This is Elizabeth Ross and Marnie Chic. The date is March 28, 1983, and we are in the home of Winny Purvis.

Mrs. Purvis, when and where were you born?

I was born in Clandeboye, but I have lived most of my life in Selkirk.

What was your association with the S.S. Keenora?

My dad was a captain, and we were always interested in boats.

How many trips did you take to Kenora?

My dad was the first captain on the S.S. Keenora after it started to run. It didn’t originate in Selkirk. My sister and I went out with him and it was mostly, well, it was a trial run. You know, if anything happens we will all go down together. So we were quite happy to go. And there was not a wave on the water, it was just as clear as glass and we had just a wonderful time.

Where did it depart from?

From the Selkirk dock, down where the Northern Fish Company has their office, where the big boat leaves from now. The Lord Selkirk. They had an office down there, and they had a fish shed, and all the fish would come in, and the boats would land in their designated spots. They brought fish in from other boats. That would be where the S.S. Keenora would be Mondays and Fridays.

What was your destination?

Well, it was Warren’s landing when we went on the long trip.

How long were these trips?

About what time of day would you leave?

Well, the S.S. Keenora went at about six at night and it came back Friday morning, early. Our family was always keen on getting down… when the boat blew we were as fast as we could getting over that bridge. There was a railway bridge. I don’t know if it is still there or not. A train bridge you know, going down to the docks, it was all open underneath.

What time would you get back, about? Would it be the next day or would it be that night? Which do you mean?

Well, okay, if you left at six- it would come in Friday morning at six and that would be the end of the long trip. Just a Monday to Friday trip. Then they would go out Friday afternoon and come in Monday morning again. That would be the shorter trip, which was less expensive. A lot of people would like just going to Berens Rivers.

Did you ever leave the boat? Did it stop periodically along the way?

Oh yes, we stopped every few hours you know. We would stop at every place along the way. The first would be Gull Harbour and we would go along to Madison Island and to Berens River. Sometimes to George Island, but that was more a stop in the storm, unless they had passengers for there. It was a small island with a lighthouse on it in the wider part of the lake. Then it was an open stretch from there to Warrens Landing.

How long did you stay at the stops?

Well, at Warrens Landing, they would get in early in the morning and the passengers would get on a boat and come back for supper. They would take a picnic lunch with them. They went to the island that I showed you with the fort and had their picnic there.

Where the dance was?

Yes.

You being from Selkirk, did you meet the local residents from these places?

Well, we would walk along and go to the Hudson’s Bay store at Berens River. It was a very interesting stop. There was always something of interest to see. There was an inn at Berens River, it was run by Mrs. Kemp. In fact, it was not too long ago that she passed away. She had this log cabin inn at Berens River, which people stayed off there for a trip, and boarded with her. For people who liked the outdoors, at Norway House there was an inn. I have forgotten the name. It was run by Mrs. Kemp’s sister-in-law and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Lowe. They were very popular. A lot of people stayed there for the week.

Now the people themselves, the local residents, they lived more in a rural area than you did. Did you find them any different?

Well, at these places where the boats stopped, there weren’t too many people. Well, there was always the mounted police, the staff of the Hudson’s Bay store, and a lot of lod timers, a Missionary with the churches. There was always a church. There were a lot of native people. There were the chief residents. The Metis people lived there all year round, and fished for their livelihood. They fished, and so on.

Would the fish that they caught be shipped down to Selkirk, and then shipped somewhere else?

The Northern Fish Company would have fishing boats out for the fishing season. There were different seasons for different fish. The whitefish start in June and stop in August. They are only allowed to catch so many thousand pounds. The company which has outfitted the different boats would buy the fish, you see. The smaller boats would bring the fish to town.

What was your first impression of the boat when you first saw it?

Oh, I thought it was beautiful.

What was your cabin like?

Oh, it was always very nice. I thought it was quite attractive.

How many people were in one cabin?

Well, there were two. A lot of smaller rooms had an upper and lower bunk, and there were a few with a double bunk in the bottom and a single on top. In the S.S. Keenora, there used to be a family room, where there was a door between the two rooms, where a family could be accommodated.

What was in your cabin?

Not very much space. We were on a boat down in the Great Lakes and the rooms were not any larger than the staterooms on the S.S. Keenora. There was just a nice mat on the floor. Just room for a nice mat, a basin, and I don’t remember if there was any cupboard space. You usually put your gear under the bed. I don’t remember what you did with your clothes. I think that there was a rod that you could hang up things. It would be on the back of the door likely.

I guess you wouldn’t spend much time in your cabin?

No, unless you were reading or asleep.

What was the colour scheme like?

Well, it was usually white. All inside was white enamel. They had coloured carpets up the hall, and it was very nice. There was a little round bench around the smoke stack. Is it still there? It was a wider hall going down to the dining room. The dining room was on the upper floor.

What was the berth like?

That was what I called the bunk. Very comfortable. It had a cover, a comforter on it. All in white. With old fashioned white spreads. It was the style of the day.

Who was the cabin mate?

What do you mean?

Who was your cabin mate on the trip? Do you remember?

Oh, well, my sister and I were together. You arranged that with the Purser who looked after how he placed the passengers.

When you made your reservations, would you say, “I want this person to be in my cabin”?

Oh yes, the Purser looked after that. It was part of his job.

As passengers, did you associate with the crew?

Oh yes we did because we knew most of them. We got to know a lot of passengers as well. It was very popular to Americans, you know. A lot of the interested Americans would come up to go on the boats. We enjoyed them. That’s what we kept hearing, that the Americans kept coming up to get away from the telephones. We were really away from everything. It was very secluded, a nice trip. I think now you can telephone anywhere from the boat, can’t you? If a boat were running today, like the Lord Selkirk, they could get a telephone message.

Dealing with the food. Was there a menu from which you could choose your meals?

Yes it was very good. Delicious meals.

So everyone did not eat the same thing?

No. Waitresses would wait around and it was always very good. They had a Captain’s table, and sometimes we would sit at the Captain’s table.

Was that a prestigious thing to do?

Yes, after they had eaten. Their hours were from six to twelve. They had six hours on and six hours off. If they were the crew that went on second, they hurried up and ate their meal.

So there were shifts?

They were fast eaters.

You didn’t have to eat all at once, did you?

They never had room for everyone at once because on a normal trip there were up to one hundred passengers.

Was there any room service?

I don’t know about that.

Was there any liquor available on the ship?

Nor in the old days, people brought their own.

So that was allowed?

Yes.

Did you get dressed up for your meals?

I don’t remember being dressed up especially. It was all outdoor clothing more. It would be nowadays, but not then. It was holiday attire.

So it was pretty casual?

Yes, casual.

Were the meals expensive, or were they included in your trip?

Included in your trip.

That would be good, eh

You know, at one time we thought that twenty-seven dollars was a good price to pay for the trip. Imagine what it is now. Today, it must be over two hundred dollars. Oh, yeah. For sure. It is a lot of money compared to what it was. I don’t think the service or the meals are any better today.

What did you do for recreation on the boats?

They had games up on the top deck and ring toss and the dance sometimes on the top deck. There was the little parlor on the main floor where they had a piano and we would have sing-songs. There was lots of card playing, too. You could always find a quiet place to read if you didn’t want to do any of that.

Were you ever on the boat during a storm?

Yes.

What was it like? Could you leave your cabin?

Yes, but, well I can’t explain a rough trip. (So you were allowed to leave your cabin.) Oh sure, if you were well enough to keep your feet on the floor.

People got seasick a lot?

Oh, definitely. It can get very rough on Lake Winnipeg.

Were you ever afraid that the boat might break or something?

Yes. I was more afraid something was going to happen to us than seasick. But I have been seasick, just not very often. The first time I went on a rough trip, I was going to stay there until the train came. But it didn’t come so I came back on the boat. You can’t count on the weather. You can have a beautiful time one time and others, it will storm all week.

Was it possible to eat or sleep during a storm?

Well, as long as the kitchen crew could make it, there were meals served. The dishes would sometimes move around and fly off the cupboards. Fly off the tables too.

How far in advance did you have to book your trip?

I never booked a trip. (Everybody knew you.) Yeah, I don’t know. In the busy season, people might book quite far in advance, but I don’t know. (You had contacts.) Yes, well July was the best month and in the middle of August it got quite windy and stormy on the lake. Although I read here that one person came back several times in one year for that same trip. From the States. I guess he didn’t have anything else to do and found it quite reasonable.

You said that it was about twenty-seven dollars for one trip?

Yes, as far back as I can remember.

Was that the long trip?

Oh yeah, the long trip up to Warrens Landing. That was many years ago so you can figure everything else has gone up.

Was that a lot of money in comparison to everything else?

Well, it was a lot of money to spend. A lot of people could afford it comfortably; they did it anyways. Business people going for a holiday. Teachers, stenographers, the pay was very small compared to what it is today. (We actually did do another interview with a fellow that worked on the boat, and it is really phenomenal how much they got paid, but they said it was enough to live on.)

Now, I would like to get on to the general living conditions in Selkirk around this time era.

What type of education was offered in Selkirk when you were going to school?

Grade eleven. In grade twelve, you would go somewhere else.

What were the schools like? Were they one room?

Oh no, they were beautiful schools. My goodness, girls. Did you see the pictures of the schools that were at the rally last year? Grade nine and ten, wasn’t it? Not eleven. I think at grade nine we took cooking, and sewing. No, sewing and cooking. Did the boys take cooking and sewing? No, they took manual training. Today, the boys take sewing and cooking. I know that from my grandchild.

Would the boys have liked to? Let’s say cooking and sewing were offered. Would they have taken it?

I haven’t any idea. It wasn’t offered.

Was church going an important factor for the town of Selkirk?

I think so. Thye had more things going from the Church; young people’s club, snow-shoeing, and things like that.

More important than it is now?

Yes, I think that we are overorganized and the Church is lacking. There are so many other things going on like hockey and baseball. And don’t you have things going on in school? People don’t have time for all those other things. They have school danced now. It’s hard for people to find time anymore. The school’s population has grown tremendously.

Were there any modern facilities available like plumbing and good roads?

Oh, yes. I don’t know when plumbing first originated in Selkirk. It has been here for long time. The roads left a lot to be desired. They were muddy for a long time, and then they got to gravel and finally hard top. The people themselves had to pay for hard top.

So the government didn’t pay for it?

The government only pays for the highway. They paid for part of Main Street and out to highway number nine.

Were political parties instrumental in governing Manitoba at the time?

Oh, definitely. People lost their jobs on the boat if they were on the wrong side when the government changed. That was it. That’s how cruel they were.

What type of recreation did people partake in like skating and things like that?

Skating, we had carnivals, skating carnivals, which were lots of fun. I don’t know who instigated those. Our church club used to be the… I belonged to the Okabees. Okabees was my Church club and we put on a carnival at the Jones rink. It was privately built by Mr. J.W. Jones and it was where the Rotary home is now. It was a good size rink. The present rink was built in 1949. Oh we had lots of fun. We had a live band that was great to skate to. A live band? Yeah, a live band, and later when the band played out, they had a record. That was good stuff but not really as good as the live band.

Were there any major physical catastrophes that you can remember in Selkirk?

Oh, I remember when two boys drowned when the ice was going out behind our house.

Were you living there then?

No. One time I remember there was a, it must have been in the spring, when Mr. Goodman’s rig went through the ice. Oh, in spring and fall, weak ice, you know, with people launching out on it, it was often things like that would happen.

Well, now we have road clearing methods and things like that for when blizzards and such occur. Were you ever stuck in your house because of the environment? We walked anywhere. No storm would keep people in their house if they wanted to go out.

How could you stay warm?

Oh, we had furnaces. Oh, yeah. We had to put wood down the chute and we had a pile in the backyard.

Thank you.