and she's part of Brave Dog Society. There are 250 of them in that society. They do the security in the work, firewood, and what not, at the sun dance.

Q: You mentioned that it's not advertised on social media. Do you think that to do so would undermine the sacred value?

DF: My mother's statement on that was, don't contaminate these; don't contaminate it, don't get political.

JF: Don't make it about the money.

DF: No monetary. This animal was brought in to be respected, and that's what we do. That's all we do. If anybody comes and wants to be a part of it we tell them, as long as it's not politically used, yes come. It's like ceremony. If you go to ceremony, you can't take pictures of ceremonies.

CF: I just want to say too that in this case, Dan has brought it this far. I would venture to say that there isn't any other group that runs it like he does. Others are in there for the money. They don't control their herd, they don't spend as much time as that. They're... Our brothers to the south, the Blackfeet, they got a lot of buffalo. And the Crows too. They don't take care of them as much as he does. Very seldom they'll have those celebrations, because they're selling off theirs for profit. The way he's doing it is how we did that thousands of years ago. It's a community thing, a clan thing, and this is how it's all shared.

Q: Do you think they taste different in different regions? I've heard of some individuals who eat bear, and bears that feed on blueberries taste differently. Is there a difference in buffalo taste depending on what they eat?

DF: Yes, there's this lady that's a well-known biologist or environmentalist. She's travelled the world and she's gone through Montana. She said, I've tasted a lot of bison through the U.S. and everywhere she's gone. She said, a lot of the bison that are fed oats and grain products and molasses so they could put weight on, she said a lot of times some of it has a little bit of a bitter taste; some are gamy; some are hard. But the way we do it, our animals are literally stress-free.

JF: They're grass-fed, grass-finished, just how nature intended them to be.

DF: We don't load them up in a trailer to bring them to an abattoir to get them put down, because just loading them up and putting them in a trailer, by the time they get there they're all bruised up because they're banging in the trailer and fighting. Here they're eating and they're in

their natural element. The best thing that I've been taught by other people was the best thing, the healthiest animals is the water that they drink. Our animals very seldom use dugout water.

JF: We haul water.

DF: All our water is healthy water. We bring in the best water for them. This lady that travelled the world and travelled the U.S., she calls back and she buys bison only from us, because our bison has the best flavour and taste.

Q: Where do you get the water?

DF: We've got our own water systems on the reserve. It's all natural water. Right on my property here...

JF: We've got a water aquifer that runs right underneath about 120 feet down.

DF: It's 115 gallons per minute.

CF: The best water you can get.

Q: Are we on the reserve right now?

JF: No. If you just cross the bridge to the east, then you'd be on the reserve.

CF: About a half mile down the highway is the bridge.

JF: Across the river is the reserve. So we're just right on the edge of it.

Q: Where do the buffalos graze?

JF: On the reserve.

DF: About 15 minutes east of here. We have 218 acres on the one lot.

JF: And 197 on the other.

DF: And 197 on the other lot. So we have two small herds.

Q: Do you ever have trouble with vandalism or with people shooting at your herds?

JF: They haven't shot our animals but they have cut our fences and opened gates.

DF: Run through our fences.

JF: With vehicles.

Q: Does it occur often?

DF: When I first started, about the first four years I used to get up 6 o'clock in the morning. One of my family members would call, hey there's a four wheel drive chasing your buffalo around in the field. These young kids would come in there with their four-wheel drives and start chasing them around, taking pictures, and literally vandalizing. But then we started locking our gates and we did away with the barbed wire, because we had barbed wire fences. Now we have five or six feet of...wires to keep the two-leggeds out.

Q: Is that the type of wire they have at Elk Island?

JF: Yeah, it's like game fence.

DF: But it's not eight feet tall; it's only five or six feet.

Q: So it's not an issue anymore?

JF: Not as often, not as often for sure.

[ END ]