

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Alex Krawec audio recording 2017.mp3
http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/a_krawec.htm

Narrator: Alex Krawec
Interviewer: Rosemary Neaves
July 25, 2017

[Start of Interview]

Rosemary My name is Rosemary Neaves, and it is July 25, 2017. Alex Krawec, his full name was Alexander. He is residing at Pleasant Valley Lodge, Athabasca, Alberta. His father's name was Paul Krawec. His mother's name was Eva. His birthdate is September 8th, 1929. His place of birth was Volin, in Ukraine. His first wife was Millie Pidzarko. Millie died at 41 years of age. His second wife was Helen Bahry.

Rosemary We are going to be talking about some of Alex's memories in terms of his stories and life through the years. When we started out, we thought we would start right at the beginning when you reached Canada, and I believe it was in Halifax that you docked?

Alex That's right.

Rosemary And you were coming from the Ukraine?

Alex From the city or the shipping port of Gdansk that was in Germany. We had to go through a portion of Poland to get to Gdansk, which was the shipping port, and it was on the German border. Now, I don't know my directions there, you know, so I can't tell you the actual place of the port. I would have to think it was on the northern part of Germany, the Baltic Sea. That's where the port was. And from there, we went on directly to Halifax. Mom told me it took 11 days to sail from Gdansk to Halifax. That was the sea trip or ocean trip, whichever it would be. And from there on, from Halifax, of course, I guess we went along with the group of immigrants. And our intentions were to stop and try and get some homesteads or a homestead in Dauphin, Manitoba. But when we got there, all the homestead land that the Canadian government was giving away or selling for \$10.00 for 160 acres. So that was a very attractive deal for the folks. And I guess they were young people, you know, and they were expecting family, of course. And I was the only one who was born in the Ukraine. And when we got to Halifax, they kept telling us to go further west into western Canada because that's where the new development was starting up in those days. And that was the Canadian idea of developing more of Canada and getting a lot more people here. So, this is the reason they made the offer to the pioneers. For \$10.00, 160 acres, which is a quarter section of land in Canada.

Alex So other than that, it must have been a very traumatic time for my parents. I can't tell you how I felt because I was too young.

Rosemary/Alex How old were you? I was born on September the 8th and we got into Halifax on June the 28th. We would have to sit down and figure it out.

Rosemary/Alex And that was 1930? Right. Anyway, other than that, what else can I tell you?

Rosemary You got up to, I presume, Edmonton then Athabasca area?

Alex That's right. But when we got to Dauphin, Manitoba, they advised us there were no more homesteads available. All the earlier pioneers had taken it up already. Nothing was available that was suitable for farming anyway. You know, there may have been some land, but it wasn't available or suitable for farming, so they advised us to continue going west to western Canada.

Alex And we got into Edmonton by that kind of prompting, from the pioneer agents, that we just had to continue going west. We got to Edmonton and there was a Ukrainian agent for the Ukrainian pioneers called Mr. Smalling. Now his first name, I don't remember. But he advised us to go on to Athabasca and when we got to Athabasca, the only available place for us to stay was the Immigration Hall they had in Athabasca at that time. I don't know how big it was. It must have been a pretty big building, you know, because there were quite a few immigrants that come and we all stayed. And from there my dad searched for a homestead. He did file a homestead in the Deep Creek area north of Athabasca River. But when he went and examined it and checked it out, it was a quarter section that was split up with three creeks running through it, dividing that quarter section into three portions of land. And of course, that wasn't very suitable at that time. Well, not only at that time, but, you know, just the farm, because it was broken up by the creeks. And so they had to drop that order that they filed first.

Alex And he took on the SE-33-68-21, west of the fourth meridian.

Rosemary Good memory!

Alex That's what happened at that moment. And then from there on, when we got to Athabasca, I don't know just how many days it took to for us to get from Halifax to Athabasca. I didn't stop to figure it out. But anyway, whatever time, we ended up at the Immigration Hall in Athabasca. And the Immigration Hall was located right at the mouth, or on the west side of the mouth, of the Tawatinaw Creek or River that flowed into the Athabasca River.

Alex That's where the Immigration Hall was and we stayed there for two weeks while dad was hunting around, you know, going and searching for a homestead. He went to the Boyle area first. The reason was, there were some friends from the Ukraine that were already in Boyle.

Alex So he went to visit with them because he knew them. They couldn't find anything that was suitable at Boyle or Boyle area for a homestead like, you know, because Boyle was a fairly low-lying area with a lot of muskeg. So he went north of the river. And, of course, it was more difficult to access because of the fact that in the fall and in the springtime, you know, there was no ice freeze-up in the river in the fall

and of course, in the springtime, the melting of the river ice. So there it was hard communication to get across the river.

Rosemary So you used the cage in those days?

Alex I don't know if they had a cage at that time. I think it came a little bit later. You know, they erected the towers on the side of the river and strung the cable afterwards and we were able to go across spring or fall during freeze-up or break-up of the ice. And we crossed the river by what they called the carriage. And when dad realized what he filed the second time, he found out it was all big timber and big spruce. Big timber so they had to look around.

Alex They finally found a little opening in the timber, you know, whether it was from previous burns or whatever. But he decided to take that quarter and started to clear a spot for a garden patch and, of course, the house spot, you know. And when they built the house, they realized because the land was all covered with big timber, and it held a lot of moisture. So there was a little stream in the bush and dad decided to build by the little stream that was flowing in the bush because it was a water supply. And they needed water. That was the first and foremost thing. So anyway, when they built the house, he built it by this little stream, as I mentioned before, and I guess they dug a little what they called a cellar for the house. It was just a little kind of, maybe six by eight, or four by six, a cellar, you know. It's just like a little basement.

Alex So anyway, when they built the house, the stream, when it started to flow, it filtered into the cellar. And we had water in it, in which I almost drowned of course. Because one day when I was playing outside, Mrs. Korolak was visiting with mom, and they were having a cup of coffee or tea or whatever. And I was playing outside, and as I run back to mom, I had doors open in the house, because there was no sense in closing, there were flies in the house and flies outside, mosquitoes and everything. So anyway, I was playing outside this one day when Mrs. Korolak was visiting mom and I happened to run. The doors were open, so I ran right into the house and mom had the cellar door in the house opened up. So, you know, as a child, I just kept running in and I fell into the cellar. That water was about four feet deep. You know, headfirst. And then my mom just about froze at the time. But anyway, she managed to stay by the cellar. And as I fell down, I guess I hit the bottom and I bobbed up, you know, and she grabbed me by the leg, and pulled me out. Laid me on the floor. And I had water leaking out of my ears, out of my eyes, everywhere. And I said [in Ukrainian] "I fell in the water."

Alex Anyway, I got over that, I guess, and managed to grow up to be a pretty healthy young man. And I still feel pretty good in spite of my age now, but health wise, I feel pretty good. So other than that, life continued, as on a homestead it was all bull work everywhere you went.

Rosemary Where did you live while you were building?

Alex Well, while we were building, dad, first of all, got to know Mr. George Korolak who was a pioneer that came to the Richmond Park area two years before we arrived in 1930. They came in 1928 and we came in 1930.

Alex So one day, while dad was in Athabasca, that Paul Hnatyshyn which was about 10 miles away from our place, from the homestead that dad filed.

Alex And he got a ride from town and as they were in Athabasca he got to know Steve Korolak. Not Steve, sorry, George Korolak, pardon me. And he caught a ride up to the homestead. And then he got to know Korolaks quite well. So they invited him to stay for the winter. But before that happened, in November, dad and mom, they settled down in a little shack that was sheeted with just one layer of lumber. And we stayed there till about the middle of November and it got pretty cold.

Alex So in the middle of November, Steve Korolak, because he knew Steve already, he decided to ask Steve if they could stay at his house.

Alex You know, they had their own family. I don't know whether it was [two] children or three. But anyway, we happened to stay at Korolak's during the winter. And that got us through the winter. And then, of course, in the spring of the next year, that was 1930-31, dad started to build a house and that was first or foremost because you needed a place to stay. So anyway, dad built this little house and I've got a picture of it right there.

Alex That's my farmstead there, the coloured building. That's after my settlement on the homestead. But that's the first house that dad built. And in 1942, dad had to build a bigger house because there was more in the family. There was already six of us children plus dad, mom, that was eight of us all together in that little shack there. So we had to do something. Anyway, dad built the house. I've got a picture of the second house they built. So anyway, from then on, we just plugged along and did what we had to do. It was all hard work. It was not easy the way that dad cut the lumber for the roof of that little shack, there. They had high scaffolds. And they built kind of a sloping ... would you call it a slide or whatever? But then in order to get the trees, the full-length tree or the full-length log, they'd skid it up on the high scaffold and there they used a ripsaw.

Alex A man-made, well, a built ripsaw. Where one man would stand up on top of the log on the scaffold, and one guy would be below and they would, you know, rip the lumber off that log and use it for sheeting the roofs mainly, because the rest of it was all built from logs, huge logs.

Rosemary So were they sawing downwards or were they going across?

Alex No, they were going up and down. One guy standing on top of the log and there's one guy below and he would pull down. And that's where the main cut was, you know. Because it was a ripsaw, the main cut was on the downward stroke. The guy that was on top would just lift the saw and then drop that down. And that's how they managed to saw the lumber for the roofs of the house. So it was a big job, very tedious job, I guess, but people had to do what they had to do.

Rosemary When your father started out, he wouldn't have had any animals at that point?

Alex No. John Chudek was one of the earlier pioneers, a couple of years sooner. And he had already several head of cattle. So mom and dad bought a cow from them, and the cow had a calf on her, you know ... a suckling calf. And of course there was no fences for pastures in those days or anything so the people would just let their cattle go into the wild kind of thing, you know. And of course, having a cow that had a calf in the same pasture area [another calf] would always suck the cow out. And mom and dad needed milk for myself because I was a baby yet. And themselves, of course. And so we had some problems with Mr. Chudek.

Alex He wouldn't really care whether his cow got sucked out by the calf or not because it didn't matter to him anyway. They almost went to court over that. But anyway, later on, I guess the calf grew up and the cow, kind of separated out of the group of livestock. That was because we had Deep Creek, you know.

Rosemary Yeah, that's a huge creek.

Alex Yeah. And the public cattle were ... oh, everybody had loose cattle running it. The only way we could tell the difference is we hung bells on the cows, and the bigger the bell the louder it would ring, and the easier it was for us to go and find them in the morning or in the evening, you know. Yeah, that was quite some time I tell you.

Rosemary What about horses?

Alex Horses? Dad never had a horse for about two years. He didn't have the money to buy one. So he went working out several years to Morinville area to earn some money during spring and fall mainly. And they'd catch the train from Athabasca, you know, the freight train. And dad one time was catching this freight train, and they would ride on top of the boxcars, you know. This one time, when dad was catching the freight train, he grabbed onto the ladder on the side of the freight car, you know, the boxcar, and they had these switches along the side of the tracks. They would switch your railing to steer the train off to or from one track to another, like, you know. And dad got hit by the side of the sign and he got pulled off. He was hanging onto the ladder on the boxcar. But the sign that hooked him up pulled him right off and he fell right alongside the railroad, railways, and he just about lost his feet. So he quit catching the train. After that, if he was going to work, he would catch a ride otherwise, you know, whether it was somebody going to Edmonton or wherever.

Alex And that's the way he'd find his way to work to get a job.

Alex I am the oldest one or was the oldest one in the family. I was born in Ukraine. When I came to Canada, I was probably about nine months old, eight or nine months old. I just don't remember. But later on, mom had seven children in total. And she had some midwives, a midwife coming in. Mrs. Charlie Gora, senior, kept coming to be with mom when she was in labour and had the other children. We all didn't have an opportunity to be born in the hospital or anything like that, because we were just not able to because of the distance to town. And it was not like today's modern time, you know, where you get in the vehicle and you're there in a half an hour. This took several hours to get to town with a team of horses. So that's the reason mom had not

been able to have her children in the hospital. See, she had all of us, all of us seven children at home, well, except me.

Alex But I wasn't [born] in the hospital either. I was born in Ukraine, in the potato patch. That's what she said! She was digging potatoes. Anyway, I guess we should repeat it. And she was digging potatoes in the month of September, which is probably the fall time that they were harvesting potatoes in Ukraine. So while she was digging, I guess the natural forces of a human being, of a woman, the pressures came and the time element was mature. So there she was in the potato patch, having her baby. That was natural in life. Women in Ukraine in those days, they never had a doctor that was handy or available. It was natural life.

Alex And that's the way things happened in those days. Now, after we came to Canada, mom and dad and myself as a small child, we managed to get the house built in time for mom and dad to be able have their families at home. We did have Mrs. Charlie Gora, senior, in those days, a midwife type of thing, and she would come and visit if you called on her. She would come to visit. And of course, there was no charge because it was all, you know, helping one another in those days. And so that's the way life had to exist, and we continued that way until I guess the whole family was born.

Rosemary So the second one was Annie?

Alex Yes, Annie. And the third one was brother Steve. And then there was brother Pete. And then there was sister Mary and sister Lydia. And brother John was the youngest of the family. John was 10 years younger than myself. So there was a 10-year period during the time that the family was arriving and being born. Later on, as time went on and things progressed, of course, we expanded into a little more land opening. And we just managed to increase the production area of the farm, you know, where you could grow more grain and stuff. Maybe at this time I should mention that I was in the 4-H club; Grain Club, they call it, and I had a field of about 20 acres of oats that I grew this one year. And of course, had an exceptionally good yield because it was the kind of specialty, you know, where we cared for the land. And of course, we didn't use no fertilizer at that time because it was just naturally growing.

Alex But being that the land was new, and just broke and started into production, we got fairly good yields. I don't remember what the bushel rate of the yield was at that time because I don't have those records anymore. You know, my 4-H club records, so I don't remember. I know that I won a prize by having this field of oats, but I don't remember the details of it because [it was] a long time ago.

Rosemary/Alex Do you remember what the prize was? Oh, I don't know. I'm sorry.

Rosemary I didn't realize they had prizes for good yields and so on.

Alex I don't know if it was any kind of a financial prize, but there was a recognition, kind of a plaque and a certificate, you might say. But what it was exactly, I can't remember. You know, Rosemary, that's 80 years ago! No, not quite 80 years ago.

Alex But anyway, that's a long time ago. So anyway, and I always believed this as an individual, I was always involved in community activities, regardless whether it was recreation or organizational. You know, I belong to clubs. I belonged to different clubs and the farm. I was in the Calf Club at one time. I raised two, I believe two little steers. Well, they weren't little. We took them in to start raising, I think about 400 or 500 pounds and, you know, we'd bring them up to about 1,000 or 1,200 pounds, by the time the season was over for that. So I always was involved in a lot of community works. I helped build the community hall at Richmond Park, which we had none when we first arrived in Canada. They did start to build a school, I think, in about 1928. And from there on we had the school to go to. I had a long distance to go to school because it was about four and a half miles from dad and mom's place to the schoolhouse.

Rosemary And you used to walk?

Alex Yes. We used to walk most of the time. Dad would try and take us to school with a team of horses and a sleigh and then he built ... later on he built a bobcat ... not a bobcat, a bobsled. And that's the way we went to school. There was five of us going to school at one time from the one household.

Rosemary Yeah, and in winter, you were talking about how you had this sleigh with the little caboose.

Alex Yes, but that was later. That wasn't from the beginning, because we didn't have no horses, you know. Dad only had one horse from the beginning. And the way he got that horse is he went harvesting around the Legal, Morinville area. And he earned enough money, I guess ... whatever the price of the horses were those days ... that he was able to buy a horse. And his name, dad called him Mike. So anyway, I got to tell you this. Well, you know, I wanted to go to our neighbours one day and I took Mike along and he was pretty well broke in. And I took him to go to Korolak's place across Deep Creek and that was quite a coulee to cross. So anyway, dad said, okay, you can have the horse and go ahead. So I got the horse and I drove up to the embankment of the west side of Deep Creek, and Korolak's place was on the east side of that embankment of the creek. And when he come to go down the hill, you know, to go across the coulee, he bucked me off. I had to try and catch up to Mike, the horse, and get him home so that I could tame him down again. So I never did get him to take me across Deep Creek anyway. Not that day, anyway.

Alex I did cross Deep Creek, going to a dance at the Laura School district, which was kind of north and a little bit north and east, about five miles of our place ... mom's and dad's place. But I rode a different horse at that time. We called him Prince. We had two horses by then, and dad bought a female, a mare. And of course, she had a colt and we named him Prince. And when I took him to go to the dance that one time across to Laura School, which was northeast of our place, about five miles away, he took me across the Deep Creek. And it was kind of in the springtime, the water runoff and the Deep Creek was pretty high, you know, and it was kind of dangerous to cross. But I sat on this horse and he took me across Deep Creek; took me to the dance.

Alex And then after midnight ... I don't know what time ... it must've been about three, four o'clock early in the morning, he brought me back and we swam across with me on top of him. We swam across the high waters of Deep Creek. And they were high because you could hear them from a mile away. The rumble of the water, I guess. It's hard to explain, you know, how high the waters were in that creek because it drained the area all the way from McCullough Lake. I don't know if you know where that is on the way to Calling Lake. And it's about two thirds of the way north of Richmond Park to Calling Lake. And that's where the water's drain basin come from, because there's lakes there and it drained into Deep Creek. And in those days, I don't know, we had a lot of snow, and when it started to melt in the springtime, there would be a lot of water ... spring runoff water and the creek would rise pretty high. So anyway, this time this Prince brought me home from the dance. He brought me across.

Alex He swam across with me riding on top of him, swam across Deep Creek. And I guess he knew; the horse knew that we were going home. So he brought me home pretty safe. I wasn't afraid or anything, but I guess, you know, as a youngster, you take those kind of experiences.

Rosemary How old would you have been at that time?

Alex Probably 14 years old. Anyway, and that's the way life continued in the olden days. We created our own recreation. That's what I did. Dad's house was built. Well, I told you they had a house built by this little stream in the big bush. But then it got cleared away. Some of the big bush got cleared away and there was, you know, more room for us to play as children. Then what we did is, we would go into the bush, clear a path, you know, sweep it clean and create a trail through the bush. And we had little, so we built little sleighs and wagons, all done manually. And we played around with those toys that we used to build. And dad wouldn't make us anything. We would have to do it ourselves. And so, we'd make these trucks and vehicles, kind of thing. And the way we would make a truck is build a little wagon and build a cab on it. And on the side of the box, I would have an arm that was crossways on the back of the box that was on this vehicle. And it had an arm with a pin in the center of the arm. And on the right-hand side of the arm was another piece of board down towards the front axle. And the front axle was on a swivel so that when you pulled the lever on the back of the truck, while you're pushing it, you know, supposedly it's like, well, working.

Alex: You know, it's amazing what we could imagine and do when you want to create something. And that's the way we, you know, enjoyed ourselves, created recreation for the children. Plus not only my sisters and brothers, but I would for the neighbouring Mochid family. They had six boys and a girl, and I would go and play with them and build them some vehicles to play with. Because those were the kind of days that we had to create our own recreation and I think it was enjoyable. I, when I think back, I don't know if I would trade my position differently in life. You know, I think I would like to kind of relive my life if I were young again. So there's a lot to be talked about.

Alex: And I guess when I started school, I was eight years old. The reason that mom and dad wouldn't let me go to school [earlier was] because of the distance from

school, four and a half miles from home. And I had to walk that. And especially in the wintertime when the snow came, I would often wear moccasins, rubbers, and a pair of felt socks, if you know the felt socks. And when we'd go to school, especially in the wintertime, you know, the rubbers would fill up with snow. And it was a hard time to walk and keep the rubbers on your felt socks because that was the warmest thing you could have for your feet at that time.

Alex So anyway, we would take the rubbers off and put them in. I usually packed a little gunnysack on the back, with a couple of string shoulder straps, you know, and they would work into your shoulder because, you know, it eventually got fairly heavy, and it worked down into your shoulder. So it was hard to carry, you know. But anyway, we had to do those things. And after we grew up, I guess, I had the opportunity to go to grade nine, finished grade nine at Richmond Park. We had three teachers at that time and then about 19_, hmm, gee, I'd have to figure it out what year it was, but it was later on in time.

Rosemary Probably mid-40s.

Alex Yes, I would say so. Maybe even 1947; somewhere in there. Anyway, when I went to high school in Athabasca when I wanted to go home for Easter, I caught a ride, no, I'm sorry, for Christmas. I caught a ride with Jewells. The Jewell family had a sawmill that was two and a half miles south of my dad's place, on the south side of the Athabasca River. And this one time I wanted to go home for Easter, so I caught a ride with them to the camp. And at midnight, it's a good thing it was moonlight.

Alex I had to get down from the sawmill site on the south side of the Athabasca River, cross, go down, cross the river and then go about three miles, probably, down to Brownie Holowieski's landing. And then from there, and that was about, probably a mile and a half to two miles east of the sawmill site, Jewell's sawmill site. And when I got there, it was like nighttime. You know, it's just a good thing that like I said before, it was moonlight. So I went and I made about a five-mile loop to get home, you know, at night. I got home at two o'clock after midnight. I often told my children, you know, you should have been going to school when I was going to school. You don't know what it means to go to school.

Alex But anyway, that night I crossed from the Jewell's camp and got home at two o'clock after midnight. And the next time that I just wanted to go home was for Easter. And I had a friend called Barney Chrusch and we were both going to school in Richmond Park. And then Barney got an opportunity to stay at the hostel, because the Anglican Church had a boy's hostel and the girl's hostel at that time.

Alex I don't know if you remember that, but probably not. So Barney he got a chance to stay after our Easter break, Barney got a chance to stay at the Anglican boy's hostel in Athabasca, and I had to try and find a room. First of all, I got a room at Charlie Kluz's place west of Athabasca about seven miles. And there was a school bus at that time, Andy, I forget his name now. He was driving a school bus from west, from Riva's place, they had bought some land there. And that's where I was staying. And Barney and I wanted to go back home for Easter. So we took our suitcases. We had small, well, medium-sized suitcases. And I put whatever clothing that I had to get cleaned up and washed up, you know, at home. And we were

packing these things down to Chrusch's landing. And there was a trail from the top of the hill on the north side of the river down to the river, so in the wintertime people would drive up, you know, with horses because it was closer to town, quite a bit closer. And so Barney and I got to the Chrusch's landing. And this was just before Easter anyway. And we had to get off the river ice, because there was already water flowing along the edges in the springtime, you know. So anyway, Barney run back a ways, and he took a run and he jumped into the water up to his knees. I said, "I'm not jumping here. It's too far a distance to try and jump it." So we walked back out, I don't know, 50 yards or so, and I found a narrower place that I run back and jumped off the ice and got onto the shore. We got up to the trail and we walked up the hill to the top of the hill.

Alex: And in the wintertime, you know, there was quite a bit of snow, and a windstorm come along and it drifted a snowbank over the top of the embankment, and it created a sharp wall of snow. So when we come up to that wall, we couldn't get over it. So we found a spot that had a tree growing right in the edge of the snowdrift. And we climbed the tree. And of course, Barney went up first and I passed him the suitcases. We threw it up on top of the snowbank and, you know, on the north side of the river. And anyway, that's the way we got our suitcases up from off the river. And then I didn't get home that night because it was too late. So I stayed overnight at Barney Chrusch's, or his parents' place, and I went home the next day. So that's our experience. That was Easter time. But in the wintertime, I started to tell you about me going to this sawmill site with Louis Jewell was his name. And I got to the mill site. Then that's the way I got home for Christmas. And of course, the next time I had to go back to school, dad would drive me in, you know, with a team of horses.

Rosemary/Alex Did they know you were coming? No.

Rosemary/Alex The family. Did they know you were coming? No, because we had no phone in those days. You know, I could tell you a story about the first telephone.

Rosemary A party line?

Alex Yeah. We pulled the staples out of the barbed wire fence line, you know, that was along the road. And we pulled those staples out, cut little pieces or strips of rubber and put it inside the staple. And that would kind of insulate the wiring, you know, the fence wire. So it wouldn't create that static sound, you know, on the old phone, and that was the first phone that we started in the community. But there are so many stories to be told, Rosemary.

Rosemary Do you remember what year that came in? Do you remember the year, that first phone?

Alex I'd have to go back to look at some of the stories that I have, you know, other stories. And I think then I've got it there, but I can't remember the exact year. I couldn't tell you that, not at the moment anyway. Maybe someday we'll have a chance to talk about it then and I'll get that information.

Rosemary So there must have been quite a celebration when you arrived home for Christmas. Just walked in, eh?

Alex Well, mom, dad didn't know that I came at night, you know, or I wasn't very far. I was only four miles away from Chrusch's place to our place, you know. But that was the next day I came home and of course they didn't know. There was no phones to notify anybody or tell anybody. The way I made a few dollars is when I was going to high school in Athabasca, I would shovel the snow off the tops, rooftops, of the homes. And I'd make a few dollars, you know, 25 cents would buy quite a bit in those days. You know, you can buy a meal, for that matter. You ask me questions because that brings back memories, you know.

Rosemary Yeah. Well, in terms of high school, then you were basically boarding during that time? During your high school in Athabasca you were boarding for months at a time?

Alex Yes. Our intention was ... we went to school. First of all, we started in the month of November. Kirkpatrick was his name. I forget what his first name was now. But he had a house that was sheeted with just shingle rough lumber, if you know what that means. It was lumber that had no drop edges on it or anything. It was just sheeted with cracks, some up to a half inch wide. We put up a heater in the house and we stayed there till the middle of November and then it got too cold. So we had to move out. And Barney was ... we actually made application to go into the hostel, the Anglican hostel. In those days they had the boy's hostel and girl's hostel. But we couldn't get in there. But at Christmas time, I don't remember whether both of us stayed at Charlie and Elza Kluz's or not. But anyway, I stayed there. And we got a room there to stay there, they had a lean-to built onto their house. It was a log house in those days plastered with mud, in the cracks, you know. So we stayed there till Christmas time. And after Christmas, Barney got a room at the hostel and I got a room at Monson's. And Monson's was about a mile and a half to two miles from the school in Athabasca. They lived on the southwest side of, well the present-day UFA co-op establishment, where that is in town. And there's a road that goes out and through Monson's old place there. And that's where I stayed after Christmas. And Judy Monson, she married Joe Jewell. I don't know if you know Joe Jewell. But you probably heard the name. And anyway, she accepted the responsibility for looking after my clothing, I guess, you know, to wash and stuff like that.

Alex So I didn't have to worry about getting that washed at home. Because I don't remember whether there was a dry cleaner at that time or not in Athabasca. Or where there was a facility that I could have got the laundry done, but I didn't. But Judy is the one that accepted the responsibility to keep my clothing clean.

Rosemary/Alex And did she provide you with meals too? Yes, when I stayed there at their house, yeah.

Rosemary And did they charge for that or did they take stuff from the farm?

Alex I honestly don't remember whether I used to bring eggs for them or something from the farm, you know, in exchange for me staying there. No, I don't quite remember. I do know that I was hauling eggs in a basket, you know, in front on

bicycles, and a lot of times I'd put in a couple dozen eggs and a half of them were broke by the time. It was pretty rough going. Yeah, it was honestly. Oh, but anyway, that's the way life had to continue. Mrs. Monson was working for the DA [District Agriculturist] at that time when I stayed there. And of course she had two girls, younger girls than me, you know, Didi [Dyllis] and I forget the older one [Denise] she married ... Forget her name now, the younger girl was Didi, her name, and the other one, I forget, that's a long time ago. So anyway, I stayed there and one morning I got up to go to school and I got up earlier than the girls. So I hid in the bush, you know, and frightened the girls and they told their mother. And I got a real kind of lowdown from Mrs. Monson, their mother, of course, for doing that, because the girls were afraid afterwards to go early in the morning and especially in the wintertime. You know, it's still dark in the morning. You know, eight o'clock is still fairly dark. And I hid in the bush that time, scared the girls. And they told her mother, I got a little bit of a ... anyway.

Rosemary/Alex You got a tongue-lashing, did you? A little bit, but it wasn't too bad, I didn't mind. You know, we were kids and you know what kids are like and especially boys.

Rosemary What was high school like?

Alex High school was Athabasca EPC [Edwin Parr Composite], the Brick School. I'm talking about. There was a principal there. I don't know his first name, but his second name was Gordon, and he was a pretty strict principal. You know, pretty firm with his rules and regulations, and I managed to manipulate my way through as best I could.

Alex You know being broke wasn't that funny, in those days, because there was just no money to be had. So I said that I used to shovel snow off the rooftops of the houses in town, made a few cents.

Alex Yeah, then I, I went to school until I graduated to grade eleven, and in the fall of grade 11 that was about 19__, hmm. Can't remember the year, but it had to be, anyway, it doesn't matter. When I got to grade 11, dad had to have help.

Alex What happened is dad bought a new thresh machine with his neighbor, Frank Malik. They lived a half a mile apart. And they bought this thresh machine to be able to do their own threshing, because, you know, in those days, only Charlie Gora had a thresh machine ... Charlie Gora, senior, and John Byrtus. There were two thresh machines in quite a large community to serve all the farmers. The way farmers would stack ... they would take their crop off the field and stack it in stacks so that you could drive the thresh machine and they would put one stack over here and the next one about 8, 10 feet apart. And you can drive the thresh machine with what they called the feeder, the intake into the thresh machine. And you can just, you know, pitch it in from the stacks. And you wouldn't have to wait for the stooks to sit out in the field because usually it snowed by then. There was only two thresh machines in the community. So we stacked those and then brought the thresh machine whenever it was available.

Alex And we were able to get the grain off and into the bin, like into the granary or whatever. And that's the way people had to do it in order to accommodate everybody to get their crops off, you know.

Rosemary And so your dad and his neighbour got one?

Alex Thresh machine, yes. But that was later on. They bought a brand-new Red River Special thresh machine and they did their own threshing. Mind you, first and foremost they got their crops off, and then they'd go out to the neighbours. If anybody still needed some grain threshed, you know, so, but that was in the later years, already. From the beginning, it was pretty hard. They had to wait for the two thresh machines that were available in the community. It was either Gora, Charles Gora, or John Byrtus.

Rosemary Sure. You left school to go home and help your dad?

Alex Yes. And when I passed into grade 11, I had to go. I went to school in the fall and I was in school for about a month. And then, of course the threshing season come on and the weather was nice. So he came and took me and after that, you know, I was already getting to be 18 years old. And I thought, well, my goodness, you know, I have a girlfriend, I'm 18 years old, and it's time to start thinking about a future life. So I didn't go back to school after that. You know, I thought, buster up.

Rosemary You didn't mention the girlfriend till now.

Alex Oh, I had ... my girlfriend was ... I had a girlfriend through, since I guess she was about 14 years old when we kind of, you know, we went to school together with one another. And then we decided, I guess we started to fall in love. And, you know, we went around for six years before we got married. And when I got married, I was 23 years old and Millie was 20. There was a three-year difference between us. And so we went together for six years and then we decided we were going to get married. So we told the folks one day and then I had to go and I did some trapping and I bought my girlfriend a set of rings, you know, engagement ring and wedding rings like, you know. I forget what I paid for it. I think it was \$150 for the set of rings.

Rosemary/Alex That's significant! They were nice rings, you know!

Rosemary/Alex What was Millie's last name? Pidzarko. What else?

Rosemary Well, where do you want to go? On into the wedding and so on?

Alex Well the wedding is a complete new story because you know when we were getting married, I was of the Orthodox belief, Ukrainian Orthodox, and my wife was a Ukrainian Catholic. So she belonged to the Catholic Church. We had the two different denominations in the community at Richmond Park.

Rosemary/Alex Still do? Yes, we do. Rosemary, are you going to put me through this, too?

Rosemary It's up to you.

Alex Well, it's kind of, you know, kind of nice to reminisce, but I thought, why not? It may as well go down in history. What's the difference? People will know exactly what we lived through. But do you want me to talk a little bit about the wedding or what?

Rosemary Sure.

Alex Or is there something else before that yet? Well, I want to tell you this. I used to go to see my, well, Millie. She was about three miles from my place, dad's and mom's place. And the Pidzarko family were three miles apart. And I used to go in the wintertime, you know, try and go to see your girlfriend. Pretty cold some days. So I'm walking, not wearing very heavy underwear or anything else. Got pretty cold, my feet, everything. But anyway, yeah, those were the good old days, they say.

Alex I used to go there mainly once a week, because other than that we were occupied, and she had a little job later on when she got older. And I was kind of ... I never worked out away from home. I didn't go working for anybody. I tried to make a dollar by trapping or some other ways and means of making a dollar. I never actually left home to do any physical labor working out. I was just kind of, I don't know, an individual that probably tried to. Well, one instigation was that George Godel the DA, District Agriculturist. He used to say that your best investment is into your own business or whatever field you're going into, and that's what I kind of kept in mind. And I tried to do that. So I know I'm getting away from my girlfriend's story, but anyway, that's what happened. And I just didn't, I wasn't the type of individual that would want, or I guess I didn't like, to go out. I'd like to make my own dollar wherever I possibly could and that was my intention. And I think I succeeded quite well in life.

Alex I built a pretty nice homestead, yard over there. That was started in about 1950. When I first got the homestead, it was in 1950, and the way I got the homestead, I know I'm straying away. But anyway, in 1950 when the fires ... when Bill Chrusch came from the army he got a half section, well, not a half section, actually 240 acres which was one and a half quarters, 160-acre quarter, and then 80 acres of the next half. And I told you that before that he was clearing this land when he came back from the army and he windrowed or piled up the bush and whatever.

Rosemary The brush.

Alex Yeah. The brush and made a windrow that was half mile ... over half a mile long. And then when he set it on fire, in July of this one year, that was in about 1950, the fire kept on burning, and the wind I guess come up that day, and pretty strong wind you know. And it blew from the south and it carried the sparks of the fire from the brush pile into the big timber that was still growing on the 80 acres of the school section that Bill got.

Alex And my quarter, and there was another quarter north of mine, and another quarter west of my place. And there was all big timber, you know. So when the fire got in there it burned all of that. And that's when we went to Edmonton to make application for our homestead lease, because the government had announced that it would be up for homestead. So I was one of the applicants. George Ryga, you probably heard about George Ryga?

Rosemary Yeah, I've heard the name.

Alex And he, and Eddie Mochid. And we all went into Edmonton to the Department of Lands and Forests at that time. And they took and wrote our names down on a little piece of paper like the one you gave me the other day. And then, when we got there, they made us ... they put our names, the three names, on the different slips of paper.

Alex And they made us draw, you know, to pull it out of the hat. That's true. They put them in a hat and "you guys draw and see who gets number one." Because there was two quarters available, you know, and there were three of us that were interested in it. Myself, that quarter section that was available was next to my dad's place, it actually was the boundary line between the two quarter sections.

Rosemary So that's the one you wanted.

Alex I wanted it for home. And Eddie Mochid was the neighbor boy half a mile north of our place. He wanted a quarter section and then George Ryga wanted one. And you probably know quite a bit about George.

Rosemary I just recognize the name.

Alex He became a playwright. He first went to work on the bridge here in Athabasca in 1950 when they were building the bridge. Yeah, the river bridge. And he got in an accident. He lost three fingers on one hand. Somehow some beam fell on them or something. But anyway he lost three fingers. And he was a very smart boy. He was very good in school. In both his English and spelling and everything, he was a very good student, actually.

Alex After that, after we went to the Lands and Forest Office, like I said, they made us draw for a quarter section. They put number one, two, and three. There were three of us and only two quarters available for homesteads. So they made us draw. Number one, two, and three. And I was, I guess, lucky if your wife calls it that, and I drew number one. So I filed on the SE-32-68-21 ... the homestead that I got.

Rosemary And that was beside your dad?

Alex Yeah. Because it was a school section and the government reserved that green timber for the people that were moving in, you know the settlers. And they had a place to go and do their logging, you know. They'd have to buy permits, you know, for 10,000 board feet.

Alex And you can log that and take it over to the sawmill and get it cut up and use it for your buildings, you know. So anyway, when we went to Edmonton and I drew number one and Eddie Mochid drew number two, so he took to the north quarter right next to mine because it was in the same section. And George Ryga didn't get no land. He was a pretty smart kid. And he went to school and he went and applied for a job at the bridge. But he when he was working at the bridge in Athabasca, he lost the three fingers in an accident. So then he got himself a job as an advertising

scriptwriter, I guess you might call it. And he started to work for CFRN in Edmonton. But then as he worked, he decided to go into some writing.

Alex He became a playwright and he took a little course, as you know, he went into Banff School of Fine Arts in those days and he advanced himself to where he'd become a scriptwriter for the CFRN. And then from there on, he went on and he took some more courses at the Banff School of Fine Arts. And, you know, he'd write stories. I don't know, there's one I forget the title of the one book that he wrote about a native woman, I guess. And it's pretty interesting. So he did quite well, but unfortunately, he just didn't live too long, you know, and he passed away.

Rosemary Oh, really?

Alex So his sister is married to Ed Chudyk. I don't know him that well. I saw him and I know him and I know Anne, George's sister. But I don't know where they're living now or anything like that. I just didn't keep track. But George never got a homestead, so he went into a different field and he did quite well. But apparently he got cancer and he passed away. So he was probably about three years or four years younger than me.

Rosemary We are just going to be talking a bit about your marriage to Millie Pidzarko. And if you'd like to just fill in a little bit of information about that.

Alex Yes, Rosemary. I would like to say that when I was getting or intending to get married, I bought a set of rings. That I was trapping and made some money to buy the set of rings, and I think it was \$350. If I remember correctly, I bought the rings for \$350, and then one weekend my parents and I, we went over to the Pidzarko family so that I could give the engagement ring to Millie ... which was my wife's name. And after the ring presentation that evening with my parents and Millie's parents present, and of course, the rest of the family, the children that were around. That was a year before we got married. We went over to the Pidzarko family, like I said, and I presented the rings to her, to Millie with both parents present hers and mine. We just continued going around for about a year after that, and then it was June the 15th, 1950, I believe it was. No, maybe not. Maybe '49, I have to verify that date, it was either '49 or '50 that I got engaged and a year later, we got married. And when we got married, we prepared, of course, for the traditional thing was to build a big archway in the gateway of the [yard of the] parents of the girl that was to be married. And that was quite a significant thing, because when you build an archway that was probably 30, 40 feet high, from evergreen trees. A couple of evergreen trees we took to tie them to the corners of the posts at the gate and made this archway, and then that was as a signal that there was a marriage going on.

Rosemary Is that right?

Alex Yes, at the yard. Anyway, when the day came, we went to church, the traditional thing was if you were an Orthodox, you were to go to the bride's church and accept your marriage. And after that, she automatically took on the belief of the husband, her husband, which was an Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, groom. And that's what happened in my case. I was of Orthodox faith and she was of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox faith. The reason the Greek word was used is because

Ukraine was baptized into the Greek Orthodox faith years ago. And that was the traditional thing that was being kept by, you know, the family and parents.

Rosemary That's a tradition?

Alex Right, it's just a continuation of the faith. And if you want to go further?

Rosemary Go on, whenever you like. What would you like to?

Alex I'd like to mention our wedding day. You know, in the morning we get up and Mrs. Kachorowski, she was a very good friend of both parents, like the Pidzarko family and the Krawec family. And she brought, going to church before the marriage, she dropped off korovai and that is a big wedding cake, probably two feet in diameter. It was a big piece. She was going to church on her way that morning and she stopped at the Pidzarko family and dropped off korovai, the wedding cake. That was the Ukrainian wedding cake, and we accepted that. And then we went on to the church and it was a beautiful morning that morning. But by the time we come out of church after the wedding, because, you know, the Ukrainian service, our liturgy takes about an hour and a half at least, up to two hours in the church. And after that, the wedding ceremony took place. And, of course, we stayed in church till probably noon hour or pretty nearly noon hour. And after church, we went to the Pidzarko family [farm] where we got a platform ready and a shelter with a canvas roof we put over top just in case of some rain. And we did that.

Alex We had everything prepared for the wedding day, and exactly as we thought might happen, the weather turned rainy after we went to church. It was a beautiful morning, but by the time we got out of church, it was raining. So we were kind of lucky we had the shelters built and the platform built at the Pidzarko yard, and that's where we celebrated underneath the shelter. And of course, the poor house was being used as, you know, as normal. And by the time the house was all done with, and the wedding was all done, the next morning, well, Millie and I were intending to go to a honeymoon like, you know. And our intention was to go to Banff and Jasper and Lake Louise and all those places which we never were before. [It] was something totally different for us as being country kids, you know. We got to Edmonton and when we got to Edmonton, we were going to Edson to go to Jasper. And on the way there, we got pulled through about a mile and a half of new road construction. They were rebuilding, and muddy. So we had a D-8 Cat pulling cars. I borrowed dad's 1949 Mercury car, and that's what we used to go on our honeymoon like. You know, when we got back from the honeymoon, the next time we were going to Athabasca, we went as far as Swanberg's store. I don't know if ... well, you wouldn't know the location, but anyway. This one weekend, we decided to go with my parents to town.

Alex And we got the Swanberg's store and I looked at the front tire. After our honeymoon trip, had a bald spot, you know that the rubber tread was wore right off the front wheel of that, I believe it was the left wheel, if I remember correctly. That was wore right off, you could see the cord, you know. So we were so fortunate, we never had a blowout on our trip. But anyway, we got the town that day and we put new tires on the front of the car, and we managed to come back home that day. So

really, when you think back, you know, we could have had an accident, we could have had a blowout, the front tire especially. But that's the way it happened.

Rosemary So where did you make your first home?

Alex We lived for two years with my dad and mom. We got married. Dad and mom had to make us a bedroom in their house, in the living room. And that's where we lived. We had a baby. Terry was born, our first son. And we stayed with mom and dad for two years. And after that I started to build a new home on my homestead, because in 1950, we started to move into our house at the homestead. That was the homestead house. We were building the basement, mixing cement for the basement with a kind of a home device, cement mixer. We poured the basement and built the house, and in 1944, we moved into the house in August.

Rosemary Probably '54, right?

Alex 1954, yeah, sorry, that's right. Anyway, that's when we moved into our house and we started to develop from there on. And we built a home as you see it in the photograph over there. And that was our homestead. From there, we just continued working on the farm as best we could. I belonged to a lot of different organizations when I was a young fellow. I shouldn't say, maybe young fellow.

Rosemary You were a young fellow?

Alex In those days. That's right. So, anyway, life progressed and we were thankful we had a family of four children. Boy, a girl, a boy, and a girl.

Rosemary Do you want to just run through their names?

Alex Terry, Christine, Harold, and Maria. Terry was the one with the corsage there, that was the day he was graduating from Grade 12 at EPC. Because after going to school at Richmond Park, they started to ... the roads improved in the county, and they started to close down the little schools. And Richmond Park at that time had a three-room school, went up to grade nine.

Alex And we had three teachers. We had a principal. It was Mr. Galovich at that time and then Mary Gislason and Lorraine Gislason become teachers at Richmond Park. And I think the school was closed. You know, I shouldn't name the date because I just don't remember the exact date that they closed down the Richmond Park School and all the children were bussed to Athabasca. So it was centralized. I shouldn't say, centralized, because Richmond Park was centralized once before. They included Laura's District, the Mercury District, and the Richmond Park District, which were centralized into Richmond Park. There were three busses coming to the Richmond Park School. And after that, once they started to transport the children to Athabasca, the Richmond Park School was closed.

Rosemary/Alex What year that was? No, I can't remember. I would have to look back into the records and I could tell you the year that Richmond Park actually closed down.

Rosemary/Alex So the kids were born. Do you want to just go through the children and when they were born? You think I could remember that?

Rosemary Well, you have the four children, right?

Alex Yes. There is Terrance and Christine. And the reason we named Terrance? His name come from the, I guess some Ukrainian history we have. Which was Alexander the Great, you know, and so we gave him the name Terrance, after the history of the country, Ukraine. And Christine was named Christine because of her grand mom. Mrs. Pidzarko, her name was Christine, so we named our first daughter after grandma. And Harold, we had in mind that, he should be a doctor, you know.

Rosemary Did he agree?

Alex Yeah, the wife and I agreed. So we gave him the name Harold. And it was a popular name in the Ukraine at that time. So I guess maybe it still is. I don't really know. But that's where Harold's name come about. And Maria, I guess her name come from both the collection of Mrs. Pizdarko and my mom's kind of combined, we named her Maria.

Rosemary Very pretty.

Alex That's the history of the children. Now, what else can I tell you about? I went together as boyfriend and girlfriend for six years with my first wife, Millie, we were school kids. I guess we got to know one another quite well. Well, during the school years and she was a pretty girl and I guess we fell in love.

Rosemary/Alex I think you must have. So we were very fortunate. We had four beautiful children, we thought.

Rosemary What was Millie's life like on the farm?

Alex Millie's life was the housekeeper. I would say in general. Helping her mother because, you know, there was what? There were seven or eight children in her family, the seven of us in my family. So we were a pretty big family, you know.

Rosemary But when you homesteaded your own place and you were together as a family, did you have cattle, and chickens, and geese, and a garden, and everything?

Alex We had everything. We had geese. We had ducks. I built a little pond, and we had a little creek in the back of the yard of our home. And that's our homestead. And we built that pond in there for geese and ducks. Chickens for eggs and, you know, kind of self-sufficient as a farmer would be, you know. We had cattle. We had hogs. I think one time we had about four sheep, but that didn't last too long because it was just too much variety. So we cut down, just to livestock and grain farming.

Rosemary Were you making your own butter and all that?

Alex Oh, yeah. Well, you know, there was a plunger in my cream can. Cream cans at one time were quite tall, you know. So I built a round kind of the paddle at the end of this stick and we would paddle the cream in the churn, cream churn.

Alex And we made butter, and we had a form, a one-pound form. That if you made butter, you packed it in there and then made a pound-sized chunk of butter. And it would cool off, you know, and it would stay firm because butter didn't thaw that easily and it stayed firm and made a nice pound-sized butter.

Rosemary How did you keep it cool?

Alex In the cellar from the beginning because we had water in the basement. But after that, of course, I got a propane-run fridge. I bought a used one from the Swanberg's store. They had a fridge come along, a used fridge, a propane-run fridge and that's what we used from the beginning, years ago at the farm.

Rosemary That would make a difference.

Alex We used to take cream to town, to the creamery, because there was a creamery in Athabasca. And we used to milk cows and save the cream, separated the cream with a cream separator that was a hand-cranked separator. We would separate the cream from the milk like.

Alex It's just the normal things of life that had to be done, we all did it.

Rosemary Sure. But in terms of self-sufficiency what about lighting, were you using lamps?

Alex We had gas lamps, you know, double mantle if you can visualize. It hung up on the wall or up on the ceiling and the lamp itself was a double mantle lamp with a long wire kind of thing that you would hang it up on the ceiling. And it lit with two mantles. When you lit it, it was quite bright, actually, for light. That's what we mainly used from the beginning years we had to use the coal oil lamp, if you can imagine what that was.

Alex Some real memories to keep, I'll tell you.

Rosemary But truly, you were pretty well self-sufficient.

Alex Oh yes. We'd milk cows and the cream we would separate and ship to Athabasca because of the creamery being in Athabasca. After they moved the creamery out of Athabasca to Barrhead, then it kind of curtailed our milk and cream operation, you know. We had to change our style; we just didn't produce as much. We would produce some cream, but mostly for home use, because it was too much of a problem to try and ship the cream all the way to Barrhead. Not only because of the distance, but because of the time it took and the time element involved. The cream would usually get sour. And of course, that brought down the grade and you didn't get as much money for your cream. So we had to kind of quit that too. And going to more direct milk with the cattle that we raised at that time. We milked at one time up to 12 cows at the homestead. But that didn't last. I bought a kind of a

portable milker when we got to have 12 cows. It was a double milker that you can milk two cows at one time. And I built a sled and of course, there was no power. So I had to transfer the milking machine from the wellhouse where it was heated, and then bring it back to the barn on the sled to milk the cows. And then take it out of the barn because there was no heat, [to] the wellhouse I had heated. So that kept the machine thawed out so that you could use.

Alex Hard times, Rosemary, I tell you.

Rosemary Yeah, not easy. But you kind of had fun, though, didn't you?

Alex You know, I often said that if I had to live life over again, I think I would do it again. Because of the enjoyment, like you say, you know, we had fun doing things. We made our own games and our own trinkets and whatever. Made Christmas cards at Christmas time to send to your girlfriend or, you know. Even in school we made presents that we sent to other countries. Yeah. Little wooden toys, the horses and sleigh and wagons. We'd make those things. And they were in miniature form, of course, but we enjoyed doing those things. It was something to keep yourself employed, I guess. And by doing things, you kind of had a self-satisfaction. You know, you made something, you try to utilize it to the best you can, or you could, in those days.

Rosemary/Alex And you were saying that you got into quite a few organizations? Oh, yes.

Rosemary/Alex That started pretty early, didn't it? Yes, when I had 40 acres or 20 acres of Victory oats, I was in the Grain Club.

Rosemary That was the 4-H; yeah we talked about that.

Alex And I had a crop of oats that time. I forget the per acre yield that produced. I don't remember. And I have that on record somewhere because I've got all those records. But I find I just can't remember just how many bushels of oats. But it was a tremendous crop, beautiful crop of oats. Victory oats was the name of the brand, you know. I was a very active individual, I always belonged to the hall club and everything that was to be done as far as recreation, I think, I took part in.

Rosemary What was the hall club? What was the club you talked about?

Alex Grain Club. And that year all the members of the club grew oats. And we were kind of competing, you know, for the best crop and stuff like that. But I was lucky that dad had cleared that time about 20 acres, I guess, and it was just brand-new land. And I seeded that oats and I had a tremendous crop of oats on that. So it was, you know, I did very well as far as being recognized by the club members and all that. I did very well. Matter of fact, I think my crop yield was the highest per acre.

Alex Yes, many things went by in life.

Rosemary/Alex So what were some of the other organizations you got into? Well, I always belonged to a choir, a Ukrainian choir. I sang the tenor tone.

Rosemary Oh, I didn't know that.

Alex Yeah. We had, ... Mr. Chrusch was the choir director, and he had about 25 members, as far as I can remember, is the most we had in the in the choir group. And we sang in four voices all the time. We sang the soprano part, the alto part, the tenor, and the bass. The four different voices, yeah. We sang in church all the time, and we traveled many times to other locations, we went to Edmonton with our choir to Lac la Biche [and] west of Edmonton. Forget the name of the town.

Alex But, yeah, I was active in pretty well everything, any activity that there was or any organization. I like to belong to a group. And I guess I continued that through my years and in 1960 I became a councillor in the fall, in a by-election. And then I was a councillor in Division nine for eight, ten years. And then we moved to town because I built a house in town. I bought some lots that were very cheap from J.P. Olson. What was his name? Did you know him?

Rosemary No, I don't know him.

Alex Anyway. He had some lots, three lots, as a matter of fact. So I bought one for myself and one went to the church, to the Orthodox Church, and one of the lots I kept it till later on in life, and I built a house on it.

Alex Life went by with the necessities that you could afford, for one thing. You had to have a few dollars. I didn't have no money, but I trapped lots. I did a lot of trapping. I told you the time I caught a fox in the trap line.

Rosemary No.

Alex No, I didn't? Anyway, I had a trapline from dad's place, dad and mom's place, along Deep Creek down to the Athabasca River. That was about two and a half miles distance and I set snares. There was one time, one place, there was a log, a dead tree fell across the creek. So I put some stakes underneath the tree and in one spot I set the snare. And I caught a fox, a red fox.

Alex So I'm going to pick my catch and then there's this fox in this snare that was half dead. So I took him out of the snare and put him in my pack sack. Put him on my back. And I went trapping the rest of the day and picking up any furs and shooting squirrels, of course.

Alex Come home in the evening and taking my bag off and I could feel that something feels like it's alive in my bag. So I took my pack sack off and opened it up at home, you know, in the evening. And there's my fox running around inside the sack. So I guess I killed it in the sack because there was no other way I could save it and that was worth about \$30 at that time ... the fur. So I got \$30 for that day's trapping, anyway, plus the other few small furs, of course.

Rosemary Where did you bring the furs to?

Alex To Hingley's in Athabasca. We had a ... right where Marshall Wells store is, right at the corner, that same corner. There was a little building there. And there was, oh, I don't know his first name. I can't remember his first name. I did think his name was Hingley and he was a fur buyer, he was. And he used to buy fur right there.

Alex And whatever he did with the furs after that, I don't know. He probably, you know, grouped them together, the bundles of fur and shipped them on to Edmonton or Westlock or wherever. But I think at that time it was Edmonton because I don't remember taking any furs, my furs, to Westlock for sale. I always took them to Edmonton.

Alex One time we went hunting squirrels, you know, across the river on the south side of the river, because it was all bush. Riverbanks were all bush, big timber, and there's a lot of squirrels and weasels and other furs. So, I would go there. And this one time when I was coming home in the evening and I was walking across the ice on the river. And, you know, in the fall when it freezes, usually the water drops a little bit in the river and the ice kind of freezes along the edge with fresh water and then once it freezes that way, it drops. The water level drops in the river. So the ice and along their edge is clear ice and kind of sloped. I was hunting this one day across the river on the south side of the river and I went and I stepped on this ice, and I'll be darned if my feet didn't slip out from under me and I fell down and on the back of my head. And I still think that till this day that's the reason I'm wearing glasses, because I fell twice on the back of my head, you know, on my back when I slipped on the ice and fell just banging my head.

Alex So then I had to go up the riverbank to get home. And I followed the fence line, holding on to the railing on the fence line to be able to steady myself enough to get up to go home, you know. And I think I kind of hurt my eyesight a little bit falling on the back of the head. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's what I gather from it, because after that I went to school and I, I could always read the writing on the blackboard. From the back of the school, you know, but after that, my eyesight kind of shortened up, you know. I got short-sighted. And I started wearing glasses. Now in order to get glasses, in *The Free Press* there was ... I don't know if you remember or not ... but anyway there was a list, a kind of a row of little glass ... in the paper. It was right in the paper, attached to the paper, *The Free Press*. And in order to get glasses, I went and I looked for those glasses, little particles, and I tried to fit my eyesight to the glass that was in the paper that I could see the best through. So I ordered myself a pair of glasses for \$5 through *The Free Press*. And that's why those were my first glasses that I wore. And after that, I went to school, to high school a year in Athabasca, and of course boys are boys, you know. We played ball and we're playing some kind of a game. Something hit me in my glasses and broke my lens. So in order to not let my folks see that I had my glasses broke, so I made myself a piece of plastic lens inserted into that space. Well over the frame, a little frame, you know, and put it in there. And I went home that weekend. Of course dad and mom didn't recognize that the difference, you know, because they didn't look that closely. And I had an artificial, plastic, glass in the frame of my glasses.

Rosemary How long did that go on?

Alex Oh, I don't know, for a while, because by the time I ordered new glasses, you know, it took a little while. And then I finally went to Starko Brothers optometrists in town and got myself a pair of glasses. But they were, they were only 20 some dollars. I could afford that, you know. I could afford to buy them. That's the way I got around dad finding out I had broken glasses.

Rosemary So he never knew.

Alex No, well, I don't know. I might have told him later in life, after that. Yeah, oh, kids are kids, you know. And especially, you know, boys are always figuring something out that they shouldn't be, but they did. Yeah, I have to admit to it too. I'm not [no] angel, no.

Rosemary No, you weren't the innocent, necessarily, huh? You were going to talk about after the wedding?

Alex I told you about the platform that we had built at the Pidzarko family yard. And then when the wedding was over, we moved for the evening because it was raining. So we moved to the community hall. And after the dance was over about four o'clock in the morning, we decided to go to my parents' for the night. My wife and I. So we got within a mile and a half of dad's and mom's place, we get stuck in the mud at the corner of the road. So my wife, she picks up her wedding gown and throws it over her arm, and the veil. And I rolled up my suit pants and we walked home for a mile and a half from where the car was stuck to dad's and mom's place.

Rosemary Oh, my goodness.

Alex Yeah, we stayed overnight and the next morning, the next day, got up and we hooked up to the Massey Ferguson 444. And we hooked it up to the wagon and then we all got into the wagon and went back to the Pidzarko family [home] for the gift opening. And that's the way we were able to get back because it was muddy. So we got through that day, had the gift opening, and the next day we went over to the Pidzarko family to clean up. Well, of course, the mud that was carried in by the people that were at the gift opening, they walked into the house and that.

Alex So before Millie and I left for that, which was three days after the wedding, before we left on our honeymoon, we had to shovel the mud. Believe it or not it was layered, half an inch thick on the floor in the house because people were walking back and forth and all this when it's raining. So, anyway, we worked for two days to clean the house before we left for the honeymoon. We got to Edmonton and we got to east of Edson. Or west of Edson, I should say, because we were on our way to Jasper.

Rosemary And that's where you got stuck.

Alex No, we got stuck going home from the dance at Richmond Park. A mile and a half from dad's place.

Rosemary No, I know what, I'm thinking back to when you talked about having to be pulled through the mud.

Alex Oh, that yeah. I don't know, about a good mile and a half of construction that they were building. And I had dad's Mercury car, it was a big car ...1949 Merc ... and we had to have it pulled through the muddy roads. That's what there was in those days. We got pulled through that construction and we got into Jasper and then from there on we got into Radium Hot Springs, I guess.

Alex And then, Banff Hot Springs, and then we went on to, it was a tower, a new tower built in, gee I forget the name of the town. We wanted to see that tower, so we went there. We saw the tower and then we went on to, right into, just across the border into the States. And then we had to come back because my wife got homesick and she started to cry. And we had to come back home. I can't really explain the reasoning, but just homesick I guess. And so we came home and had to start settling down in dad and mom's place. We lived with mom and dad for two years. I told you that before. And then the baby was born. Also, we lived with dad and mom until I built the house and started to move into our place. It was quite a sentimental feeling, I guess.

Rosemary Oh, it must have been wonderful.

Alex When we had to move into our own, I don't know. Sentimental because of not being able to stay with the parents, but sentimental because we were able to go on our own. You know, and I guess when you kind of understand your wife's condition and your wife's feeling and if you're willing to give and take, then I think you can make a go of it. And we did. We'd spend many a time when we were building the house, you know. We'd sit out on the doorstep on the east side of the house, and if the wind was from the eastern direction, we could hear noises from Charlie Gora's and Mike Holowieski's and Korolak's place, cows bellowing, people hollering. It was just the normal way of life.

Rosemary And you weren't that far away from your parents' place.

Alex Just half a mile west. Yeah, I was fortunate because that quarter section that I got as a homestead, I think I told you it was reserved for a bush quarter for the community. But after the fire, the government opened it up for homesteads. And the three of us, George Ryga, and [Ed] Mochid, and myself, went to the city to the Department of Lands and Forests at that time. And we drew and I happened to be number one. So I took my selection and then Ed got the second choice, and George got left without a quarter. So, that's the way things worked out.

Rosemary Yeah, it's amazing how they did it in those days.

Alex And very simply, actually, because they put your name on a piece of paper and threw it in a hat and made you just pick up the name, and if you were number one, you got number one. That's what it was.

Rosemary: Wow. Let's go back to the fact that you had married Millie Pidzarko. And the children had come along through the years. And maybe just talk a little bit more about Millie.

Alex Millie was a girlfriend of mine. From the early school days, I guess. We both went to school at Richmond Park and got to know one another quite well. We went around as boyfriend and girlfriend, I guess, for six years. It just continued until the time I got to be 23 and Millie was 20. And there was a three-year difference between our age. We raised a family of four children. The first one was a boy, then we had a girl, and a boy, and a girl. I don't know if I have to name them.

Rosemary No. We've talked about them. Lovely kids.

Alex: Sometimes it's a little difficult to recall all the activities of life that transpired during our time.

Alex We both enjoyed working with people. We both belonged to a choir at Richmond Park, a Ukrainian choir. And then when we moved to Athabasca, we joined the Athabasca choir. And we just participated in community activities as much as we possibly could. Other than that, life, I guess, was quite normal. We enjoyed going out. Working with people, visiting with people. We had a lot of friends. I guess we still do. In 1968 I become a councillor in a by-election. In Athabasca, I sat on the town council for five years. And then I got a school bus driving job and that kind of supplied the financial needs of life. And during that time, I was a councillor, a town councillor for five years, and then I got onto a school bus driving job. And then made my home in Athabasca ever since.

Rosemary/Alex I thought I'd just go back to Millie and what happened with Millie's health and that? You know, I don't remember the year, off hand when Millie passed away.

Rosemary/Alex Well, you said 41. She was 41 years old, when she passed away.

Rosemary Very young.

Alex Yes, and it left me with four children. And my mother-in-law was with us, so she helped me along until ... I don't know. She stayed with me for three years after Millie passed away, and then she said she wanted to go to the Lodge. So I said, "that's fine, if that's what you'd like. I will make those arrangements." And so we did. I took her to the Lodge and I got to know the matron.

Rosemary Yeah. But prior to that, you had, Mrs. Pidzarko had been with you for 15 years, right? So she was very much a part of the family.

Alex Oh, yes. The children learned to speak Ukrainian because she didn't speak English. Or very little, if she did. She understood, but she didn't speak it. So, all life continues.

Rosemary Yeah, well, she was a real anchor for you and the children after Millie passing.

Alex Of course, she acted like a mother. And not only that, like a mother, but she was there at the home when the children went to school and they come home after school. They came home to somebody that was there. It wasn't an empty home that

she came to. And it was an asset to me. I know, worthy actually, you might say, because it certainly helped bring the family up. Other than that, I just I think I'm repeating myself.

Rosemary Well, that's probably because we talked about it before then.

Alex Have you got anything in mind that you would like to ask me?

Rosemary/Alex Well, I'm thinking, your mother-in-law would have been a big feature for your children? Yes.

Rosemary/Alex And Millie passing, I presume it was cancer? Yes, it was, breast cancer.

Rosemary And that must have been, a very hard, time?

Alex: It was not only hard for me, but for her mother also, because, you know, a mother's, I guess feelings are always for a child. Because she is a mother. Or she was a mother. She understood fully the life of a female. And she knew exactly what, well, she went through along with her daughter, you know. Yeah, it was something that was natural in life, and we had to live through it and trying to make the best of it.

Rosemary Yeah, very tough. So you got into 4-H originally, and that was probably your introduction to community stuff, eh?

Alex I always, like I always say, my dad belonged to a choir, Richmond Park Ukrainian choir. So I went to the singing practices of the choir with along with dad all the time. And my sisters and brothers took part too. We had a Sunday school at Richmond Park one time. And dad was one of the instructors, I guess, or teachers during the weekend, mainly, because that was when we had the time to do community work.

Alex And this continued, being a community worker. I helped build the Richmond Park Community Hall in 1936. I was getting old enough, I guess, to give a helping hand. And I worked as a community worker ever since. Well, right from the beginning, I was very active in all types of kids' [activities] you know, young schoolboys or girls for that matter, school children age. And I just participated as a community worker all the time.

Rosemary: Sounds like you were a natural.

Alex That may be, but and then of course, in 19--, I forget what year, I became a county councillor in Division nine, north of the river. I think I talked about that one time before. And I was a county councillor until I had to give it up, as for the county council is concerned. I moved to town and in a by-election in town, I became a town councillor. And I was a town councillor for five years. Making it a total of 15 years of community work and involvement in community work. Other than that, I've been working. I've helped to renew the church here in town, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. I've been on county council or town council, I should say, and did as much as I possibly could on the town council. I'm still very interested in the local activities.

Rosemary You read *The Advocate* every week.

Alex Well, I, you know, I tried to do my bit as far as community work is concerned. Other than that, I'm very thankful for the Almighty that I have had the health and ability to be able to partake in those kinds of activities. Other than that, I just feel that I should, and I will, continue putting in my little bit of effort that I possibly could towards community activities and the whole community.

Alex: I love the country I live in. I am very thankful to my parents that they had the foresight to bring themselves, as far as myself as a baby, to Canada. I think we have a great country and I think we have to give, or put, all our efforts into maintaining a country for ourselves as well as our future for our children. Because I think we have a great country to live in and I'm very thankful for that.

Rosemary Would you like to go back a bit to, you married a second time after quite a bit of time. I think it was Helen, right?

Alex Yeah, after my mother-in-law stayed with me for three years after my first wife Millie passed away. I took Mrs. Pidzarko, my mother-in-law, to the Lodge, and I got to know Helen, who was the matron at that time. We got to know one another a little bit more, and we went out for a year to different occasions, entertainment, you know, entertainment mainly and well, all kinds of activities for that matter.

Alex And just got married. Got to know one another to the stage where we decided we would get married. I didn't want to live common law. Because of the fact that I had a family and I wanted to set the example I guess to my family, that life is a partnership. Unless we look at it in a broad way. And I guess, overlook the misgivings and try and do the future to the best of our knowledge or live for the future.

Alex Other than that, life is quite normal. I am very fortunate to be blessed with good health, at least I feel that I've got fairly good health at my age.

Alex: I shouldn't be sitting here discussing with you all of this, the past and the present and the future, I guess.

Rosemary/Alex Well, why not? Yes. But that's where we're at, Rosemary.

Rosemary/Alex Yes, so life has been, life has been good? Yes, I think it has.

Rosemary I mean, it's been difficult.

Alex I know we lived through misfortunes and all of us, but I think that we have to thank the Almighty that we are able to be healthy enough to partake and give whatever we possibly could to our community, our country, and to life as a whole.

Rosemary You were talking about harrowing when you were first, you and your father and some of the building that you used to do, to try and make things easier. You talked about harrowing with the seeding.

Alex Yes, dad used to always ask me to do the harrowing after, you know, because in the olden days we used to seed by hand. We had no seed drill, or anything. So I would be the marker boy that would go along the edge of the area that the seed would fall on when dad was seeding by hand and it would give them an outline. Well, of course, my footsteps in the dirt was just something that they could follow and proceed, you know, extending the seeded area in the field.

Alex And that was our way of doing things. And when it come to harrowing, I had to walk behind the harrows. And of course we had three horses at that time and probably five harrows. I don't know, the harrows must have measured about three feet by five feet, or four and a half feet and I used to have to walk behind the harrows to do the harrowing after the seeding. So I decided I'm going to make it easier for myself. So I built a cart. I took a 2-by-4, I don't know, about 14 feet long, and built a cross arm, and made an axle. But the thing that I did forget was that the axle was wooden and the wheels I used was from an old drill. And they were steel wheels with the spokes protruded right into the hub, and it was rough inside. The hub was rough inside. And as I rode on that cart, it worked through the wooden axle that I built for it and I fell down.

Alex So I had to walk and harrow after that to finish the field that I was harrowing. And that was a part of an experience that I learned that not everything is 100% proof. Because I didn't realize that the steel wheels wore the wood axle through and that wore right out until I fell off the cart. And then I had to unhook the cart and continue the harrowing on foot again. So that was a learning experience in the lifetime. And of course, I did many things that I would do, and while doing it, you would make mistakes and that's how you learn to do things better the next time when you're doing it.

Rosemary Yeah, and you were saying that you and your father built houses?

Alex We built. Dad built his own house when he first come onto the homestead in 1930. I think he must have built his house, which I have a picture of right over there in the corner. It's the first house dad built on his homestead. We just continued building. We didn't have no special, carpenters or any, you know, professional help. We did all the work by, just self-experience, I guess. And dad learned quite a bit because he got left behind at the age of nine years old when his father passed away in the Ukraine. So he had to take the place of his dad and help his mother there maintain the farm in the Ukraine until they decided to immigrate to Canada. That's where we'd get educated and learn.

Rosemary For sure. Such was life. Yes, and you were saying that in later years, the District Agriculturist invited your family to come into the Exhibition?

Alex We were recognized as a farm family award. I've got the certificate and all that here somewhere in my album. If we need to, I can find them and we can provide information for the future. But yes, we were recognized as the farm family award. And we were asked to go to the city, to the Klondike Days. I forget what year it was.

Rosemary Well, that was an annual award, right?

Alex It was an annual community award of the surrounding area, I guess. I was a 4-H member at that time and I grew oats, Victory oats. And it yielded, I forget how many bushels it was at the time that it yielded, but it was very recognizable. The reason it yielded quite well was because it was new land dad had worked up and cultivated to be able to grow a crop of oats on it. And I guess that the club, the agricultural club that I belonged to, was sponsored by the community agricultural organization, local organization. And Mr. Godel was the District Agriculturist at that time. And I was given that club recognition, as a member of the club.

Alex Other than that, life was quite normal. It had to be.

Rosemary But lots of work.

Alex Oh yeah, but that was no problem.

[End of Interview}

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Jan Thiessen
Proof-read by: Linda Doroshenko
December, 2020