

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project

<http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/>

Transcription of Linda Buhlmann.mp3

Narrator: Linda Buhlmann

Interviewer: Brenda Gilboe

June 1, 2022

[Start of Interview]

Brenda This is June 1st, 2022, and Linda Buhlmann is going to be recording.

Linda All right. By 1945, the war was over and my dad was coming home. We were back at the place where I grew up prior to the war. During the war we had to evacuate, first with one grandmother and then with another. That went on for about four years. In between, now and then, we were able to go back home but when it rained bombs, mother decided to take us back out to a smaller town. So I spent about three years with one grandmother. She was very religious and was a really nice lady. But you had to read the Bible according to her rules. It was my job to read the Bible at night, and, if I asked any questions that she didn't agree with, she just slapped me on the back of the head and said, "Keep reading. Don't ask questions." We were at that town when the Americans came, and after that, mother got us all together and we went back home. Our dad showed up one day after curfew. He left the hospital because he found out that everyone was going to be evacuated to France at the time. So he came after curfew and we had to hide him until we figured nobody was looking for him.

Things went not too bad for a little while, but then it seemed that there was a shortage everywhere. You couldn't get anything to eat. You couldn't get anything to burn. Yeah, there was just nothing to be had anywhere. And so everyone who had anything ended up taking it out to the farms and trading it for something to eat. My mother had a lot of material for sewing and also some linens that she traded in. She also had some gold pieces. For a \$20 gold piece, you ended up maybe getting a pound of butter or something like that. The farmers did very well at that time.

My dad got busy doing things. My mother grew up in a town where they tanned leather. She went to school with a fellow who owned the factory there. She went to see him to get a cowhide. He said he couldn't sell it to her because the Americans wanted all the leather that they could manufacture. However, he gave her a cowhide and my dad made briefcases, wallets and all sorts of other things out of it. He and my mother went into the countryside and they found a miller who needed some briefcases for his relatives and his sons and also for some other people. Dad traded that so we could get flour. So, at a time when no one had hardly anything at all, my mother was able to make buns that we called dampfnudeln in German. So, we had something to eat. A great uncle of mine owned a farm and we used to get some stuff from Benny. He butchered

some fat or a little bit of something. But otherwise, for some reason or other, there was really nothing much available after the war. It was really bad. Whereas, during the war, we were never hungry. It was rationed, but it was always available. People could always have enough to eat. So that was quite the difference, you know.

And, like I said, you couldn't get coal or anything because whoever occupied our area, at first it was the French, shipped all of the coal and wood out of Germany. So people there didn't really have much. The same thing happened to other industries – it got all shipped out and all the intelligentsia got either shipped to the States or to Russia at the time. So, you likely know the case of Wernher von Braun, the Rocket Man, who they discredited later on. Anyway, those were those years.

Now, my dad decided what he was doing wasn't good enough to support us. He did get some pension from the government but it was pitiful. So he retrained as a watchmaker. He had been a sheet metal person before, but without legs, you cannot do that. So he retrained. He had a buddy from the army who was a watchmaker, and he took him on as an apprentice. He did his apprenticeship in two years and, after that, he was repairing and selling watches. He worked at home in our living room.

I was fourteen then, and the time had come for me to decide what I was supposed to do. The next thing I knew I got apprenticed into the jewelry business. This worked out well for my dad because whatever repairs came into the shop, I brought home to him. So it worked hand in hand. I worked for three years as an apprentice and when I was finished, I gave those people another year of my life. After that, I decided it was maybe time to get out of Germany.

I decided this in 1945 when we received care parcels from.... well, I shouldn't say an old friend because he was a previous fiancée of my mother's. She decided never to come to Canada but he went and homesteaded up in Sturgeon Heights by Grande Prairie. After the war in 1945, he sent us a care parcel. And being ten years old, I figured if they had good stuff there, that's the place to be. And that's when I decided to go. So I wrote to him at the time and thanked him. And from that time on, I sort of read up about Canada and took a look at the map and read anything that I could find out about Canada. I figured since it was so huge, that, if there was ever another war, you could probably disappear in a bush somewhere! It wouldn't be like being a sitting duck like we were before. When I was finished with my job, I applied to come to Canada. I had to talk to my dad about this. Since I wasn't even 18 yet, he had to sign the application stating that I could leave the country. He regretted doing this the rest of his life. But anyway, he signed it, and that was in April.

My birthday was in May, and by the 22nd of September I was aboard a ship coming to Canada. I ended up in Quebec and from there went to Montreal. In Montreal, everyone got sorted out where they wanted to go to. I had a friend in Edmonton and Carl was just up north there by Grande Prairie, so I figured Edmonton would be a good place. I ended up coming here with a few other girls. Since I was single and not 21, I had to sign a contract with the government to do housework for a year. So I agreed to be a domestic for a year. Since I was the only one who could speak English, I helped another four or

five girls find their place with the lady from the Immigration. And then I took what was left, and that was a lucky thing. I had a family with four kids and a grandma. They were a very nice family and I stayed with them for a year. This family had property at Pigeon Lake and when we were there, I met a young woman who came from Germany and we became lifelong friends.

Through her I met my husband in 1955. I came to Canada in 1953 and arrived in Edmonton on October 10th. In January 1955, I met my husband and we got married in May of 1955. My son was born in 1956. My husband came on a ship from Germany, the same boat I was on but a trip later. He didn't get here until November. And according to the immigration people in Germany, they were just waiting for him here, because he was a machinist mechanic and had his papers and was at that time already 22 years old. So anyway, long story short, he had 17 jobs in two years. And then a miracle kind of happened. A German company named Phoenix Linoa built a pipe mill in Edmonton. They recognized my husband's credentials and hired him. He worked for them until he died. He didn't retire -- he really enjoyed his work. My husband was instrumental in helping the company set up as well as when it closed down. I don't know how many years he was there. It was his whole working life. He never quit. He was 72 years old at the time. He ended up getting sick with cancer and he died, sadly enough, in 2005 when he was 74 years old.

We had a good life and in 1988 we bought the property out at the lake here in Athabasca County. While the place was being built, I was in the city working and couldn't come until August because I had orders to fill. By the time I came out here, I decided I'm not going back for a while. So my husband brought out a wheel and some clay and picked up an old second-hand kiln. And I worked here and I did that for, well, I never really went back to live in the city other than when I had pots to place or to go to market because my kiln came out here a year later. So my husband and I put that up, and I worked until about 2005 until he was not well anymore. I had to slow down because he was not well and sadly enough he died in 2005.

After that my son stayed out here. He came from BC. We had bought property just across the road here for the kids years ago. The children paid it off themselves after. And so he didn't want to go back to the city. So I had to sell the house in the city. This meant my friend, Shirley, who's been living out here with me after she retired in the spring of 1988, didn't have a place to live. Shirley had to retire because of health reasons from being a hairdresser. She ended up having reactions to the permanent stuff. She said she was homeless even though she had been living here eight years with me. But our house in the city had a suite upstairs and that was her place. So naturally, when I had to sell the house, that had to go and that was not a good happy thing at all. So anyway, I felt bad about it then, but my son enjoyed it here. He passed away as well in 2012. He was here seven years. After that, Shirley and I, between the two of us, just kind of muddled on here. And, with the help of the neighbours, we're doing okay, even at our age now. And hopefully we don't have to end up in old age home because that is a no, no! Like I said, we're going out feet first! But I have never regretted coming here.

Brenda Were you the first residents here at Crooked Lake or were there people living here?

Linda No, there was only one family at the corner living here and all the other people were summer people. And right now there's just them and one over here, two, three, four, five, six out of the 30 lots that live here permanently.

My husband sort of had the same interests as I did even though in many ways he was completely opposite of me. We both loved swimming and we both had been doing it all our lives. At that time the only swimming lessons you could get in Edmonton were through the Red Cross and it was all volunteer stuff. So I think we volunteered with the Red Cross nearly 15 or 20 years. While we were doing that, I met a lady who was running a program for the Girl Guides. She asked me if I would come and help her which we did. Shirley also came along because we needed someone in the dressing room. Besides that, I had a two-year old daughter at that time. Shirley brought her to the pool and looked after her. While we were teaching, Shirley would drag the kids around on the side with a rope and my daughter would say, "Dunk me, dunk me!" That's my daughter, the water baby! Before that, my husband and I were also instrumental in the Laura Light Society and examining for the Red Cross. I met nice people, including a lifelong friend of mine I met at Pigeon Lake one year and we are still friends. This was through the Red Cross as I was volunteering at the guide camp to look after the swimming that year. I'd never been a Girl Guide and I didn't have a daughter to go, but my son was a pretty good guide when we were at Guide camp. He had a nice time, and he figured out what group he'd go with every morning when he found out what they were going to do. He was about eight and ten years old at the time. So he got dragged along everywhere.

And then Arnold and I took up scuba diving. We did a lot of diving up in the mountains and Lake Patricia and Edith Cavell. And one year, on a long weekend in the Spring, we came down the Athabasca River. That was quite exciting. The rest of our many, many years, about 20 some years or more, we spent at the pool and we dived for many years. My husband was teaching quite a bit, but I wasn't so much. We both had made the instructor's level in scuba diving and we belonged to a club, the 20 Fathoms, where we met a whole lot of really nice people.

From the time I was about ten years old, after we came back home (following the war), I was interested in pottery. I was able to watch a lady make pots from our kitchen balcony. She lived in the building below us in the next lot where she had a studio. I always thought I'd like to do that. But when the time came for me to decide what to do, I mentioned it to my dad. This was about 15 minutes after the war. He just said, "Why would you want to be a potter? Why would you want to make pots? No one has anything to put into them!".

So that was his answer – learn something practical. Anyway, through the dive club, we met a lady who belonged to the Pottery Guild in Edmonton. At the time, my daughter was still little. And other than staying with my friend Shirley, she wouldn't stay with anyone. It was horrible. That's who I just talked to. One day my husband read in the

paper that close to us on 104th Street that some young man was starting a pottery studio and was giving lessons. I could walk there in about three minutes so that was very convenient. Shirley or my husband would watch my daughter. I started out with him. David Green was his name and he was a very good young man. He was good at teaching. He did not want to pot much himself, but he was good at it when he did it. So he was much more of an administrator teacher than he was a worker. So I started there and it seemed that every time I made something, he came and took the wire and cut it in half. There were about 12 or 14 people in the class. So I asked him, "How come you always cut my pots?" He said, "You can do better".

Brenda Isn't that an interesting way to do that?

Linda And he was right. I quit and I did. And I've potted ever since! Yeah, my husband built me a kiln and then he built me a wheel for the first Christmas. It was September when we started the lessons. I had a wheel myself by Christmas and by the following year he had built me the kiln. And then, long story short, I ended up working 16 hours a day for about 35 years of my life. This was fine with my husband since I didn't walk out the door to work because a German house bride does not go to work – that doesn't look good! That means your husband can't support you, but you could work like crazy at home! I'm still potting, but I have not done anything commercial since my husband died in 2005. No, I just decided that was enough. In 2000 I went down to the pottery club to see what they were doing. At that time I was 65 years old and I thought maybe I should take some time off and do something else. Rosie Guay was the one who introduced me to the club. I think it was about three or four years later when I quit potting every day of my life here. So, I joined the pottery club. And it's been very enjoyable. I've liked the people very much and made good friends. And it's been very rewarding, you know. And it's nice to be with people who like to do the same things you do. So I've been doing what I can to help and to teach. And otherwise, right now I'm not doing much of nothing.

Brenda Well, you're actually recovering from your repairs.

Linda Well, I haven't had a chance for that. Well, at 87, we're still wondering how come we're still around. Just live too darn long and wear stuff out. The lady at physio said to me, "You're very healthy. You just wore out some pieces." Like I said, I never ever regretted coming to Canada and I certainly never regretted coming out to Athabasca.

Brenda Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

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