

**Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project**  
**Transcription of Doug Harper recording 2017.mp3**  
[http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/d\\_harper.htm](http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/d_harper.htm)

Narrator(s): Doug Harper and Debbie Kristensen  
Interviewer: Rosemary Neaves  
October 24, 2017

[Start of Interview]

**Rosemary** It is October 24th, 2017. My name is Rosemary Neaves, and I am visiting with Doug Harper and his daughter, Debbie Kristensen. Some history regarding Douglas Harper—his full name is Alfred Douglas Harper. His father's name was Robert Harper. His mother's name was Eddie Mae Harper (Cooper). Doug's birth date was December 5th, 1929. He was born in Maidstone, Saskatchewan.

**Rosemary** So, Doug, shall we start at Maidstone and you were born in 1929. Was your family farming at that time?

**Doug** Yeah, we lived on the farm. We went to school there and then we moved to Calgary.

**Rosemary** And you had some brothers and sisters?

**Doug** Yes. My brother, he played guitar and made music. My sister lives at the coast. My older brother, they lived in the States, so I never had much time with them.

**Rosemary** Do you remember much of the time on the farm in Maidstone?

**Doug** No, not that much, because I was still going to school when I left there.

**Rosemary** That was a big move to Calgary.

**Doug** It was so.

**Rosemary** So, the whole family moved to Calgary and you were suddenly a city boy?

**Doug** Right. I went to school in Calgary.

**Rosemary** You remember how many years you were there?

**Doug** Oh, no, I really don't.

**Rosemary** What are some of the things that you remember about that particular time in your life?

**Doug** Oh, I played football for the Calgary Bronks. Stuff like that. Then boxed in the ring for a few years. Was the light heavyweight champion of Canada until I retired.

**Rosemary** How did you get into boxing?

**Doug** I used to work at a place where they served food and I used to keep them from fighting down there. A promoter was there one time; they used to run fights in Calgary, and he seen me put a fellow out and he asked me to come to the gym and start working out. He said that I looked pretty good in the ring. He said I could make money. So, that's where I went.

**Rosemary** So, you were just working, helping out, in a shelter and trying to keep the kids from fighting.

**Doug** Yes, that's right, in the cafe, Chicken Inn. Well, every once in a while, some people would jump up and get into a big ruckus there. I had to split them up and throw them out. Yep.

**Rosemary** Well, that was a very unexpected happening in your life, I would think.

**Doug** Well, when you live in the city, you look at stuff like that, because it's not like living out in the country. There is always somebody doing something that they shouldn't do.

**Rosemary** But for a promoter to just happen to be there, that's unusual, isn't it?

**Doug** Well, they come because of the Chicken Inn there, to eat there all the time, a lot of them. He seen a promotion and he invited me up to the gym.

**Rosemary** Did you enjoy it?

**Doug** Ah, it was something to do, kept me in shape. You didn't, you know, when you live in the city, you got nothing to do anyway, so you go into sports or something.

**Rosemary** And was that when your football sort of ended when you got into the ring?

**Doug** No, I kept playing football until I got too old to play. Yeah, I love that game, so I stayed with it. Everybody used to say "Quit! you're going to get hurt!" Well, that's when you look around, you're naturally going to get hurt, you can't be a sissy. You gotta be tough.

**Rosemary** Well, you certainly had the height for the boxing ring, I would think, wouldn't you?

**Doug** Well, sometimes the height thing is all you need. You get the little short guys, sometimes their weight is a disadvantage. And you get the tall ones, that was the same.

**Rosemary** So, was that something that you did as full-time sort of, once you got with the promoter, or was it just whenever?

**Doug** Just whenever. I never stayed there too long. Whenever somebody, a promoter, would phone me and ask me to come and fight somebody or something, I'd get in shape. Fight them and that's how I got the Canadian title that day. I fought a fellow from down east. I guess he was whooping everybody. They phoned and I'd already moved out here then. They phoned for me to come down there, to see if I could beat him. So, I went down and I beat him.

**Rosemary** So, at what point did you decide to come up here to Athabasca?

**Doug** Oh, I don't know what year it was I came up here. I had some friends that used to live up here and I come up to visit them and I liked the country. That was way back, before the ... I didn't even have my family then. I love the country.

**Rosemary** That's your favorite, the country?

**Doug** I couldn't stand too much going on in that city. You got know, what do you got? Every time you step out the door, there's somebody in your face. Now-a-days you can go for miles and you don't see nobody or be bothered, you know. It's a better life.

**Rosemary** Quieter, and more reflective life, maybe?

**Doug** Right.

**Rosemary** And were you married at that time? Had you met your wife?

**Doug** I had met my wife. We worked at the same place there for a while.

**Rosemary** Now, where was that?

**Doug** At the Chicken Inn in Calgary. And then I decided I should marry her, and she said it would be okay. So, I asked her mother and dad and they said if I looked after her, I could have her!

**Rosemary** And so you were in Calgary for a few years with her, was that correct?

**Doug** Yeah, we stayed there for a while and then we went to the coast for one season there; fought out of Vancouver. Then when we left Vancouver, I bought this land from a lady down there. She wanted to get rid of it.

**Rosemary** You mean the lady in BC wanted to get rid of it?

**Doug** To get rid of it. Yeah, we bought it anyway. They were using their land and not paying the taxes. And she said she was eventually going to lose it, because nobody was paying her for using her land. So, if I wanted to buy it, she would sell it. I said, I'll take it. I never was a guy that liked living in the city.

**Rosemary** So, what were some of the things once you got out here? I'm presuming that you got into some farming, or was it something else?

**Doug** Oh, I worked for a farmer here for I don't know how many years. I did all of his farming for him there. He had all the machinery, so he hired me, and I did his farming.

**Rosemary** And who was that?

**Doug** Stanley Zayezierski.

**Rosemary** Okay, and you built a house?

**Doug** Yes, I built this house. I don't know what year we built this shack.

**Debbie** 1983, 'cause when we first come here there was an old house there that they lived in.

**Rosemary** And so, your family, I presume, began out here. Was that right?

**Doug** Where were you born? Weren't you born in Vancouver?

**Debbie** Calgary.

**Rosemary** Oh, so you were a Calgary baby.

**Debbie** Rhonda was in Vancouver. You were boxing in Vancouver.

**Doug** Yes, that is right.

**Debbie** Wade was born here in Athabasca. His son.

**Doug** One in BC, Alberta, I tried all of the provinces.

**Rosemary** Good thing you didn't move to any other provinces. So, you have the three children?

**Doug** Yes.

**Rosemary** I'm wondering in terms of stories that you remember from when you came out here, are there particular stories that come to mind?

**Doug** Not really. You know it. Well, there wasn't too much of a story to tell because they played a lot of ball here.

**Rosemary** You mean? What kind of ball?

**Doug** Baseball. Amber Valley had a good baseball team. They used to play at all of the picnics. But I wasn't such a good ballplayer, so I was used sometimes as a spare. Yeah.

**Rosemary** Amber Valley was quite a little community at that time?

**Doug** Oh yeah. We used to have the church and everything here, a half a mile away from here. They had the school here. Didn't you go to school here, Deb?

**Debbie** Yeah. I started here.

**Rosemary** So, baseball became the sport?

**Doug** Well, Amber Valley had one of the best ball teams in this part of the community. But I never was what you'd call a real ball player. I played ball, that's it. Them balls were coming too fast and too hard.

**Rosemary** What happened to, I was going to say rugby, but that's not the word I want. Your other sport that you were involved with?

**Doug** Well, after I finished playing football, I didn't go up any further because I wanted to do boxing. I had a chance to win the title of Canada. So, I set down football and stayed with boxing. I won the title of Canada from a fellow named Yvon Durelle from Baie-Sainte-Anne, New Brunswick. Oh, you find guys from all over.

**Rosemary** Well, during that time, I mean, how often would you be fighting?

**Doug** Well, not too often because nobody wanted to fight me after a fashion. You win so many, people don't want to fight because they know, they figure that they can't whoop you.

**Rosemary** Sort of gun shy, huh?

**Doug** It's a game that you don't want to stay in too long. And if you don't look after your body and go to bed like you should, you better get out because you're going to get wounded.

**Rosemary** Would you be sort of practicing or working out every day?

**Doug** Oh, yeah. You had to run, you hit that road every morning and do a five-mile jog. You had to stay in shape. If you get into that ring and if you ain't in shape, you're going to get beaten.

**Rosemary** And all the time you were still working on the farming, right?

**Doug** No, I was in the city for a while [before] I bought this farm. Until the year I moved out here. Got a chance, a lady wanted to sell the land and I was at the right place at the right time.

**Rosemary** Yeah, well, that was really kind of a gift?

**Doug** It was so.

**Rosemary** Just to all to come together like that.

**Doug** Yeah.

**Rosemary** And what about the children? They went to school here?

**Doug** Yep.

**Rosemary** How did Eddie Mae like it out here?

**Doug** She was never out here. No.

**Debbie** No, his mother wasn't here.

**Doug** She used to live in Calgary.

**Rosemary** I'm getting the name, your wife's name I should say?

**Doug** Oh, she thought it was alright, because I was home most of the time, you know. Working for the farmer and come home every night. Life was good.

**Rosemary** Yeah. And did you have cattle?

**Doug** Yes, we had horses and cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys; we had the whole bit. Like a hobby farm, you know. A lot of animals.

**Rosemary** Well, it sounds like homesteading to me. You built your own place. Those were the days when you could be self-sufficient.

**Doug** Oh yeah. Well, if they ever inspected it, they wouldn't pass it, you'd have to tear it down. Well, we were lucky when we built this, everything passed.

**Rosemary** Now, your wife's name was?

**Doug** Jennie.

**Rosemary** Jennie, and she just took on the homemaking, breadmaking and all that kind of stuff.

**Doug** Yes, she looked after the house.

**Rosemary** And what about the community? Was she very involved?

**Doug** She didn't have much time to do much in the community; she had three children to look after. But she did a little bit there for them, she used to cook for the suppers and what not.

**Rosemary** Well, the suppers are amazing, aren't they? That's a whole community effort.

**Doug** Yeah. They used to be good suppers. People used to come from the city and all over to have chicken supper out here.

**Rosemary** Yeah. What are some of the memories that you have of the family and Amber Valley in terms of the community?

**Doug** They all get together on Sundays and sometimes play ball and what not. Other than that, there wasn't too much. They had a church and a school here. That is about the end of her.

**Rosemary** Did you have a minister that came out on a regular basis?

**Doug** Well, the minister used to live there. Mr. Bowen was kind of the minister out here. And every once in a while somebody from the city would come out and they would have church and that. But most of the time I was too busy working in the field. I worked for that farmer for years. I did all his farming, so Sundays didn't mean nothing. We had to get her in. Weather was good, you kept going.

**Rosemary** Yeah.

**Doug** Yeah, farming you know, you got to go with the weather.

**Rosemary** For sure.

**Doug** The day you take off, you could maybe put in 100 acres of crop. The next day she could be raining.

**Rosemary** That's right.

**Doug** A lot of people used to say, "Why are you working on Sunday?" and if you want to get her in, you got to get out there. "Oh, nobody works on Sunday." Probably Monday, she'd be raining. And I would have his in and they'd blame me for it raining. [laugh] Like they say, you gotta make hay while the sun shines.

**Rosemary** Yeah, that's right.

**Rosemary** Debbie Kristensen, Doug's daughter, is going to talk a bit about the boxing history that has been a major part of his life. So, Debbie, I'm just going to ask you to pick up on that?

**Debbie** Doug's debut fight was on June 4th, 1947, at the Victoria Pavilion in Calgary, Alberta. It was a light heavyweight bout that he won. Doug fought 33 times between 1947 and 1953, amassing a record of 25 wins, six losses and two draws. He only fought six times after 1954, finishing his professional career in 1961. Once his fighting career was over, he settled into a life of farming at Amber Valley, Alberta, and he went on to work with construction and general contracting. On February 6th, 2017, Doug received an honorary lifetime champion award from the Canadian Boxing Council.

**Rosemary** And Debbie has some dates and events that happened throughout Doug's family life. So, Debbie, if you'd like to start with your notes.

**Debbie** In March of 1942, Doug's family moved from Saskatchewan to family [in Calgary] where Doug continued going to school. Doug played soccer on the Langevin High School team in Calgary, Alberta. In the 1946-1947 season, this team became the senior soccer champions.

**Debbie** Doug met his wife to be while she was working at Bob's Southern Chicken Inn in Calgary. He fell in love and they were married July 15th, 1948. Doug played junior football for the Calgary Bronks from 1948 to 1950. Doug played football for the Calgary Junior Stampeders on the all-star team on July 1st, 1949.

**Debbie** Doug was the first Calgarian to hold a Canadian boxing championship, and he was the first Calgarian to hold the Dominion fight crown. Doug won the heavyweight championship of western Canada in April 1952 against Sonny Matheson at the Sales Pavilion in Edmonton, Alberta. Doug never lost this title.

**Debbie** Doug and his wife bought a farm in Amber Valley, Alberta in 1952 and moved from Calgary with two daughters; the oldest born in 1949, her name was Deborah, and his second daughter was born April 1952 and her name was Rhonda. Doug defeated Yvon Durelle on November 17, 1953, in the Victoria Pavilion in Calgary for the light heavyweight championship. His opponent denied a rematch. Doug's third child, a son, Wade, was born November 30th, 1953 in Athabasca. Doug defeated Benny Flake for the Intermountain Boxing Championship on March 3rd, 1954. He won this title and was never defeated.

**Debbie** Doug trained amateur boxing in Amber Valley in 1958. While he was pursuing his career in boxing, his wife Jennie, stayed on the farm and raised their three children. They planted a big garden every summer and there was a variety of animals on their farm to take care of. Doug retired from boxing in 1961. Altogether, he had 56 career boxing matches.

**Debbie** He settled into a life of farming and operating heavy equipment in the winter months to bring in extra income. Doug trained Air Cadet boxing in 1968 in Athabasca, Alberta. Doug participated in the old timers' boxing card at the Edmonton Coliseum on March 9th, 1978. The money raised was donated to the Native Boys' Boxing Club.

**Debbie** Doug's oldest grandson, Darren, played peewee hockey in Boyle, Alberta in 1980. The village had no luck in finding a coach for this level of hockey, so Doug laced up a pair of skates and coached these young men to win the High Point league trophy.

**Debbie** Amber Valley decided to set up a community hall. Doug and Jennie were very active in this endeavor. Doug became president of this club. They had chicken suppers twice a year and there was always a picnic and ball tournament on July 1st. Amber Valley got a sweat equity grant to build a new community hall a few miles west of the old hall. Doug and his wife were very active with the building and activities in this new place. Doug was still president and continued doing this for many years. They continued the chicken suppers, baseball tournaments, dances and rented the hall for weddings, etc.

**Debbie** In December 1995, the Edmonton Boxing and Wrestling Commission's honor roll presented Doug with their award of recognizing outstanding service to professional and amateur boxing and wrestling in the city of Edmonton. On February 6th, 2017, Doug received an honorary lifetime champion award from the Canadian Boxing Council. The presentation was made by Scotty Olson at Amber Valley, Alberta.

[End of Interview]

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