

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Judith Edwards recording 2017.mp3
http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/j_edwards.htm

Narrators: Judith and George Edwards
Interviewer: Eleanor Staszewski
June 23, 2017

[Start of Interview]

Eleanor It is June 23, 2017 and Eleanor Staszewski is interviewing Judith Margretta Edwards, known as Judy Edwards.

Judy I am Judy Edwards, residing at Pleasant Valley Lodge. My maiden name is Judith Margretta Ryan. My father's name was Archibald John Ryan, and my mother's name was Doreen Pearl Devlin. My birthdate is February 6, 1942. I was born in Athabasca, Alberta. My husband's name is George William Edwards.

Judy I will start by telling you about Archie's parents, Heddy and Barney. Heddy came to the Crossfield and Carstairs districts in 1917, where they lived on their farm for many years. In 1970, Heddy moved to Olds and resided there until she was taken to the Foothills Hospital. She died after a lengthy illness in 1971. Barney, Archie's father, was born in Ireland and came to Montreal with his two brothers and a sister. Barney left Montreal and travelled the seas. He was never a soldier but was on the Gold Coast in Africa. Heddy and Barney were married in Saskatchewan and lived in Foam Lake, where Barney had a homestead.

Judy Now I'm going to talk about my dad, Archie Ryan, who was born December 12, 1908 in Foam Lake, Saskatchewan. The family moved to Crossfield in 1917 and then Carstairs in 1918. Archie came north to Athabasca and homesteaded in the Bald Hill area before 1930. In June 1932 he married Yula Nesbitt of Calgary and they had one daughter, Sheila. Yula got meningitis and died shortly after.

Judy Doreen Devlin, my mother, was born on March 20, 1918. Archie and Doreen were married November 19, 1936. They moved to Bald Hill to homestead. They had three children – Gerald, Judy, and Melvin. Bald Hill is north of the river, quite a long ways out of town. That was a long time ago, but I guess it was a home for them.

Judy Some of the highlights of Archie's life – he worked on the municipal hospital board for many years. In April of 1958, Doreen and Archie had a farm sale and moved to Athabasca. They sold the farm to Steve Zachoda. Later, Steve turned the farm over to his sons. They supposedly retired but bought the pool hall and ran it for several years.

Judy My dad always loved horses and when they lived at Bald Hill, his horses were his transportation to get to town. It was a long ways on horseback, but sometimes, it had to be done.

Eleanor We didn't have the bridge at that time. Did they have to cross by ferry to get to town?

Judy Yes. There was no bridge at that time. It was in my day when the bridge came – 1953.

Judy In Archie's younger years, in the winters he would fish and hunt. He was a very good mechanic. He could fix anything and yet never had any training in that regard. He just had a natural aptitude for it.

Eleanor He was from Ireland. He also had musical ability, didn't he?

Judy Yes, he played the fiddle, and very well. He never had a lesson with that either. One of the instances that happened when he was on the farm was the tractor, with the lugs on it, ran over his leg. Thank goodness the lugs didn't go into his leg.

Judy As a family, we did lots of camping. In later years, that was something they loved to do. Both mom and dad golfed for a few years. Archie passed away after a brief illness following open heart surgery on February 18, 1979.

Judy Doreen, my mother married my dad, Archie, on November 19 of 1936, and they moved to Bald Hill. We've talked about that already. Bald Hill is where the homestead was. They had three children, but not until they moved to a farm closer to town, which was about six miles out. The children's names are Gerald, Judy, and Melvin. Our half-sister, Sheila, lived with us, too, for a while.

Judy Mom was a member of the Royal Purple and eventually she was an honorary member. She always enjoyed her family and her grandkids. She was quite an outdoor gal. She preferred to be outside helping with the chores, rather than inside doing dishes.

Eleanor Did she have a big garden, too?

Judy Oh yes. She always had a big garden. Doreen lost her father at the age of two years. And of course, the mother married again. Her mother died when Doreen was age 15. So she really didn't have a very good childhood. She was raised by her brothers and one sister that did all they could for her. They were in Athabasca when all this transpired, but they moved to Burnaby, where she babysat for her brother Mel and his wife, Laura, who have a set of twins. This meant that they could both work in the fish factory. They ended up moving back to the homestead. That's when she met Archie Ryan. Two or three of the brothers moved back here. And yet Jean stayed in Vancouver.

Judy Mom smoked three packs of cigarettes a day. She quit smoking and threw her nerve pills away at the same time. She ended up in the hospital.

Judy It seemed like my brothers and I, Gerald, Judy and Melvin, were accident-prone. I stepped on a ground fire when I was five and burnt my foot. Melvin stepped on a Klik can and cut his heel, and Gerald ran a treadle sewing machine needle through his finger.

Judy We had lots of fun. After dad died, mom got her driver's license but didn't drive much. She was still too nervous. Mom was 65 when she learned how to water ski. I don't think she did it very much, but she still felt good to have that accomplishment behind her. Back when we lived on the farm, on Saturday nights, we'd all go to a movie and our neighbor Alf would come with us. We always brought a bucket of chicken as our treat. We made the chicken at home.

Judy Okay, I'm going to talk about myself now – Judy Ryan. I was born on February 6, 1942. I took piano lessons from Nancy Appleby. At that time, we lived on the farm, and Fairhaven Hall and school were close by. We rode horseback to school and I rode behind Gerald. And, of course, it was his job, being older, to look after the horse. But anyway, being in a country school, I took grades one and two together. And then the next year, three and four. We used to have a Christmas concert at Fairhaven Hall. One year I sang Alice Blue Gown at that concert.

Judy In Grade 9, I was Rose of the Danube at the Edwin Parr School and Ray Sauer sang with me. I was also the teacher's aide at school for one year. My job was to keep track of the time. I rang the bell on time. I was rodeo queen one year. I had to sell enough sponsored tickets to win and I got a nice crown.

Judy I'll talk about meeting George now. His brother Frank and my brother Gerald were always really good friends, and this one time I was babysitting at Logans and George came to the door. I thought he must have come to see Don Logan because that's who I was babysitting for. But he said no, he came to see me and then he asked if I wanted to go to the year-end dance with him. And I said, well, I had to run it past my dad. And anyway, that was our first date. And then, the first time he came to the house, my dad said, "Oh, my, you two would have cute kids if you got married." I was horrified. Yeah, I never forgot it. We ended up getting married and we lived in town. In 1970, we moved to the acreage which was just south of town. And of course we had three boys – Bob, Lyle and Mark.

Judy George's dad was Jeremiah John. We called him Jack Edwards senior. He was born at home in Norfolk, England, on November 5, 1906. He took his schooling at 18 Ellingham School until grade eight when he quit. He also worked for a time in England on a farm for Wilfred Dons and was paid 18 shillings. At the age of 18 he came to Canada, arriving in Halifax, coming west and working in the Stettler area.

Judy He later moved to the Boyle area where he married Geraldine Saxton on March 14, 1934. They homesteaded in the Forfar area. He farmed in West Athabasca until his retirement. For the next years he made his home at Baptiste Lake and then went to the town of Athabasca. He and Geraldine had four sons George, Jack, Frank, Albert, and two daughters, Phyllis and Evelyn.

Judy The six children were: George William, born December 21, and he married Judy Ryan. Jack Frederick was born August 11, 1936 and married Betty Lou Newberry. Frank Arthur was born April 7, 1938 and married Donna Ferguson. Albert Ronald was born October 17, 1942 and married Anita McClelland. Phyllis Elizabeth was born October 7, 1945 and married Bob Gray. Evelyn Florence was born October 30, 1948 and married Garry Schumacher.

Judy Geraldine Edwards, George's mother, worked for George Gray at a post office in the rural area. George Gray did all the farming, but it was nice for her to have a job because everybody was hard up in those days. She was always a very caring and capable lady. She ended up having six children and all of them ended up being very successful.

Judy I was 17 when I got married and I had one year of secretarial college in Edmonton in 1959. Bob, our first child, was born October 25, 1962, Lyle on April 30, 1964 and Mark on February 29, 1972. They all had their little hardships, too. Bob stuck a plug in his mouth and burned his mouth. Lyle took a drink of turpentine. It wasn't fatal, but it made for a trip to the hospital. Mark stuck his hand in a cup of hot tea. So, that was the extent of the tragedies, but I guess it was nothing too crucial. We moved to the acreage in 1970. That's where Lyle started school. They went to school on the bus. Bob was already in school.

Eleanor Where is the acreage?

Judy Oh, it's south of town, about one mile. There was an older home there. In 1978 we decided to build on to the original house and it became quite a nice home. At that time we did have horses and things like that. And of course, being boys, eventually we all had skidoos and that sort of thing. Later, we even had a small motorbike. Bobby managed to break his wrist on it, even though it wasn't very motorized. We never did find out what they were doing when that happened.

Eleanor But you don't usually find out until much later. Yeah, I remember talking with Mark one time and he was saying how his grandpa used to shoot with a pistol the flies on the wall. He sure hated flies.

Judy George's dad used to like to go beaver hunting. So anyway, at different ages, the kids went with him. And that was a fun time for all of them.

Judy But anyhow, the boys were all in cubs. Bob and Lyle were in cubs together. I think Pete Krawec was their leader. And then Mark, being our afterthought, had Jim Patterson as his leader. We had a lot of interesting times with that. George couldn't help as a leader but, if there was an excursion, he was always there to give a hand.

Judy We actually did a lot of traveling with our folks – mom and dad. They had a camper and so do we. And Albert and Anita travelled a lot with us, too, because their kids were the same age as ours.

Judy In 1953 the bridge was built. It was quite a blessing because prior to the bridge, we had to travel in a cage in the spring and fall, a ferry through the summer, but then in the winter, once the ice was thick enough, you could drive across the ice. But to ride in that cage, it was quite an experience. It was very cold and scary.

Eleanor And I understand that the people from across the river, if they had to bring a pig to town, it rode in that cage, too.

Judy Yeah, it would have to. There wasn't anything else.

Judy Gerald Ryan, my brother, and my husband George bought Brant's Welding. It was an old building, nothing more than that. They also bought Rita Birkigt's [place], just to the south. They tore that old shop down and built a shop in 1973. It was a welding and automotive shop. And we did get a lot of, you know, just repairs. But in the meantime, they got the New Holland dealership. That was pretty interesting in the fact that it put a whole new slant on the type of work we had to do. George was a good salesman and Gerald was a good repairman, so it always worked out well.

Judy Gerald and Dorothy decided they wanted to sell their share, so George and Judy took over their share. We moved the shop to the south end of town in 1984.

Judy George and I did a lot of traveling through New Holland. It was a wonderful company. You could earn trips. So we went to Hawaii, Costa Rica and Switzerland. In 1990, we decided to close down. Times were just getting too hard to try and sell farm machinery.

Judy For about 16 years, I've actually sold Mary Kay products and it's been something I quite enjoyed, especially once we weren't working at another job. It gave me something to think about, and it's always fun to meet people.

Judy So I'm also going to talk about our boys, Bob married Ida Pederson. Their anniversary is January 31, 1986. They have two children. Phyllis was born August 8, 1986 and Quinton on April 3, 1990. Phyllis married Andrew Pitura and they have three little boys. Bob did get welding and heavy-duty mechanic's licenses. He worked for us until we closed. Bob and Ida currently own a building in town called the Turnabout Place where dance classes and music classes are taught. And anyway, Bob is currently working for a paving crew for the summer and is hoping to just take the winter off.

Judy Lyle married Bonnie Alm on September 8, 1984. They have two children – Josh was born December 24, 1987 and Vincent was born October 6, 1989.

Judy Lyle has a parts ticket and worked at our shop for a while. When we closed our shop he went to Alpac, which is the pulp mill here, and has been there ever since it started.

Judy Mark was born on February 29, 1972. He married Tracy Webb. Tracy Webb's birthday is July 12, 1977. They were married on August 31, 1996. They have three children: Gaige born on December 14, 1997, Danikah on May 28, 2000, and J'Nay on August 28, 2004.

Judy Mark has worked at various jobs here and there around town. He eventually ended up at Alpac. At first he was hired on for the summer. In the meantime, he got his ticket as a machinist. That was kind of after the fact, but it was something he always wanted to do. He has his own business in machining, but he works two days a week at Alpac still. He and his son Gaige have added a plasma cutting ticket to the machining. That was something new and exciting.

Eleanor Explain what plasma cutting does. What do they make?

Judy Well, you can make fire pits and anything decorative. You can do all these fancy cutouts with it. You can make signs and just about anything your imagination wants.

Eleanor This is Eleanor Staszewski. I am now interviewing Judy's husband, George Edwards.

George I am going to start by talking about vehicles. My dad bought an old car, about 1944. They only drove it when they had to, which wasn't very often. Later they bought a 1946 Willys Jeep. That was brand new. We used it as a tractor and for running around. Our next tractor was an International Farmall. Our next tractor was a bigger International Farmall M. It was used. We also bought a steel wheeled tractor for breaking the land. One summer I think I broke a hundred acres with it, mostly our own land but some for Henry Patry.

George Somebody came and cut some brush for my daddy. They had a D4 cat with a brush cutter on it. The cat wasn't that big, so they only cut the trees that were small enough. The bigger trees were left and were taken out by hand. We had to cut out all the roots from the trees that were fallen by hand. All of that was piled up by hand. All the trees were limbed and put in piles and burnt. The wood was used for firewood.

Eleanor Where was this farm located?

George Where Albert is at right now. About nine miles west of town.

Eleanor Did you want to talk about the threshing?

George I would stay with my family threshing as it was quite a good size area. We used to get help with ours and my dad threshed out in other places. When I was 15 years old I went with him, just myself and the team of horses. And I remember very plainly working for two weeks without one stop and no such thing as stopping on a Sunday. I thought it was really something because I didn't have to go to school.

Eleanor That was a good treat.

Judy Yeah, but he never did like horses.

George No, I didn't like horses but they were a good team. Later years, Roy Evans used to thresh with us. Of course he wanted to operate the threshing machine. He brought a team of horses, which he wanted me to drive. I just hated them because every time you wanted them to move, they didn't want to get started on the job. They didn't stop when you hollered at them. You didn't have a hope of stopping them. But that's just the way he had them trained. Once you had the load of bundles on, they just wanted to run all the way to the machine. You couldn't let them do that because they would kill themselves if they did it enough. I used to hate sitting up there, holding them back.

Eleanor But they weren't thoroughbreds.

George No, that is just the way he had them trained. It seemed like they were a pair of horses that were nothing but a ball of nerves.

Eleanor George, did you do other cat work or grader work for the county?

George Yeah. But that was later on. That was in the 50s. I used to work for the county. In the summer I would operate the grader and in the winter I would operate the snowplow. I remember very plainly working with Lloyd Wright. We had one big blade and one small one and we would trade off driving them.

George One winter we got a really bad storm with lots of snow. The snow blocked in all the roads, all the way from Athabasca right to Forfar. I started with a cat in Colinton pushing snow on the 2nd of January and we never finished until the middle of March and we weren't done yet. There was snow we never got to.

Eleanor When did you buy your first school bus?

George I got my first school bus in 1955. I had it for three years and then the county wanted to buy it. So, I sold it. I couldn't see any future with it.

Eleanor Now, going back to your dad. You said he played the button accordion.

George Yeah. Oh yeah. He wasn't a professional but he could play just about anything he wanted to.

Eleanor He had quite a few jam sessions at home.

George Oh yes. Kids my age would come over on Saturday night. He played as long as they wanted to listen, and he would play all night.

Eleanor Did they dance?

George Yeah. Oh yeah. Lots of dancing. Sometimes there would be 20 of us. I remember the Saluk girls being there. Oh yeah.

Judy Would you like to mention Chris Bradfield and Mike Butler?

George Chris Bradfield showed up with a well driller used for drilling water wells. When the well driller moved on, Chris stayed and started to work around here. And then he got a job in Edmonton wiring aircrafts. I found out that he had done this before over in England. Well, he had done some of that. That's where he met Mike Butler. Chris and Mike used to travel. They used to come up here every weekend, either in Chris's car or in Mike's. Chris's car always run good but Mike's car, well, it seemed like he always wanted to hit it with something. He had an awful time. But he drove the thing wide open all the time. I remember one weekend, Mike came out from Edmonton. He had a cheque and he couldn't cash it. He went to the post office and they said they couldn't cash it because they didn't know him. They told him that he had to come back with somebody that they knew. So he came out and got me. We were driving along by Hess's. The water used to come up in the ditches there.

We must have been going about 100 miles an hour with one wheel in the ditch when this all evolved. I don't know how we never got killed.

Eleanor You were driving your vehicle?

George No, it was Mike's 1956 Meteor. It had a different engine in it than what it originally came with. It could really move, I tell you! One time we went out to Baptiste Lake in the wintertime and we wanted to ski behind it. It seemed when wintertime would come, Mike's car would always be broken. He'd always have to get something done to it. He'd just get that fixed, and something else would go and we'd have to use Chris's car.

George Mike had an awful temper. One time he ran into a bridge. Yeah. He put the fan through the radiator. He pulled it into the back of Landing Motors garage. It was the old place. They pulled the radiator out, also the fan. When Mike came back the next week he had a new radiator, but he had straightened the fan out. We told him that was probably not a very good idea because it could burst. Anyway, we got it all together, started it, revved it up and the fan blade broke off and went through the new radiator.

Eleanor Oh, oh. I guess he wasn't too happy then.

George No. He went back to Edmonton and had to buy another radiator.

Judy I thought you might like to mention that your home was always open. You always had a gang there. Dad, being English, always had a soft spot for these two. They were kind of like their own family.

George There was always a gang there – it was like Grand Central Station. I wasn't very old, you know, when we lived out there, but I don't ever remember a time when there was nobody there. There was always a pile of people around. The Pacholoks were over there, and you know, everyone you could think of.

Eleanor You said you knew my grandma and grandpa?

George Grandpa Young? I knew them real well. He was a man of few words. He didn't say anything unless he really had to. But his wife would talk. She didn't talk a real lot but she was a real nice woman. She was always worried if everyone was getting enough to eat when they worked around there.

George I went threshing with Yaniks, as long as there were threshing machines. They went from one farmer to another. So I was keen and went to work for them in the early fall with a team of horses and I worked for two weeks straight. We were done by then. Yeah, it was a lot of hard work.

Eleanor Did you happen to ever meet his son, John?

George No, no. He was killed before we moved there. We were still in Forfar when that happened. No, I never did know him.

George There was a lot more socializing than there is today. It was a small area and everyone seemed to get along. I can remember going all night.

George I remember walking to school. There was myself, Bill, Julie, Larry and Betty. I think Larry was the same age as me. The rest of them didn't go to school at the time I was out there. It was after I left.

George Yeah, we all walked to school, three miles. The winters were cold – walking through snow and what seemed like 40 below. It seemed like it was 40 below all winter, but I guess it wasn't.

George I finished grade 10 and then I quit. I never was very good at school. I never regretted it.

Judy Yeah, but you got training, George.

George Yeah. Right now if you don't finish school, you got to go into training. They won't accept you unless you got grade 12.

Eleanor But you were very responsible in your work.

George Oh, yes. You know, back in those days, when you worked for somebody, you didn't try to wreck all their stuff. You tried to look after it like it was your own.

Judy Last year in August, because of health problems, and too much work, we decided to move to Pleasant Valley Lodge. And that's where we currently reside. Pretty soon we'll have been here a year.

Eleanor Well, that's very good, Judy. Thank you very much for giving this interview for the archives and for other people to learn about history in this area.

[End of Interview]

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