

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Roxena Patry recording 2015.mp3
https://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/r_patry.htm

Narrator: Roxena (Rocky) Patry
Interviewer: Margaret (Peggy) Baker
October 14, 2015

[Start of Interview]

Peggy This is Peggy Baker at the home of Rocky Patry in Athabasca. It's October the 14th at about 2:00. So Rocky, would you like to start with your parents, who they were and where they came from, and how they ended up in Mossbank?

Rocky OK. My dad's name was Lester Johnston, and he married Bella Anna Watson of Dalesboro, Saskatchewan. Dad was born in 1886 in Ontario, and he came west looking for a job. Actually, before he joined the army in 1917, he was overseas, not in the fighting, he wasn't in the fighting battle, and then when he came back, he was looking for a job. I could read you the whole story, but it's too much.

Anyway, my parents were married in 1925 in Mossbank, Saskatchewan, or near there. I had three brothers. I was the third child. Three brothers, Donald and Garth deceased, and Glen is still alive. I went to school in Mossbank to Grade 12 and then after Grade 12 I went into nursing in Ottawa.

Peggy What do you remember about school in Mossbank?

Rocky Well, we lived in town so I could walk to school every day and the first recess I walked home—I thought I had enough school. I think the teacher said I fell asleep. I had a girlfriend that called for me every day, she lived out of town about a half mile, and we walked to school.

Peggy What did you do for fun?

Rocky There was a rink for skating and also for fun, I guess it wasn't fun, I delivered papers. My brother had the paper route but he got a job so he gave me his paper job. For fun we made mud pies, swung on the swing, and rode the bike. We had one bike for all of us kids. Yeah, it's hard to remember.

Peggy You went all the way to Grade 12 in Mossbank.

Rocky Yeah, in high school there was just six of us in Grade 12, three boys and three girls, and we had double desks—I think I had to sit with a boy, I can't remember, but my two girlfriends sat together in this double desk. Can you imagine it was Grades 1, 2, and 3 in one room, 4 to 6 in another, 7 to 9 in another, and 10 to 12 in another. It was a small school. There was no hospital in the town; Moose Jaw was the closest town.

Peggy What made you decide to go into nursing as a career?

Rocky It was sort of a process of elimination. I didn't want to be a teacher, I didn't want to be a secretary, so I thought, well, I'll try nursing. In Ottawa I had an aunt who was a nurse and she said come east and I'll look after you. I lived in residence so it didn't cost much money. We got \$10.00 a month, I think. Then I came back west.

Peggy Do you remember your first experience of moving into the residence there with all those other young ladies?

Rocky It was sort of exciting. It was, like being away from home for the first time but it was okay because I knew somebody in Ottawa. It wasn't as if I was totally alone and I didn't get home until the following year. I got home for Christmas once in the three years by train, that was exciting, too.

I came back west to Turner Valley because that's where my folks had moved to from Saskatchewan and then I thought, well, I'll get a job in Alberta. So, I wrote to Athabasca and Grand Prairie and I heard from Athabasca first so that's where I decided to go.

Peggy Who was Matron at that time?

Rocky Mrs. Stephenson.

In those days, it was sight unseen for both of us, they didn't interview me and I didn't interview them, they just said come. So, I boarded the bus and came to Athabasca in February. I thought, where am I going—to the end of the road, to the end of the world? But the bus driver knew the nurses and he saw them there to meet me.

There was a nurses' residence and it was nice having a place to go. You didn't have to look for a suite or an apartment or something. Yeah. The residence probably helped attract nurses to Athabasca. And then of course the young men came to town looking for you know, a nurse, a teacher, or something—to court. So, I think maybe it wasn't too long before I met Porky and we started going together, and one of the nursing aides there said, "You're going to marry him." And I says, "Oh, am I?"

I was only going to stay for six months, but here I am still.

Peggy Nursing in Athabasca was a little different from Ottawa Civic. I remember adjusting to the kind of nursing.

Rocky Uh well it was a challenge all right. But the nurses that I worked with were very good. Maternity I wasn't too keen on that, but one of the nurses just said call me any time if you need help. She was very good, well actually, all of them were but this one especially.

Peggy/Rocky The medical staff was? It was Dr. Wright and Dr. Brown.

Peggy/Rocky What year was it? 1952. I think it was just the two of them.

Peggy/Rocky Miller came later? Yes, he came later.

Peggy You remember night calls? Trying to get a hold of the doctors and phoning the operator.

Rocky We had to go through the operator looking for Dr. Wright and her saying I know exactly where he is, and so she would find him and get him up there. We had two floors in the hospital and we had to look after the two floors. Yeah. Well one time I remember I was like on the upper floor and somebody buzzed from downstairs. So, I was going down the stairs and I actually fell down the stairs but I didn't get hurt. But I don't know how they would have got by with only one nurse and an aide.

Peggy So then you married Porky in 1954. What was he doing then?

Rocky He was a truck driver, and then later on he took his electrician's test, and then after that he bought the hardware store. Link Hardware, but he was a truck driver when I met him.

Peggy As you mentioned, there were a bunch of young men and a bunch of young nurses around at that time, what did you do for fun? Where did you go on dates?

Rocky There were dances at the hall out at Island Lake, and I think every Saturday night or so there was a dance at Baptiste Lake. There was a dance floor there too. Porky had a canoe and he liked to go fishing so I learned how to fish but I didn't learn how to clean on purpose. So I didn't clean. But I ate and he ate. He also taught me to water ski. It took me many years. He kept saying, "Come on, come on, you gotta learn, you gotta learn." I said, "Well I can't swim." So, when I was 40, actually, he got me up on skis finally.

In the meantime, though, we had done some downhill skiing and well, you know, downhill skiing when you learn to snow plow it was hard to turn corners but I learned.

When I was water skiing, I had to take my glasses off and I couldn't see where to land. So, it was quite a challenge to do the water skiing, but it was fun to survive without any injuries. One time he took me out to the middle of the lake and stopped the boat and let me down and with the life jacket on, of course, it was fine so then I didn't mind if I fell.

There was also skating.

Peggy/Rocky Skating where? There was a rink in town. Yeah, an outdoor rink until they built the other rink.

Peggy/Rocky Down by where Ken's Confectionery is now? Yeah, in that area, opposite there.

Peggy/Rocky Was there a curling rink at the time? I'm pretty sure there was a curling but I didn't curl.

Peggy So Kim and Ross were born where?

Rocky Well, in Athabasca, Tim was born in 1959, February of '59 and Ross in July of '61 and they went to school in Athabasca.

Peggy/Rocky Did you ever work anywhere else besides the hospital? No.

Rocky Porky had a variety of jobs. He liked his vehicles and he taught me to drive.

Peggy Oh, you didn't drive when you moved up here.

Rocky No, he taught me to drive and that was in the days when we could get a driver's license for \$5.00. Just had to say I want to drive, no test.

Peggy At this time they did minor surgery in the hospital.

Rocky Yeah, they did tonsils, appendix, hernias, and I can't remember gall bladders. They did casts for broken bones. I had a lot of patients from the bush who didn't speak English so it was interesting.

Peggy The nurses were like a family I thought.

Rocky Oh yes, we didn't leave work until everything was under control, right? Yeah.

Peggy When you first came, you worked a 44-hour week?

Rocky I think so, yeah, and we had split shifts. Work in the morning, then a couple hours off in the afternoon, and then come back. Yeah. Like a 12-hour shift.

Getting back to when I was born in 1929, that's when the stock market crashed, and I'm sure that my parents were worried about having another mouth to feed.

Peggy You would have been in Turner Valley then when the big oil boom started. When the Leduc fields started.

Rocky Well I know they had they had some oil there. I never lived in Turner Valley. My folks moved there while I was in training, but all I know is that the flu epidemic, not when I was alive, but that flu epidemic during World War One, 1918, killed 20 million throughout the world. 30,000 to 45,000 Canadians.

Anyway, getting back to my story. My story's not very exciting, although what an exciting trip we did have once, and Peggy would remember this, too. The trip to Wabasca. We were going up there for a progressive dinner party and Peggy had the groceries.

Peggy/Rocky I had come down to Athabasca for some medical tests or something. Right, and getting a ride back with us, and Peggy had a lot of the groceries for this party.

Rocky So Porky and I and our two kids, they were quite young, and Peggy. And it was in the winter and we thought we'd take a shortcut. Then it started to snow and we got stuck. Porky and Peggy pushed and I believe I prayed or whatever. But anyway, I didn't do much but sit there. Porky said if a Cat came over the hill right now, he would kiss the driver and lo and behold, here comes a Cat. We stayed in the logging camp that night. The next day was beautiful. So, we drove out to Wabasca and the party was over. I think they canceled it because we didn't get there with the food. But that was very exciting and then we were up there another time for a carnival.

Rocky When I retired in '84, then in '85, we started going south for a couple of months every winter from '85 to '98. I think was our last year that we went south to Arizona.

Peggy So you sold the house across from the old hospital site and moved to an acreage by Grosmont.

Rocky In 2009 Porky got really sick. So then we had to buy a place in town because I knew I couldn't manage on the acreage alone. I've been in this condo here now for five years.

Out on the acreage we didn't have animals, just four cats. The grandchildren would enjoy coming out. We took them waterskiing, skating, and skiing. We were retired so we had time to do this so they all learned to skate because we took them. Ross lives out by the Hutterite Colony and they have three children. Tim lives in Edmonton and he has one daughter.

Peggy You don't remember anything about the war beginning or your neighbors being called up.

Rocky I just remember my parents sitting and talking about the war. You know, being a little bit scared, but it wasn't sort of close to home, so we're really not thinking about it too much.

Peggy What did you say your dad did?

Rocky He worked in a lumber yard. There was a training school, for air bombing, in Mossbank. We rented part of our house to a family, an Air Force family, during the war. Our house was not very big, but we made the upstairs into a suite. This family had three kids. I can't believe how they managed, but they did.

During the war I remember we didn't have a vehicle. My dad did have a vehicle once, the Honeymoon Ford in 1925, but he traded it for a radio. We listened to, you know, the

hockey games, Fibber McGee and Molly, and Lux Radio Theatre. That was our entertainment.

Peggy What happened to your brothers? Where did they end up?

Rocky My older brother, Donald, ended up in BC. He worked for the highways and they lived on the Island for a while. They moved around quite a bit. Donald died about five years ago. He was diabetic and he was almost totally blind. My other brother, Garth, was in the insurance business and he lived in Calgary. He passed away last year, almost two years now. Then Glen who was a geologist. He's still alive and he's in Calgary.

Rocky But anyway this Ford that my dad had, the Depression was upon us and no money for gas or repairs so he traded it even steven for a radio. So, we listened to Lux Theater, Amos and Andy, Fibber McGee and Molly. And Dad said that other times he would read us Peter Rabbit, and The Three Little Pigs, and one of his friends said that the best time of your life is when the children are small. He was so right and isn't that the truth.

They used to have Fall Suppers then, 1937. 25 cents for the adults, kids 12 years and over 15 cents, and under 6 years no charge. A cow sold for 89 cents. One farmer shipped a cow to Winnipeg and after paying the freight he received a check for 89 cents.

Peggy So, Rocky, I just want to ask you about the hospital fire because I remember that you were on duty when that happened. So was I.

Rocky Well, actually, no, I wasn't on duty. I was away and I remember my son Tim said, "You're out of a job." And I said, "How come?" He says there was a fire, but actually I wasn't out of a job. No, I actually missed the fire. Yeah. So, I was lucky. Yeah.

I think in the last interview I mentioned that we had a night watchman because apparently some of the younger nurses, "not me included of course," were having their boyfriends come to visit them at night while they were on duty. I don't know what year that was or how long we had this night watchman but that was sort of an interesting period.

The nurses' residence, it was handy living there because when we weren't too busy on nights, we could look out the windows and see all the nurses and the nursing aides coming home from their dates. And we can say, aha, you got in at 2:00 in the morning and well whatever. Good fun.

I can mention some of the doctors that I worked with and the Matrons. Well, I'll mention some not in this order but there was Dr. Wright, Dr. Miller, Dr. Brown, Dr. Kiltz, Dr. Taylor, Dr. Oldale, Dr. Doyle, and I think a Dr. Pawlick, I think that was the name. The Matron when I first came, was Mrs. Stevenson and then Georgia Spence, then Mrs. Parr (wife of Edwin Parr the high school principal). Then after her it was, help me out

Peggy, there was Dorothy Patry for a while, but before Dorothy I think was probably Rosalee Stobee, but she was Rosalee Sereda then, and Barb Pecola.

Peggy Do you remember after the hospital fire when all the patients were displaced? Where did you go then? Where did you work?

Rocky Well after the fire we worked in the west wing, it was still usable, until they got some trailers in.

There was the east wing and the west wing, so we weren't really out of work, you know, it was still usable. But they didn't do any surgery, you know, for a while.

Peggy/Rocky So the day of the fire, the patients were simply sent home? Probably sent home. I was on holidays at the time.

Peggy I was also thinking about Porky and his extraordinary waterskiing skills.

Rocky Yes. Yes. Well, I don't know if mentioned, but. . . Yeah, he loved to water ski, and I finally learned how to water ski when I was 40 years old, but I didn't ski for many years, but I liked it, it was fun.

Peggy Do you remember some of the extraordinary tricks he did when he was on water skis?

Rocky Well, when he used to get up on a ladder on a round board and put that stepladder on it and go round and round the lake, it was amazing.

Peggy/Rocky Did the boys water ski? Oh yes, they both could water ski.

Peggy You had a cabin at the lake and spent a lot of time out there.

Rocky I don't remember staying overnight there because mostly it seemed I was working when they were out there, but that was okay because I enjoyed my years of working.

Peggy/Rocky During that time working meant that you were in the labor room, and you were in the operating room. Yes, and on the ward, children's ward and the nursery.

Peggy/Rocky Was it a shock coming from Ottawa Civic to come to a little place like Athabasca? Oh yes.

Peggy Can you describe some of the things you had to do to track down the doctor when you had an emergency.

Rocky I remember one time, especially, there was a lady in labor. She was ready to deliver and the doctor didn't answer the phone for some reason, so I sent my helper, the aide, to go and wake him up.

But that was only that one instance. So, yeah, it was interesting. At one time there were two floors. We had to do both, which I don't know how we managed but we did, and just two people on duty at nights with no elevator.

Yeah. It was interesting. I really liked my job. We all helped each other. It was a happy time. Yeah. Yeah.

Peggy That whole crop of nurses that came when you did, married local boys. Right.

Rocky Quite a few of them. Yes. Dorothy Patry, Pat Garton, Pam Woodward. Glenis Lewis, Phyllis Melsness, and Alice Eherer were some.

Peggy/Rocky Lab and x-ray were grads of the NAIT program. I think so.

Peggy/Rocky It was like a 10-month course. I think so, yes.

Peggy/Rocky Who do you remember from lab and x-ray? Ingar Jorgenson was with lab and x-ray, and Dorothy Appleby was in x-ray.

Rocky My one great grandson, Ethan, he says "Grandma I know how old you are, you're 86." He says "That's your favorite number—86."

Peggy So you're going to stay there.

Rocky Yes, my life has been a good life but not really that exciting as some lives.

Peggy Very significant in the life of Athabasca and the hospital. Whenever I think of the Athabasca Hospital, I think of you.

Rocky Yeah.

Peggy OK, well thank you very much for taking time to do this I hope it's been worthwhile.

Rocky Thank you Peggy and I'm anxious now to hear your story.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Lois Schinkinger
Proof-read by: Jan Thiessen

April, 2022