

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project

Philip Brown – Interview Transcript

Narrator: Philip Brown
Interviewer: Irene Fitzsimmons
Date: September 16, 2019

To listen to audio interview, go to: <http://digiport.athabasca.ca/aasmp/plist.php>
Select "Eric & Ethel Brown Family" > Select "Philip Allan Brown" > Scroll down to "Audio interview" > Play ►

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Irene: *We're now doing individual sessions with the Brown family, we have Phil here with us, and this is still Monday, September 16th. The interviewer is Irene Fitzsimmons and we are ready to go. So, we're going to start, Phil, maybe picking up your own story, from toward the end of school, and an important incident that happened at around that time when your father's accident happened. Just pick up from there and go into what happened after that for you.*

Phil: Okay, my name's Phil Brown. I graduated in Athabasca in 1967 from grade 12, and went to Calgary after meeting my sweetheart, who I met at a country dance. We went to school together later on and started dating. I went to Calgary and worked for a while in the oil patch, mostly in supply. I came back to Edmonton and worked on the railroad. I was a brakeman for a couple of years. While I was a brakeman, during the winter it was quieter on the train, so I started apprenticing as an electrician. I worked union in various projects in Fox Creek, Bigstone and some other gas plants up there. My mother said one day, "There is a job in Athabasca you should apply to," and I did. I started with a local company, McLean's Electric, in Athabasca. I moved back here, I guess in about '69 and started in electrical, and of course, all that time was dating my sweetheart, Elizabeth (Betty).

We had a bad fire in 1969, when my dad got burned really badly. My sister, Jean, and I took over. We drove the school bus, did all the farming, milked the cows, and kept life going until Dad got better. I had to take time off from electrical, so I was a little bit behind.

In 1970, I got married. My wife was working in Imperial Oil in Edmonton, so I went to school for five months straight and got my journeyman's ticket as an electrician. I was still working for Maclean's, so we came back to Athabasca. We moved in 1972 and we've been here ever since.

We have two daughters who are 40 and 42. One is living in Portland, Oregon with three grandchildren and one's in Stony Plain with two grandchildren. One granddaughter now has two grandboys, so we're great-grandparents.

I've lived about seven miles south of Athabasca on a farm for 40 years. We built a house back then and we've lived there ever since, and we're still there right now. Today we're just staining it again – it's a cedar log home on 80 acres. It is very nicely landscaped now after 40 years of living there. In my electrical years, I did a lot of work across Canada, on various projects, sawmills, and SAAN Stores. My wife worked as secretary in education and the RCMP, and raised our kids. The two kids graduated school in Athabasca. One daughter, actually, went to private school for a while, and then she graduated in Edmonton.

Irene: *Phil, what are your daughters' names?*

Phil: My youngest daughter's name is Susan Brown. She's married to an engineer from the US, he was from Alaska. Her name is Susan Heffernan now, and the other is Trisha Doherty, who married a UK citizen. They split up after he didn't immigrate properly, and they moved to England for a while. She didn't want to be there, so she's back home now. She's a homemaker. My other daughter [Susan] is a nurse in the US in Portland, Oregon.

I did electrical work for many years. When ALPAC came into Athabasca, I started up a mechanical contracting firm that did electrical, mechanical, welding and picker work. In 2002, we started up an oilfield construction outfit in Wabasca, and that's been my main focus until about three years ago. We ran picker trucks, bed trucks moving rigs and do oilfield service work. I ended up with quite a few commercial buildings in Wabasca, but now I have no equipment. I basically am semi-retired. I still run a picker truck in the oilpatch, and I still look after all of my buildings. My wife is retired. She ran a jewelry store in Athabasca for many years. Then we raised our granddaughter and she wanted to get her out-of-town, so they moved to White Rock, BC where she raised our granddaughter. She graduated in White Rock and moved back to Alberta about five years ago. She went to university and got a degree in psychology and now has our two great-grandchildren.

My wife and I still live about seven miles south of Athabasca on Highway 2. Her parents were from Perryvale. They were farmers and she has a big family of six brothers, and they all live around either Edmonton, some are in BC, or around Perryvale, still farming.

As of today, I am, like I say, semi-retired, although I still try to get out and work a lot. I enjoy trapping very much. I've been a trapper all my life. I do not have a trap line at this time, but I do hope to get another one.

Irene: *What do you trap for?*

Phil: When I was trapping, I had a really good trapline in BC where we trapped mostly marten, wolverines and wolves. I did some trapping for Forestry, some live trapping of wolves and collaring them. Here in Alberta, I had a trap line with a First Nations/ aboriginal, and we trapped marten, coyotes, wolves, beaver and fishers. He died on the trapline. As I was just a junior partner, and the way the trapline regulations work with

indigenous rights, they gave the trapline to a cousin instead of me, so I ended up without a trapline. I hope someday to get another one.

I still do a lot of skidooing and stuff on the river. I have a river boat, and we have a cabin down on the Athabasca River, which is on the original trapline. We go down to that [cabin] three or four times a year. It's just out in the bush with no running water, but 12 by 16 with two beds and a wood stove.

At this time, I'm trying to liquidate some of my property. We have some property in BC that we are selling. For some other properties we own, my wife and I, of course, as the business cycle is a bit slow, we're doing leases to purchase. I hope to wind things down a little bit. But I hope to keep working as long as I can, because I feel being active and working is more conducive than sitting at home being retired.

Irene: *Can I ask, I know that your wife's and your jewelry store is where Boven's is now. It was McLean's previous to that?*

Phil: It was McLean's previously. When my mother found that advertisement, it was McLean's Electric, and we were a full-service firm. We did radio, TV, had a jewelry store and small appliances. I looked after the electrical with my partner Herman, Tommy McLean's brother-in-law, was there. We ran that for a long time. We did not so much turn the electrical around, but it grew so horrendously that I moved the electrical out of there down to Railway Avenue. I had a building down there. We brought Radio Shack into the store, then we split Radio Shack off to another location. My wife came in and started the store and was very successful and very well respected. She's very proud of it.

Irene: *How many years would she have been in that location?*

Phil: Probably from the time the girls graduated, so they would have been, it's about 15 to 20 years she ran the jewelry store there. Then Berna took it over, and she bought another store [building], of course. We still own the building – it's an old building, the McLean's building, which was the jewelry store. Elle's Clothes Closet is in there, and they're very successful. She has a clothes closet store here and she has one in Edmonton, and she's doing very well. So, we're very happy with that end of it.

Irene: *How has this been for you participating with your siblings?*

Phil: I just can't say enough about how well we get along. I don't understand it. I think they're a lot more of a family unit than I am. I've always felt myself as being a little bit of a rebel. I'm a real introvert. Normally, I don't like functions, I don't like crowds, I have no real need to go visiting people, and they seem to be a little bit more that way. The interesting thing is the family, with Mom and Dad, the way they brought us up, and the way we all get along and work together. I think it's pretty unique, because there seem to be a lot more problems in other families than there is in ours. It's just a really good feeling knowing your brothers and sisters, knowing your nieces and nephews, being really involved with them and seeing them do well.

I think the big thing is that we all are very happy with each other being successful. What is successful to one is not to the other. My sisters are all very adamant, you've got to retire, you've got to finish doing what you're doing when you're young, and they have done it. My brother and I are sitting there saying, well, we don't want to retire. So, it's not a controversy, it's just obviously a different point of view on how life should be. But no, the family is everything. I guess one of the hopes, my hope, is that our kids will be like that, but I see a bit of conflict between the two. She got this, and they got that, and I don't know if that's right or wrong and on and on. So, it's certainly not the same. Life is a lot different now than it was back then, when you had to work together and work as hard as we did on the farm. It was very good for us. The work ethic came, and we're not all successful by far, but certainly far more successful than unsuccessful.

Irene: *Well, thank you for participating as part of your family, and thank you for your individual participation. It's going to add to a wonderful story for us to put together.*

Phil: Thank you for taking the time. The one thing my wife has already done is a bit of a story on her own end of it, and I don't know where that will go with it. It's from Perryvale. She said she has written up a bunch of stuff for our grandchildren, because our grandchildren have asked a lot of the questions that were answered today. So, this is going to be fantastic to be able to send them a file and have them look at it. It's just, it's an incredible thing. I'm really happy you're involved and really proud of Mavis for being involved in it, too.

Irene: *Thank you, Phil.*

Phil: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Machine transcribed by: Microsoft Word Transcribe
Copy edited by: Mavis Jacobs