

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Harry Waschuk-001.mp3

http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/h_waschuk.htm

Narrator: Harry Waschuk
Interviewers: Rosemary Neaves
Harvey Scott

December 6, 2017
and January 3, 2018

[Start of Interview]

Rosemary My name is Rosemary Neaves and it is December 13th, 2017. I am visiting with Harry Waschuk in Pleasant Valley Lodge. It's the morning and it's a beautiful, sunny day. We also have with us Harvey Scott who is a neighbor from when Harry was living out near Chain Lakes. And so, Harry, can you tell us when you first came to Canada. You were saying that you came as a child?

Harry Yes.

Rosemary/Harry How old were you? I'm 89 now.

Rosemary/Harry Yes, I know, close to 90, hey? 89 yes, born in 1928.

Rosemary/Harry When you came to Canada, you were a year and a half? About that, yes, a year and a half.

Rosemary/Harry Where did you come from? Your family? Poland

Rosemary All the way from Poland.

Harry And then a place where I even forget what name it changed to. Sometimes in Poland and different countries could mean war. They had always war out there. My father went in the First World War. He was working in Flin Flon, Manitoba and Kirkland Lake, Ontario, in underground mines. But then he had to go to war and somehow it happened that he went back to the old country. Then he ended up a prisoner of war in Germany. How people were going [dying] and not enough food to eat. That's World War One. He said people were going [dying] like flies in the fall. During the summer, there is a lot of flies. Fall time comes, where are they? And that's how people were; they'd kill one another. And a lot of them Russians became atheists; they said there is no God. If they'd believed in God, we wouldn't have this great commotion like it became: famine, war and disease, cholera and typhoid fever, and famine. Yes, that's how it was. And people going like flies in the fall, that's what Father was telling me . . . war.

Rosemary But he survived.

Harry A lot of them became atheist. We have that trouble because [atheists believe] there's no God. They don't believe that Satan, the devil is cast out. The head angel, (God created angels) his name was Lucifer. But he decided to be like the most high, and one third of God's angels followed him. There was war in heaven but he flew like lightning on the earth. That's why we have trouble: Satan, the devil, is trying to deceive us. That's what happened.

Rosemary/Harry So he came back to Canada? Yes, he said he crossed the ocean three times.

Rosemary/Harry Three times? Yes, the first time, he came to the States and then he went back again. He crossed the ocean three times.

Rosemary/Harry How did you come to Athabasca? We came by rail from Ontario, from the east. We stayed at a, they had a place for . . .

Rosemary Newcomers?

Harry Downtown by that railroad station. We stayed there [place for newcomers] for about, maybe, three or four days, maybe a week, before we settled. We got some land there on the way to Chain Lakes. There was no roads, nothing, at that time yet.

Rosemary/Harry So your father took on a quarter section, did he? One quarter, yes.

Rosemary Was it all woods?

Harry Yes, it was all woods. You had to clear it by hand, clear some for a garden. But there was lots of rabbits in the bush, and squirrels, and a lot of fish in Crooked Lake. We used to go and catch fish at Crooked Lake and in the winter, we went ice fishing. And from the shore, cast and you can catch some jacks [jackfish] out there. Then in the springtime when the fish is spawning, there are all kinds of fish there, north of McGrath Lake, in that big meadow. Not McGrath Lake but Mud Lake.

Rosemary Did your mother come later on?

Harry Yes, she came later on. Mother, and there was about five children in the family: Lavina was the oldest, then Alice, then Tom, then me. Then John and then Bill. I guess John and Bill were born here [Canada] already.

Rosemary/Harry The others were born in Poland? Yes, I was the youngest one that came from Poland, a year and a half.

Rosemary/Harry What do you remember from those early days? That was 1930.

Rosemary The Dirty Thirties.

Harry Yes, they called it the Hungry Thirties. But there was plenty of rabbits in the bush and in the wintertime, trapping squirrels and [there were] rats in McGrath Lake (muskrats) and some beavers in that Crooked Creek.

Rosemary/Harry Was it winter when you arrived here? No, that was in the fall. I think quite late in the fall already.

Rosemary/Harry So it was cold. It was 1928, no 1930.

Rosemary/Harry You were still just a child. There were some neighbors out there by Crooked Lake. Mr. Read, Ed Read with his family.

Rosemary I've heard the name.

Harry Bernice Ladd. She was going to school. You've heard of Bernice Ladd?

Rosemary/Harry No. She wasn't from the father, from Mr. Ed Read. The family was about half a dozen children.

Rosemary/Harry They lived on Crooked Lake? They lived there by Crooked Lake.

Rosemary/Harry Yes, I remember that area. [They lived] right by the shore of Crooked Lake, Ed Read.

Harvey/Harry Were the Kuchers there yet, or was it Gillespie? Did you know the Gillespies? Yes, there were Pete Gillespie and Ella Gillespie. I know them, I still remember them. We visited them once in a while. Mr. Gray made the service at Ella Gillespie's place so I was there. I was a small boy.

Harvey/Harry This was Johnny Gray's father who was the pastor? That's right, William, William Gray. He was kind of preaching out there in that Larvert School and in homes.

Rosemary/Harry So you went to school at...? Larvert School.

Rosemary And that was quite a little walk, wasn't it?

Harry Three mile walk when we were going on a shortcut which was one mile south, and then one mile west, and one mile south again. But then we had a road, kind of on an angle. But the shortcut was a little closer but not much closer. There was a creek to cross and there was no bridge there.

Harvey Yes, I know the trail; you showed me the trail one time. It runs through that schoolhouse quarter and ends up at the school. It's all grown in now but it was a trail at one time.

Harry There was quite a few children going to school. There were these immigrants from the old country that came in and settled. I was told when they started a school

there and the kids, the teacher tells them to go home, they don't know what that meant and they keep sitting. You see, they didn't know no English.

Rosemary/Harry That must have been hard. For a while again, but they catch on fast, I guess.

Rosemary So your father started clearing the land?

Harry Yes, first he prepared for a garden. At that time, you had a horse or a cow and you hooked to some kind of a plow, scratched the ground up and then you raised your own garden. And meat, there was lots of rabbits in the bush and partridges, there were a lot of partridges. You go there where there is those willows and other bushes. I never use a .22 [gun]; I use a long pole [made] out of a willow and put a snare on it. You go there in the morning or in the evening when they roost. You can pull all the meat you want. That's good meat from partridge meat. You just put the snare over the head and pull it down and kill it; you got no problem. I used to do that quite a bit. No meat in the house; "Well," Mother said, "Go get some, bring some meat". So, I'd go run in there and bring some; it don't take long. Early in the morning or late in the evening, them partridges, they roost on them trees, on them willows.

We had wheat in the granaries. You bring some wheat in the house, you pour some water into it and wash the chaff away, and then you drain it out. You put clean water, you leave it until the morning and it softens up. Then you bring it to a boil and that's the best porridge you can have. When you grind it, it becomes lumpy somehow. But the whole wheat, it's soft, and you bring to a boil—that's the best porridge. For me, it was the best porridge I had. And there's wheat, there's bread, and everything with it.

Rosemary Did you grow quite a bit of wheat in those days?

Harry Yes, we used to raise some wheat. We used to pull a scythe [sickle bar mower]. Father made a fork or a scythe; we put some wheels on it. So, you lay a swath and then you go and tie it into bundles by hand. Then winter comes and you got the flail, hit the wheat bundles with the flail. Three of us would be swinging that flail on that bundle. Then you got your own wheat. There was no threshing machines at that time. You've seen a flail for threshing?

Harvey Yes, my mother taught me how to thresh our beans. She would grow beans and dry the beans. Then you tie a little stick on the end of a long stick with that leather. I still have done my beans that way in the fall, just for the fun of it; I don't have to any more.

Harry Sure, that was a way of threshing at one time. It don't take long: we smash it up, then you choose kind of a windy day to blow the chaff.

Harvey Winnowing.

Harry You take it outside and the wind blows the chaff away and you get clean wheat, clean grain.

Harvey We would do it in a burlap bag. My mother would put a whole bunch of beans in a big burlap bag, tie the top, and then you flail a bag. And then, as you say in the wind, you blow the chaff out and then you've got the beans or the wheat. It's a good system.

Rosemary When you first got to the land, I mean you wouldn't remember, but did they start out in a tent and then build a log house? Or how did they cope with just living that first fall? Do you know?

Harry I didn't get you.

Rosemary/Harry I said in the beginning when they first got to the land, did they start out in a tent? My father came and he kind of stayed with Mr. Kucher for a while, just until he got started up. Then he built a log house out of round logs, poplar logs. But that's gone a long time ago.

Rosemary/Harry So that first winter, they had a house built already? Yes, he had. I don't remember too much. He built the house out of round logs, poplar logs.

Rosemary/Harry Is that the same quarter that you're on now? Yes, same one.

Rosemary/Harry And then you had cattle? Yes, he had some cows and some horses too. He used horses to go and get groceries to Athabasca.

Harvey Did you go on the river or how did you get to town?

Harry On the river when there was ice. Father used the river but not too many times. You went straight south on the road that goes by the Hutterites. But then when the river was frozen, Father used the road where Struski lived. You go towards the river; you make a little shortcut there. But then the river's got to be frozen. So I know and we went a few times.

Harvey You remember, Harry, when I was trying to farm with horses a little bit. I have a grain wagon I built, a sleigh, and you gave me a brake for it. You told me you used it when you travelled on the river.

Harry Not on the river, there's a poor steep road down here. There's still a hill right now and there was a place, quite a steep hill, to put that brake on a runner. So, you come down, you stop, you just unhook it and you still leave it. You come to the elevator with the grain and then you take it out; the chain flips to the side. I gave that chain to you. It was built purposely for that reason. You walk with a horse, you walk away from it and it'll be still on the runner. It's just a brake and on the side, they had the little hook.

Harvey I still have it. I can bring it to you if you wanted it.

Harry No, I don't want it; you can have it. I had some stuff; I was broken into, my place. Twice, we had, in the '60s, somebody broke in and packed a cupboard, big cupboard,

the table, and a big trunk. Mother brought the trunk from the old country; it was like an antique and that's gone. Somebody broke in and then later on, again, two, three different times . . . broke in. My guns are stolen too. I had about two, three different guns. They're gone. I was going to go to the police but you got to know what kind of guns they are. What are you going to tell? But my guns are registered.

Rosemary/Harry Harry has a poem that he wrote back many years ago, right? Harry, would you like to tell us the poem? You want me to say it?

Harvey Yes, please, Harry.

Harry Way out far and in the swamp where the Roughnecks toil, dance, and jump, the Tool Push, proud and with a sigh, takes a good look at the steel derrick high. The Driller, bold and with a good mood, leans on a brake with his heavy winter hood. He yells at the Derrickman that is way up on height, "Come down you Weevil, it's time for a bite." The Motorman in motion calls for a sky hook but the greenhorn Roughneck, all he can do is look. He tells him again, "It's only a joke. So, laugh, smile, and be happy whenever you're broke!" The Safetyman from the board comes like a hound, inspecting the fast line which didn't look too sound. And to replace the wire rope you have to be keen, and the only way you can do it is with a snake skin. The Core Man excited getting ready for a test, holding a diamond bit which is one of the best, he shouts at the Roughnecks out of the hole, a trip to be made for another core. The orders for the Boilerman is to stoker up the pot so that the grates in the firebox would become red hot. For steam is the main object whenever it's freezing, so the Kelly could be blown just a sizzling. The life of some oilmen is rather queer for they spend their dollars just for a beer. And if you go to this rig and you would try to match, you couldn't compare yourselves with these Weevils in this old oilpatch.

That's it. That's all I know.

Rosemary/Harvey Wow, that is amazing. Yes, that's wonderful. It gives me a vivid picture of how the experience was in those days.

Harry I've been working on rigs.

Harvey/Harry Was that in the '40s or '50s? When was that roughly? It would be about in the mid-1950s.

Harvey Where did you work, Harry? All over the west, I guess?

Harry I worked up at Fort Nelson, up in the Peace River area, and High Level towards Hay River. In the northern part, in that big swamp, that big swampy country there. It's a long, long ways to go but I guess there's a lot of gas and oil too.

Rosemary/Harry Were you up there for months at a time? Three weeks in and one week out.

Rosemary/Harry And some of the lumber mills that you were in, they were all over the place, too, weren't they? Lumber camps, you mean? Yes, the lumber camps.

Harry That was years ago. That was not too far from my place where I live. Before you get to Chain Lakes, you go west towards Meyer Lake, the sawmill of Jim Burgoyne (sp.) was there for four years. There were other sawmills in there. Bill Chernish had a sawmill there north of McGrath Lake. Do you know where McGrath Lake is? That lake is about one section of land; there's not much water in it. One time there was hardly no water; there was just lily pads and a moose went in, was feeding and he got stuck and he died. He didn't come out. I tried to, thought to make a farm or a cattle ranch on that [McGrath Lake], to drain it west towards Ralph Johnson's. Cut the hump and you can drain that lake. They told me to go to Edmonton and check but they wouldn't even talk about it. I mentioned about draining a lake and that was an insult. I would go into cattle. And my brother Bill, he says, "You can use any of my equipment." He had D10, D12 cats, the biggest machines that a guy needs is in pipeline construction, and a ditching machine to cut that ditch seven feet deep and four feet wide to lay a pipeline. Because he is in the pipeline business.

Rosemary/Harry Those were tough days, hey? Tell us the story about the welding, when the guy couldn't weld and they asked you to do it. I catch on. A fellow goes into a welding business, you catch on by doing it.

Rosemary Yes, you were self-taught, right?

Harry Yes, I worked at a lot of jobs. I worked on the Diefenbaker Dam where there were six turbines for electricity and they were putting in two more. I worked on the Number Seven, on that scroll casing. The water dam, it's high and there were six and they were putting two more in for electricity. It [water] turns a turbine and that rubs some of the air. Suzuki says [talks about] global warming. Sure, you take that electricity, everybody is using electricity. It comes from the air; it rubs it out. Seven billion people living, breathing air that without air, they can't live. And it's breaking down, breaking down, our air quality.

Rosemary/Harry So the welding was something that you learned just by yourself, just by watching? Well, I did but I had to go to take a course. They made me do it so it would be legal.

Rosemary/Harry So you got your ticket? I was welding, I was scared that they would pinch a guy without no training. But I knew how to do it anyway.

Harvey/Harry But you got a very high certification; you could do pressure welding, pipeline welding. I had my First Class only. But then pipeline welding, you got to have a B Pressure. I was going to try to go on the pipeline but I knew I couldn't do it; they told me I had only my First Class, Second Class.

Rosemary/Harry Did you enjoy it? No, not really, it's a hazardous job. It's the most hazardous job: you're looking at through that glass, you got to use the right shade, you use different rod, you have to change lens in your helmet.

Rosemary/Harry Are there other things that you remember that stand out in your memory of those days? Not really too much. I have been farming at the third Chain Lake.

Harvey You cleared your whole farm up there, didn't you? How many acres, did you have one quarter or two quarters?

Harry I had two quarters out there but I sold one. I gave it cheap. To farm there, too much wildlife. When you put a crop in, moose, deer, elk are walking on it. And then, later on, what's left, you swath it and they walk on it some more. And then, the different birds, cranes and all those birds that come from the south, they land on it. They tramp it, and walk on, and manure in it. You put it through the combine, you bring a sample, Stafford [a local grain buyer], he don't want it. There's no use farming, too much livestock there, that wildlife. But I made some good money once, sweet clover seed. We didn't use no chemicals for spraying. There was a lot of bumblebees to pollinate the blossoms in that sweet clover. I made good money. A super B truck came to pick it up and I had that cheque, just about \$23,000.00. Yes, the price was good.

Rosemary/Harry And you used to have honey? There was a guy on my home place, he had bees on it.

Rosemary/Harry And lots of bears? Yes, the bears used to come for it; they can smell it.

Rosemary/Harry You have to put the little electric fence around it? I guess he did too. I moved out so I don't know.

Rosemary/Harry You used to can a lot of moose meat, didn't you? Yes, I used to can my own meat. I worked in a packing plant. Way back it was Swift's Packing Plant but they moved out someplace to Lethbridge. There was about three or four companies: Swift's Packing Plant and I forget the names anyway.

Rosemary/Harry You really didn't need to worry about packing plants because you could just do your own thing, right? Yes, I worked for them.

Rosemary I mean you had your own canning operation at home.

Harry Yes, I used to shovel that meat into a mixer and then put them in a stopper. Then you put them in those little cans, fill it up, then cook them out there. I forget the name for that place.

Rosemary/Harry Are there any other stories you have, Harry? I can't think of any other stories.

Rosemary/Harry You've had a very interesting, adventuresome life. Some, not too much, you know.

Rosemary/Harry It sounds amazing to me. You could give lessons on self-sufficiency, right? Yes.

Harvey I remember you, Harry, as a good neighbor; you were always willing to help neighbors. I remember one time I had a friend who had a trailer. He was traveling from Saskatchewan up to almost Alaska, and his trailer hitch broke. I brought him over and you welded that up just so perfectly. You wouldn't take anything for it, Harry; that was the way you were.

Harry I used to weld in the neighborhood.

Harvey Yes and for me. You would weld for me.

Harry I did work for you? I don't remember.

Harvey You did and John did too. You were a very good welder; the weld looked very professional. When I weld, it looks like seagull's droppings.

Harry You got to go into it. If you'd worked with somebody that has experience too, you'd catch on.

Harvey But you could really make it flow.

Harry Yes, I worked on Diefenbaker Dam. There was six turbines going and they were putting two more in. I worked on Number 7. Where the water flows into it, that pipe [penstock] was about eight feet in diameter and that penstock at the bottom is scroll casing. On a big pipe, a generator, is like a big flywheel. It turns and it's about 15, 20 feet in diameter, maybe more. That's where electricity comes; brushes all around, day and night, they're turning [producing electricity]. That's what you call global warming. It [electricity] causes that [global warming]. That air goes and rubs it out and there's about eight or nine different kinds of gases in the air. And it rubs it out. And seven billion people breathing air and all the animals and everything. Now a jet flies, you know what he leaves behind? You see just a big vapor behind. Every motor, don't shut the air cleaner off and see if your motor will run. It won't run without air. So Suzuki trying [to talk about] global warming. Well because everything's using air—jets, airplanes and there's billions of motors running every day. And it pulls that air so global warming [results] and it causes the north ice to melt. Way back in the '50s, '40s, there was just a few vehicles around; there wasn't many. But now there's billions of vehicles.

Harvey So as a person who has had a lot of experience in the world, what do you recommend to people or to governments? What should we be doing to help or protect the air? Do you have any ideas on that?

Harry There's no way of protecting because only way is not to have these vehicles going and everything else, you know. That's my way of thinking, you know?

Rosemary It's a tough problem to solve but we have to solve it.

Harry But that's life. I believe that the end is coming; Jesus will come when we least expect it and that'll be it. I believe in the Bible, what the Bible says. I go to the evangelical church, Missionary Church. It's prophesied that the end will come.

Harvey But you've always told me you believe that as humans, as farmers or whatever, we have to protect the birds and the bees. You can quote the part of the Bible where we were directed to do that. Even though, maybe, we can't stop it.

Harry A lot of it, we can't stop it.

Rosemary Thank you. Thank you very much, Harry. We really appreciate this.

Harry You're welcome. I'm not a good speaker.

Rosemary I think you're an amazing speaker with a lot of amazing stories. So, thank you very much.

Harvey Thanks, Harry. You're far too humble; I know that's part of your make up. But you have experienced so much in life, you have done so much, helped so many people and you don't give yourself enough credit.

Harry I used to do my own mechanic work and welding. Mechanics, you go for it. I used to grind wells myself. Wells get pitted up and then you got to put them in and you got to set them the right height in the motor. I used to overhaul my own motors. If nothing else, to me it was like a hobby.

Rosemary/Harry It's a challenge. Yes.

Rosemary Good for you.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Lorrill Waschuk
Proof-read by: Jan Thiessen

March, 2022