

Wendy: We just have to get off the leader. There we go. It's April 19th, and we're at the Bishop's House in Fairbanks with Brother Feltes, Father Renner, and Fred Bast, and I'm Wendy Arundale.

Feltes: Tacianna had been a Sister of St. Ann, and she left after a while, and then she married Harry Cardinoff. And they were living in Flat at the time. Harry was a hard working Russian-type fellow, big, husky individual. And they had two boys who were born at Flat while he was working in the mining camp, mostly driving these stakes for thawing the ground, you know, these thawing points, yes. Yes, points, that's right. You're a big help, wonderful. And then they finally moved to Fairbanks, and then they split up, I think. The boys, I think one of the boys is still here. And I think Tacianna may be around here yet. I don't know.

Renner: There was one that didn't marry. She played the organ, I think. And lives in a cabin up behind the village.

Feltes: Well, that's the second Tacianna, yes. There were two Taciannas. See there were... Cap had three brothers, Pertruska and two other brothers that had their cabins right next to his, all really wonderful people. And Petruska's wife, (Frances), is still alive at Holy Cross.

Wendy: Frances.

Feltes: Frances, yes.

Renner: She's in a hospital in Anchorage.

Wendy: She's had a stroke.

Feltes: Oh, has she?

Wendy: Yes. Within about two or three weeks ago.

Feltes: Oh, what a wonderful time when we had that group together. She was really the life of the party. And she was close to ninety, close to ninety. (Brother Feltes is referring to an elder's conference held at Holy Cross in 1980(?) to which he was invited as a special guest.)

Wendy: I've heard so many things about her.

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Feltes: Oh, my gracious. And this fellow from the New York Times that was there, this writer, reporter from the New York Times. He was just amazed. And he asked her, "What did you do when your husband died? Who took care of you?" And she said, "I took care of myself. I went out and I..." They all, all those old ladies, they'd go across the river on snowshoes and do their trapping for rabbits. There's a lot of rabbits in there. And they make a little fence through the little willows, you know. And then a little trap where they come in and get into a snare. They used snares in those days and brought them up, and they'd go over and get five or six rabbits in a day. And she'd even go out hunting and shoot a bear or a moose sometimes, once in a while.

Wendy: You know, at least as of a couple of years ago, she was still going to her fish camp every summer.

Feltes: Oh yes, sure. Yes, oh, she was the life of the party at that doings. You should have been there. If you can get the dope from that meeting, and the School District has it, and the movies.

Wendy: I talked to Martha about it.

Renner: (unclear)

Feltes: They can't use it commerically, but it was just remarkable, really remarkable. They had it so well set up in the big gymnasium there at Holy Cross. We were all in about a half circle, you know, with each one at a table and a microphone. And then a group of the older boys and girls over here to ask questions, see. And they'd point to me, and I'd take the microphone and give an answer or any of them, the whole group, you know. There was about 20 of us, I guess, old timers.

And we had the time of our lives there. Really, we did. I was so grateful for them for asking me to come down, see. I was the only non-Native there, except this reporter from the New York Times. And they had two movie machines set up, and the mikes all hooked up. It was all well set up. And they have a record of all that, and that would be something for you, believe you me.

Wendy: Sure.

Feltes: If you can get a... That's the School District. I think the head of it was in McGrath at that time.

Wendy: Right, right.

(055)

Feltes: You know all about it. You know more about it than I do.

Wendy: I talked to a couple of people about it a little bit, so I know at least a little bit about it. That must have been a great experience for you to be back with some of those people.

Feltes: Oh, it was just tremendous. That was home. I went home. You know what that can mean.

Wendy: Yeah. You know it might be interesting to people listening to this tape in the future, particularly people who aren't as familiar with some of the way the missions work and so on as some of us might be, if you could describe just an average day, what your week daily routine is like, kind of.

Feltes: Well, it would depend on where you were. See, if you were in charge of the big boys, you had one routine. If you had the small boys, there was another routine.

Wendy: Well, pick one that you feel is (unclear).

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Feltes: Well, Brother Hess, for instance, would be, he's the early bird. He was the one that got up and started the light plant and started the stove in the basement and everything. And all the other buildings, they started their own stoves. The little boys, we had kindling wood and everything by the stove, and we'd start [it]. Everything was wood, wood burners, you see. And the cooking and everything else.

One time we got burned short of wood, and we had to go up on the hillside and knock down those little birches about that big. And Sister Ida would have to put a bunch of them in one oven, a great big long range, you know, and three ovens, I guess. And she'd have to put that wood in the oven to dry it out enough to put it in the fire box to cook for 180 people, you know, 200 people.

Wendy: Hard work.

Feltes: That's heroic. Those are the things that are heroic. We lived the life of Riley over in our part of the place in the shop, and the other Brothers. Brother Hess was in charge of the gardens, and getting the potatoes ready and everything. Now the potatoes all had to be cut about this time, and they had to be dipped in the (unclear) to prevent any diseases or anything, dipped in the..., a mixture he made in a big trough that all the potatoes had to be dipped into. Oh, what is it? The bluish (bluestone) sort of a stuff. Anyhow, it was to kill all germs and everything. (Copper sulfate?)

Wendy: A disinfectant like?

Feltes: Yes, disinfectant. And then they had to be cut with two eyes left in each piece. And then we had to put them up in the attic of our house, which is up three flights of stories, stairs, out on the floor there by the big movie machines, and the movies and everything else were all on the sides. And there was this whole floor scattered with cut potatoes, see, until they were just ready to sprout for planting, see. And that was a big job, a big job. You've got to bring them from the basement two stories down, bring them up, cut them, dip them, everything, and it was a... He was more or less in charge of the gardens. He had been there about forty years, too, before he went to Copper Valley.

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Renner: He went to Copper Valley? That could be checked out.

Feltes: Yes, ah.

Renner: (unclear)

Feltes: Yes. And so that's the way it is. The thing would start depending on the time of the year, see. And if I had charged of the big boys, I was in the wood camp then, see. And we'd get up, oh, around seven o'clock or something like that, and have breakfast. One of the boys was a cook, and we had this big tent set up with a cook stove and everything, wood and a little heater stove at the other end of it because all the heat goes out through the canvas, you know. It was kind of a tough place to live. And I found it very difficult. The boys didn't mind it too much

because they were used to rolling up on a caribou skin or something like that, you know.

But sometimes I'd go home overnight and then come back in the morning. I wasn't a very good dog team driver at that time. One time I was leaving the camp in the evening, I think it was. And there was a very rough trail leaving the camp, over roots of some trees and everything else and winding through the woods and everything. And I wasn't quite ready, and they took off and threw me off the sled in back.

And away they went, and I after them, kind of cussing under my breath a little bit. I was mad, too. Because I wasn't quite ready, you know. You have your sled tied to a peg or something, and you just let that go, but they busted it loose and away they went. I knew that they'd usually run off the trail into the brush and get caught. They were, oh, about a mile down the trail. I caught up with them, and they were all tangled up in the brush and all cowed. They were...

Bast: They knew they had done something wrong.

Feltes: Had a whipping coming, they had a whipping coming, but I was too tired to give them a whipping. And so I had to get them all straightened out and went on to the mission. And then I'd go back in the morning again with the dog sled, and I did that a few times.

Wendy: You know, Brother, there's a, I don't even know who it is. I think it's a Canadian priest, but there's someone I know who said that he's certain that all oaths uttered in the course of dealing with dogs in the back country will be forgiven.

Feltes: You have to speak their language, you know. They don't understand some language. You have to speak their language.

Renner: (unclear) (laughter)

Feltes: After all, they're all sons or daughters of bitches, you know. And so you use some language and that was perfectly all right 'cause that's true, but we used other words, too, sometimes. But we had good dog teams. They were real good dog teams. We had one team [that] was good for travel. It was lighter and fast, and another [of] heavier dogs that could really (pull).

Wendy: Freight dogs.

Feltes: Amazing how much they'd pull. A good dog will pull a hundred pounds ten hours a day, even in a bad trail on just a little piece of fish. And when they're working, we give them a little piece of tallow about that big around. It seemed to give them a boost. And you never give it to them in the morning, give it to them at night, you see. Because if you give it to them in the morning, then they're loggy, and they don't want to go.

Renner: Who was in charge of the dogs there?

Feltes: Well, Brother Horan was in charge, usually one of the big boys. And we had to cook for them, and they'd cook up all the scraps from the tables and things like that (unclear) too much, you know. But mostly fish, you

see. They'd cook it up. It's better for them if it's cooked, at least partially. We had a big drum set up, [over] a little fireplace, and [we] just cooked the fish in that, and then [we'd] give it to the dogs. Seemed to be better for them that way.

I'd give them a piece of tallow. Used to buy the tallow. Tallow came in steel drums about that big around and about that tall, and you'd take the cover off, like lard, you know. It was hard till you make it into [a ball] about twice as big as a walnut and give each dog a piece of that. Boy, that kept them up really, when they're working. We only use tallow for them when they're working.

Wendy: We've been going about two and a half hours, and I'm goin to have to call a halt here because it is looking already like I'm probably going to be up most of the night getting ready for this trip tomorrow. So I hate to stop you while you're going so good, but I think I'm going to have to quit.

Feltes: Well, let us.

Renner: We wouldn't finish tonight, anyway.

Feltes: Give me about, no, give me about ten minutes to get over to Copper Valley School, see.

Wendy: Okay, that sounds fine.

Feltes: See, well, you know all about, now, all the equipment we had, and each brother had his own work and so forth. And later on the scholastics came in, and they took over the Prefecting and then the brother's took care of their work around the mission, see. Then in 1953 they decided. Father Buchanan and Father Convert talked the Bishop into moving Holy Cross over to Copper Valley School. And Father Spils got a crew together of his relatives from Idaho to build the school.

And then they asked the Bishop for me to come over to help with four of my boys. And so four of these boys, one would be Billy Beans, and Lloyd Elasanga and Pat Omiak and Tony Sipary. We went over in '53 from Holy Cross to help build Copper Valley School. We arrived at Anchorage at midnight, and nobody to meet us. And we had all day without any food, and boys get hungry, and even brothers get hungry, too, sometimes. And we had quite a time finding, locating Father Buchanan. He was supposed to meet us and take care of us, put us up for the night and everything.

At that time they had a little apartment in that tall building out on, just off of Fourth Avenue near the Native Hospital, McKinley Building. On the third floor they gave him a little apartment of two rooms and a little kitchenette. So we finally located him, and he came out and got us and brought us over there. And the next morning the boys were sent out with one of the trucks going out to the mission. And let's start from there the next time.

Wendy: Okay, that sounds good. I'm sorry to have to sort of stop you, but I think for my own well-being at this point...

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