

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project Transcription of Ron Rawson audio recording 2022.mp3

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
<http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/>

Narrator: Ron Rawson
Interviewer: Rosemary Neaves
June 2, 2022

[Start of Interview]

Rosemary My name is Rosemary Neaves, and it's June 2nd, 2022, and I have with me Ron Rawson, who is going to tell us some of his stories. I'm just going to go through some of the information about Ron's family. His father's name was Wilfred Rawson. His mother's name was Agnes Stevenson. His wife's name is Doris Hannah Boisvert. Ron was born on July 25th, 1934, and his place of birth was Rosetown, Saskatchewan. Welcome, Ron, to the afternoon.

Ron Thank you.

Rosemary Gorgeous day, and it's in Athabasca that we're recording. So tell me where you would like to start with some of your stories.

Ron Well, my dad and mother were married in 1924, so start there.

Rosemary Sure.

Ron And my oldest brother was born in 1925, my sister was born in 1930, and I was born in 1934. And I had another brother who was born in 36, and he passed away when he was three months old.

Rosemary Oh, my goodness.

Ron And then my youngest brother was born in 1938.

Rosemary And so that was a family of how many?

Ron We had two brothers and a sister surviving.

Ron I guess when I started school, I suppose that's where you want to go from there.

Rosemary Where were you living?

Ron Well, we were living 22 and 1/2 miles northwest of Rosetown, a community called Kingsland.

Rosemary And that would be Saskatchewan?

Ron Yes, in Saskatchewan. And my grandfather came to this country in that country in 1905 and homesteaded there, and he built the first and only Kingsland School that was there. Him and a neighbor built it in 1909. Classes started in December of 1909. And my dad and some of his brothers and sisters went to that school. And then, when I was old enough, I started school there when I was seven, along with two other boys and a girl.

Rosemary And that was the class.

Ron Grade one. And there was eight grades in that school. The teacher had to look after all the kids, and she taught grade one to grade eight, and even some of the kids took correspondence in grade nine and ten, and then they had to go to Rosetown for high school after that.

Ron When I got home from school at night, it was my job to look after my younger brother because my sister worked with mother in the kitchen and my brother worked in the field with my dad. So I had to look after him and he was four years younger than me, and, so, if he got into trouble there, I caught heck and got into trouble for letting him get into trouble. So I just had to look after him. That was the only thing I could do. But after I'd done it for a while, I finally got tired of it and I decided I was going to leave home. And mother and dad had this family that lived in Rosetown that they used to see once in a while, and Mr. Navy that was in Rosetown said, if you ever get tired of home life, farm life, you come and live with us.

Ron So I decided one day when I was 10 or 11, somewhere in there, that I was going to leave home, so I took a loaf of bread and a quart sealer of water. And it was 22 miles to Rosetown, and I took off walking. The first night, I think I got about halfway there, and I spent the night in a straw stack that the farmer had put up for threshing machine. I buried myself in that straw pile, and the coyotes were outside howling and just scared the heck out of me all night. And I buried myself in there right far as I could go. And the next morning I made it to about three miles from Rosetown. And I stayed in the fields so nobody would see me on the road. And I made it to about three miles from Rosetown, and I had to go across the bridge to get across Eagle Creek. A Mountie stopped me on the bridge, and wanted to know where I was going.

Ron And I said I was going to live with the people in Rosetown. And he said, well, did your mom and dad know you're gone? And I said, no, I'm leaving. And so he said, I'll take you home. And I said, I really don't want to go home. But anyway, he talked me into it and he said, I'll take you into town, buy you lunch, and then he said I'll take you home. And I said, well, I've still got some bread and water left. And so after we had lunch, he took me home and I thought I'd really get a good tan on when I got home. But all my mother said to me was we will not mention this to anybody in the community or

anyplace because a Mountie had to bring you home. And we don't want the people to think that the family was involved with the Mounties. So nobody knew about this till now.

Rosemary Was it summer or winter?

Ron It was probably in July. It must be in August, because the grain was tall and I walked in the grains and they wouldn't see me. I was fairly short. I walked in the grains and they couldn't see where I was going.

Ron Apparently my dad, the first night I didn't get home, mother said I wasn't home for supper, and he said, well, when it gets dark, he'll be home. Well I didn't come home, so the next day they started looking around the communities to see if I was at somebody's place and I wasn't, so I guess they were getting kind of worried, then a Mountie showed up with me.

Rosemary So do you think they called a Mountie to come and help?

Ron No, I just seen him when I was walking into town. I guess a kid on the highway. So anyway, I still had to look after my brother. After I was probably in about grade four, I started lighting the fires for the school in the furnace, and every day I had to put a fire on him.

Rosemary Like one room?

Ron Yeah, a one room schoolhouse, and it had a big furnace in the basement and I used to go up every morning and light this fire and I got paid \$0.50 a day for putting the fire on. And in the wintertime, we lived half a mile from the school, so I used to walk up there. In the wintertime, my granddad had a big grove of trees halfway between our place and the school. And so I would take the 22 with me and shoot rabbits on the way to school and on the way home. And when I got to school, I just hung the gun up in the barn and nobody touched it. Nobody said a word. And that spring I had enough hides the rabbits to sell, and I bought myself a Pendleton bike.

Rosemary Oh, my goodness.

Ron So after I had grade eight, I went to Rosetown for two years in high school, and I just hated the town life and I quit after I got grade ten and I went back and farmed with my dad.

Rosemary What was the situation in Rosetown? Did you live with somebody?

Ron Yes, I boarded out in Rosetown. First time I boarded in a rooming house, and if I couldn't get home in the wintertime on account of a storm, she never fed the boarders on Sunday. So I only got a dollar a week to spend in town, and so Sundays I didn't eat. If I had to stay in town, I didn't have anything to eat for all day. Most of the time I got home because there was another family, another boy that lived in Rosetown, and I

could catch a ride home with him and back and forth. There was the odd time I had to stay. The second year I told my dad I said I'm not going back to that boarding place because it's not good. And so he got me a place in a widow's house, and she was really nice, Mrs. Lowe. She was a really nice woman and I liked it there. I just didn't like the town life, and anyway, I had to go home in the spring time to help my dad seed for about probably three weeks. I missed that much school, and then harvest time, I'd be gone a month to help him harvest, and I missed all that high school, and I couldn't keep up.

Ron So I just said to dad I'm not going to do this anymore. So I went home and I farmed, worked with him till 1956, and Doris and I got married, and we bought a quarter section of land. I had a quarter of my own land before that, and we bought another quarter of land and we farmed that from 1958 till 68. Then we took over Doris' dad and mom's farm, a section and half there, and farmed it for the rest of our life at the farm.

Ron We raised, we had cattle, on the farm, but we didn't have enough pasture to have very many cattle. So I built a hog barn in 1968 and we had it till about 75 and it burnt down. We run out of pigs and I just went straight grain farming after that.

Rosemary Wow. Did all the pigs die in the fire?

Ron No, we got them all out. Actually, what had happened, I was burning the ditches on the road before supper, and after supper I went out to see if there was any fire going and I seen a fire about a half mile north of our place. I went up to put it out and then Doris come to tell me that we were going down to my brother's place for my niece's birthday, and there was a little bit of fire burning beside the trees and all of a sudden a gust of wind hit the trees and the whole half of the yard was on fire. We lost a granary full of barley and two barns. And we were just lucky that we got the fire out before it done any damage to anybody else's property. And so after that, we didn't bother with pigs anymore. We just went straight farming.

Ron And then in 1959, our first son was born in January. Next, when our second son was born in February of 61, and our third son was born in December of 63. So we lived on that farm for 43 years. The boys all went to school at the local school, and they ended up taking their education in Rosetown in grade 12. Warren, the oldest son, after he graduated, he started farming with us and he got himself a section of land and we farmed together. And Dwayne, he decided that he wanted to be a mechanic, so he went and took a course. He was a heavy duty mechanic for 11 years. And then he decided he was going to go into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and he joined them in 1990, and he spent 27 and 1/2 years in the force. And my youngest son, Steven, he worked at a janitor's place in Kindersley for a school. He was there for about five or six years, and then he joined the army and he was in the Armed Services for 15 years. And he was over in Kosovo and Bosnia when they were fighting over there. And he came home and he got out, he got a medical discharge as he hurt his back. He got a medical discharge out of the army, and he worked for a company that done training for soldiers. They put a software on them like Star Wars, and he would go to train soldiers like they'd

be, not actually a battle, but it was all software stuff they put on them and they would be able to tell if they got wounded or killed. And that's what he did after he got out of the army for about five or six years. Now he's a peace officer in Lloydminster. So, my oldest son, Warren, after we sold the farm, he took a power engineering course, and he's at Fox Creek, Alberta, in the oil business.

Ron I guess that's up to where we had our family, but before that, we have to go back to when I was a kid. I should have started with it, but I always I had the feeling that I had to fly, and I couldn't understand why I couldn't fly like a bird. And even before I went to school, I had this feeling. I used to lay out in the pasture and watch the birds flying around and I couldn't figure out why I couldn't do it. So one time I took a pair of my sister's long cotton socks, and I stuck them all full of feathers that I found around the farm and I put them on my arms, and I thought they would make a wing I could fly with. That didn't work. So I took my grandmother's umbrella and I jumped out of the loft to the barn, and the umbrella turned inside out and I hit the ground pretty hard.

Rosemary Did you break any limbs?

Ron No, I never. And mother and dad used to have a whole bunch of turkeys, and they'd roost atop the barn, and in the morning they'd take off and they'd fly around, make a circle in the pasture and land in the pasture. So I thought one night if I grabbed a turkey in each hand and jumped off the barn, that they would fly and I'd go with them. That didn't work.

Rosemary And that's very imaginary.

Ron I hit the ground pretty hard. I didn't break anything, but the darn dog thought the turkeys were attacking me and he turned to jump in there and he tore the back end out of one turkey.

Rosemary Oh, my goodness.

Ron And I thought when dad found that out, he would get rid of my dog. So I took the turkey and threw it in the trees and told him that an owl had come down and got it.

Rosemary It's a strange owl.

Ron And he used to tell the neighbors that, and I used to feel about two inches tall. I never did tell him the truth, but I should have.

Ron So anyway, after we were married and 1973 I took my pilot's license.

Rosemary Did you really? Good for you.

Ron I got my license and we rented a club plane for a couple of years. And after that, we bought a 150 Cessna, a two-seater, and we flew that airplane for quite a few hours, and then we sold it and I bought a four-seater, 172 Cessna, and we flew it till 1996.

Rosemary Where were some of the places that you went?

Ron Oh, we were pretty well all over Saskatchewan, and I think about 1980 we flew down to Harlingen, Texas, with another couple in his airplane, and we were gone for a month. We just flew around in Saskatchewan.

Ron We joined the Flying Farmers, the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers, and we used to go all over. Oh, we flew into Alberta too. They had Flying Farmers conventions in Hanna, and where else did we come in Alberta.

Rosemary Telling me about the Flying Farmers. I've never heard of them.

Ron Well, there was an organization of farmers that owned airplanes, and they used them for mostly recreation and some of the farmers used them for spraying with. And it was an organized Saskatchewan, actually it's an international, organization, in the States too. We belonged to the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers and we belonged to the International Flying Farmers. And what year did you become queen?

Doris Oh, you were president.

Ron Oh, I was president of the Flying Farmers in 1993. And then Doris became queen of Saskatchewan Flying Farmers. And so we flew down to Abilene, Texas, to a convention down there.

Doris Rapid City.

Ron And Rapid City, in the States. And it got so expensive to insure the airplane. The last year I had it, it cost me \$235 an hour to fly it. And insurance was terrible. So then we farmed for 43 years, and then we sold out to the Hutterites in 1998, and we moved into Rosetown and bought a place in there. And I started to work for the Rosetown radio station being a farm news broadcaster. Oh. I did that for six months, and it was just too much work.

Rosemary You went around and interviewed people?

Ron Yeah, and getting farm news. But I had to be at work at 5 in the morning to get the news on by 6. And then they expected you to go to all the farm meetings at night, and sometimes you didn't home until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and had to get up at 5. I was 65 then, and it was just getting too much, so I quit there.

Ron And Wheatland Regional Center is the same thing as the Blue Heron here, their recycling depot, and they have all handicapped people that work there. So the boss that

was a CEO of Wheatland, he asked me one day if I wanted to come and build him a couple of trailers to put cardboard in, and so I did that. And then he said, how would you like to come work for us full time? And I said, well I could if could work my own hours. And he said, yes. So when I went to sign up, I said, I just joined the government payroll. And he said, are you 65? And I said, yeah. Well he says I can't hire you as we have a policy here you can't be 65 and hire you. But he says, I can contract you. So I was there for 18 years.

Rosemary My goodness.

Ron That was when I quit in 2018 and we moved up to Athabasca, Alberta, into Baptiste Lake to be closer to our sons and our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and it's just been wonderful. It was an awful thing to leave home, Rosetown. The worst part was leaving the guys at work because they were just so loving. If I had known what that field was in when I started to farm, I probably wouldn't have farmed. I probably would have worked with those people.

Rosemary With the handicapped people?

Ron Yeah. Well, I just fell in love with them and they were great. And so after I worked there till 2018.

Ron The boys, the kids up here, my grandkids and my son, they kept saying, why don't you come and live up close to us? So Dwayne had bought a cabin at Baptiste Lake, and he wanted us to come up and take it over, to look after it for them. He is retired and when he wanted, so that's what we did. And it's been wonderful up here. We've met some wonderful people and we've got involved with the community and, I don't know, it's just so good. Like, we've got seven grandkids and nine great-grandkids, and so we're all close. We're within 3 hours of all of them now, and before that, we were 9 hours for a trip up here to Fox Creek or up to Athabasca was 8 hours, so we didn't get to see the grandkids very often, but now we see them regularly. It's been wonderful.

Rosemary And it sort of adds a whole dynamic to your lives, doesn't it?

Ron Yes, it does. We've had a really good life. I mean, Doris and I have done just about everything that was impossible to do.

Doris Well motorbike.

Ron I started riding a motorbike when I was 70 years old, and toured Alaska for a month on the motorbike and we've been to Sturgis, South Dakota, to a motorcycle rally down there.

Rosemary Oh, good for you.

Ron Where all have we been? Manitoba.

Rosemary When did the motorcycle come up? How many years ago that you started?

Ron I was 70 years old, and we bought the motorcycle.

Doris Just after we sold the farm.

Ron It would be about 1969 or 70. We used to every first weekend in June, we used to ride out to Banff with three generations, and two sons and three grandsons.

Rosemary All on motorcycles?

Ron Yeah. We've had a great life. Yeah. I have no regrets.

Rosemary You're still having fun.

Ron Yeah. I get involved in the community up here, with the church, and we deliver Meals on Wheels.

Rosemary Thank you for that, and worship packages, and you've been part of the Lions, too.

Ron Yes, I'm a member of the Lions Club here, and I was in Rosetown as a Lions member. Probably a Lions member for at least 20 years.

Rosemary You mean in Rosetown and now here?

Ron Yeah, now here. We helped start Citizens on Patrol in Rosetown, and we done that for 15 years, before we moved up here. Then when we came up to Athabasca, we joined Citizens on Patrol up here, but they have since now quit because it got too dangerous I guess. And we were guards at the jail in Rosetown

Rosemary How big is Rosetown?

Ron It's about 3,200 people, about the same as here.

Ron Well, all our kids now are in Alberta. So when I got my pilot's license, that was one of the things I was glad I done, because Garth loved to fly too. And if anything was bothering me on the farm about maybe had bills to pay or something like this, I just got up in the airplane for a couple or an hour and I just forget about everything except flying. And that was the best medicine for me, and probably for Doris, too.

Rosemary That's something that you had had that sort of dream for a long, long time.

Rosemary Oh yes, Rosemary, I dreamt of that for years.

Doris You forgot to tell about what your uncle told you.

Ron Oh, gosh, yeah. When I was about five years old, talked about flying and flying, and my Uncle Jim, he said to me one day, he said, you go out in the pasture and you find all the dead hens or roosters and you pull the wings off them. And when you go to bed at night, you lay them on your shoulder, on your pillow, and they'll grow on and you'll be able to fly. So that was one of the worst fights my mother and I had because she wouldn't let me put the dirty old wings in the bed. And I said, well, Uncle Jim said that this would work, and she says, I'll Uncle Jim him when I see him.

Ron I guess before I went to school, I used to travel around a little bit and take off on my own. And I walked over to neighbors one time and was riding around on a seed drill when he was pulling it with horses, and I was riding on the seed drill with him and my sister come to find me. So I guess I was adventurous.

Rosemary I would say so. I mean, goodness me.

Ron But, yeah, I guess I'm the only one left of the Rawson family.

Rosemary Oh, is that right?

Ron Yeah. I guess I was on council for the RM [Rural Municipality] of Mountain View in Herschel from 1985 to 1998. And I was on the council there. I was also on Rosetown Hospital board representing our RM of Mountain View for nine, eight years. And I was also on the Saskatchewan ambulance board for five years. And also I worked for six months from 1998 at Rosetown radio station CJYM as a farm news broadcaster.

Rosemary That's exciting.

Ron Yeah, it was, alright. I don't know if I mentioned before when I was trying to fly, I built myself an airplane out of old barn wood. I took some of my dad's binder canvas and cut it up to make the cover for the wings and the tail. And we had a big hill in the pasture, I figured that if I could get that anything to roll down the hill, it would take off, but it wouldn't do that. So one day I decided to hook the horse onto it and I got her going and this thing goes plop behind her. She got scared and took off and it started falling apart. It's a wonder I didn't get killed. But anyway, she ran in the barn door with everything and hooked the harness on the door, tore the harness off her. I didn't get hurt, but I was badly shaken up. And the worst part was when my dad found out I had cut up his canvas, I couldn't sit down for a week's meet and supper or dinner. Oh he was pretty mad.

Rosemary My goodness. Oh, you were in it when she was running.

Ron Yeah.

Rosemary Wow.

Ron I wanted to fly so bad that I would have done anything to do it. Yeah, but that was probably my last experience till I got my pilot's license.

Rosemary What prompted you to get into the actual Flying Farmers?

Ron Well, after we got my pilot's license and we bought an airplane, then we joined the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers. It was an organization of farmers that owned airplanes and used them for agriculture as well as recreation. And we used to have a convention every once a year at different cities and we'd have safety seminars. And we'd also have president of the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers that would hold the president's flying day, and we'd fly into his day wherever that may be. And we used to go to different fly-in breakfasts in different provinces, and we just enjoyed it. And it was a feeling that when I got up in the air in that airplane, I forgot about everything else but to fly. And that was just a wonderful relaxation, and you forgot about any troubles that you ever had.

Rosemary No fear at all?

Ron No.

Doris Tell about fly-in fishing.

Ron Oh yeah, we flew up north to different lakes to fly-in fishing camps. Only one incident I had when I had the airplane was I was going to fly down to Swift Current to pick another guy up that had taken his airplane down to get some work done on it. When I took off, he had flown over home and when I took off and got in the air looking around to find him, and my motor quit and I had to land in the field ahead of me. And that was the only time I ever had any thrills other than flying it. I didn't hurt the airplane any. I didn't get hurt either. We landed in the field. The gas line had froze up in the airplane. It was in the spring of the year, and I really don't know what happened, why I had water in it, but it quit anyhow. It was the only time.

Rosemary How many years did you fly?

Ron From 1973 to about 96, I guess it was 97 when I sold the airplane. Yeah.

Rosemary Certainly a dream come true.

Ron It was a dream come true. It was a beautiful dream, too. When I was a kid, I couldn't get that thought out of my head no matter whatever I done. And it was just wonderful. Wonderful experience.

Rosemary Must have been hard to give it up, I would think.

Ron It was. The only reason I gave it up I was probably, I must have been 70 something, and I thought if something happened to me when I'm up there, have a heart

attack or something like that, and anybody that was with me would have been gone, but didn't know how to fly. So I thought I'd had a pretty good run at it, so I thought I'd better quit it before something happened. Because two of my friends had heart attacks in the airplane when they were flying. Lucky the airplane landed and they didn't get hurt. So it was just a miracle that they got down without being hurt.

Rosemary Ron would like to add a story of some of the activities he did as a Santa Claus. Ron.

Ron I probably did Santa Claus for at least 25 years when we were out in the country or farm, or used to do it for our community and a couple of surrounding communities. After we moved into Rosetown, I started doing it for the kindergarten in Rosetown and also the playschool, and sometimes the stores would have Santa Claus days, so I'd help do that for them. And I just had a ball with the kids. And I have albums from the daycare and kindergarten, and probably got 15 years of pictures of the kids that I have in Santa Claus from there and daycare and kindergarten, and it's just a wonderful feeling. We had a couple of boys that lived across the street from us, and they were little, and I used to go over there every time before Christmas. And they seen me coming out of the house one day. And so they wondered what Santa Claus is doing in our house, and I said was somebody had to feed him for dinner. And they said, oh that was really nice of you.

Rosemary Quick thinking.

Ron You know, it was comical that some of the stuff the kids would say, like when I was in kindergarten one time and one little girl came up to me, he said, you're not the real Santa Claus. And I said, what makes you think that? She says look at our Santa Claus on the wall picture. He's got green boots on and you've got black boots on. I said, well, I only use the green boots on Christmas Eve when I am going around the country. She said, well, that is sure nice.

Ron And one little guy with that community center, his mom couldn't get him to come and see Santa Claus. And his grandfather and I used to work at Wheatland Regional Center, and we were shingling a garage roof one time and this kid and his brother were up on the roof running around with us on the roof. And so I seen that his mother couldn't get him to come over, and I said, oh Braden, how come you're scared of Santa Claus? If you could get up on the roof of a garage and run around, it was like he was slapped on the side of the head because he just stopped and he couldn't believe it that I knew that Santa Claus knew that he was up on the roof. And so about a week later, I was at kindergarten and he was in kindergarten. And as soon as I walked in the door, he said to the teachers, he knows everything. And it is stuff like that, it sticks in your memory and just stays with you. The one little guy said to me, he said, you're not the real Santa Claus. And I said, well, what makes you think that? Well, he says how come your eyebrows are brown and Santa Claus eyebrows are white. And I said, well, you know, Santa Claus smokes a pipe, so the smoke curling up from the pipe makes his eyebrows

brown. He said, oh, I don't know whether he believed me or not, but I could go on forever telling the stories of what the kids did.

Ron One little girl, at the community center one time, and she said to me you're always Santa. You're always giving people gifts, so I'm going to give you one. So she gave me one and she told me what she wanted for Christmas. About a week later, I went to kindergarten and here is this little girl there, and she just put her hands on her hips and swaggered up to me and she said, I bet you don't remember what I asked for the other day, do you? And I said, no, I don't really remember, but I said, I have it all wrote down in my book. She said that was very nice. As soon as I seen her coming up, I knew it was in trouble because she just had that swagger to her

Ron I just had so much fun. And when we moved up here to Athabasca, the first year we were here, I went up to the mom and tot's school up on the top of the hill here. They had it up there the first Christmas we were here. But then COVID hit so I hadn't been back. When we go singing at the lodge and Extencicare, I always wear my suits come Christmas.

Rosemary Patients would get a lot of fun out of that.

Ron Yeah, it's fun. And, you know, the people in the Extencicare and the lodge, they just shine when they see you come in. They think about their childhood I guess. It gives you a good feeling.

Rosemary So Athabasca has got another Santa Claus.

Ron I was disappointed when COVID hit as I couldn't do it anymore. Maybe this year, I probably will. Oh, I think that's about it.

Rosemary Okay. Thank you for that.

Ron You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Proof-read by: Mavis Jacobs

November, 2023