

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Shirley Backstrom recording 2019.mp3

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<https://athabascau.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/au%3A96166>

Narrator: Shirley Backstrom

Interviewer: Rhonda L. Hinthier

September 4, 2007

[Start of Interview]

Rhonda This is an interview with Shirley Backstrom recorded on September 4th, 2007, at Colinton, Alberta at her home. The interviewer is Rhonda L. Hinthier. Can you tell me what your full name is?

Shirley Shirley Loretta Backstrom. And it was Coleman, before.

Rhonda Your maiden name was Coleman?

Shirley Yes.

Rhonda Where were you born?

Shirley In Amber Valley.

Rhonda What year?

Shirley 1934.

Rhonda What's your birth date?

Shirley Seventh of July.

Rhonda Okay. Where did you grow up?

Shirley I grew up in Edmonton because I was moved out of Amber Valley when I wasn't even two years old yet, when Mom and Dad moved to Edmonton.

Rhonda How come they moved to Edmonton?

Shirley Because Daddy, he had work out there; he was working on the railroad.

Rhonda What kind of work was he doing?

Shirley He's a porter on the CNR [Canadian National Railway].

Rhonda Okay, so he traveled quite a bit.

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda Did your family travel a lot by train because of his job?

Shirley No, we didn't. We didn't go on very many trips on the train.

Rhonda And what kind of work did your mom do?

Shirley She was just a housewife. She had six children so that kept her busy!

Rhonda So, what would her average day have been like when you were growing up?

Shirley What would it have been like? Busy from the time you get up until the time you go to bed when you've got six children and the house and the farm to look after.

Rhonda So, whereabouts in Edmonton did you live?

Shirley We lived on down in Rossdale. I started Grade 1 and we lived in the Rossdale flats and then we moved across the over into Cloverdale flats in Edmonton.

Rhonda Do you have many recollections of when you were in Amber Valley? Of when you lived in Amber Valley?

Shirley When we went back the second time.

Rhonda Yeah. And how long were you there? Was that just for a visit?

Shirley No, because we moved when Grandpa Coleman died; it was in '46, and then we moved back out to Amber Valley and we was out there till 1950. We moved back out to Edmonton again.

Rhonda So four years, approximately?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda And what were you doing out there then?

Shirley Dad was doing Grandpa's farm. He had his farm there so we moved into his house.

Rhonda Did he give up his job on the railroad?

Shirley Nope. Like, Dad used to, we was out there . . . well, he quit for a while on the railway and then he went back out to Edmonton because he couldn't make enough money on the farm. So, he went back out to Edmonton and started up again on the railway. So then, we moved back out to Edmonton.

Rhonda And what happened to the farm?

Shirley Well, they had sold the farm to Tommy Melton. He bought the farm.

Rhonda/Shirley/Rhonda So, over the course of your life, where have you lived? Started out in Amber Valley, then Edmonton, then back to Amber Valley? [Yeah.] Then back to Edmonton?

Shirley Yeah. And then I went up north. I went up to the territories in 1957. I moved up to Fort Smith in Northwest Territories and I was in Fort Smith for 12 years. And then, I moved over to Pine Point for another 10 years, and then I moved over to Hay River. So, was up there 34 years altogether in the territories.

Rhonda And then after that?

Shirley And then, I moved out here in 1991.

Rhonda How come you moved out here?

Shirley Because my husband, he wanted to move back into Alberta because that's where he was born at so, he wanted to move back into Alberta because he was retiring.

Rhonda Where was he born?

Shirley He was born in Camrose.

Rhonda How did you meet your husband?

Shirley Well, when I was working up there in the territories.

Rhonda What kind of jobs have you had over your life?

Shirley Well, I've been doing a lot of different jobs, working in restaurants, and in the hotels, and the last job that I had was from '82. I started to work and I was a highway transport officer at the weight scales in Enterprise.

Rhonda/Shirley/Rhonda So, you held a real variety of positions. [Yeah.] What made you go up north?

Shirley Well, see, Mom and Dad had moved to Uranium City and they were up there because of the mining, and then my sister Corinne and her husband, Richard Lewis,

well, they moved up. Well, there was a lot of people because, Hez Carothers, and my uncle, Oswald Lipscombe, they all went to Uranium City when it first opened up, the mine up there.

Rhonda Were they miners?

Shirley Yeah. They was working in a mine. Dad wasn't. Dad was working construction work. Because he was a carpenter/painter and Uncle Oswald, he worked in the hotel up there. And, Hez Carothers and them, they went up there and they were out staking claims in the mine there. And ah, oh, what's his name? I think his name was Henry Brown. H. Brown, they called him. Well, he was up there too, but then. It was a freak accident. He went out with some prospectors and then he never come back and they never did find his body up there.

Rhonda Do they know what happened to him? Did he fall?

Shirley No, but they never did; they never found his body. Never found none of his belongings or nothing. Because, see his family, they were still out there in Amber Valley.

Rhonda So, what do you do for a living now?

Shirley I just keep myself busy all the time because I am doing that drug awareness program in the schools. Like, I put it in September and I finished it up in May, in the spring. And I got it in Rochester School, Landing Trail School, the Colony school. And then I've got that teasing and bullying and unacceptable behavior: I got that in the Rochester School, Landing Trail School, the Colony school, Whispering Hills School, and the school over at Smith.

So, when you implement those programs, well then, you've got to follow up on them to see whether it's working. It's from that; ah, trying to think of that, the name of that place. It's at the university in Edmonton, that deaf detection and stuttering and all of that? Well, the Elks; they sponsor all of that.

Rhonda So, can you tell me a bit more about the Northwest Territories, what it was like up there? Like, why did you choose to go?

Shirley Well, see Mom, when my sister Carol drowned in Uranium City, Mom didn't want to stay there no more. She was only 13. She drowned out there in Martin Lake. So, then they moved over to, Dad found work over in Fort Smith. So they moved over there.

Rhonda Was he doing construction work?

Shirley Yeah, he was a carpenter and he was a painter/foreman. He started working for the government. Over there at the government shop.

Rhonda And what did your mom do up there? She worked in the home still?

Shirley Yes, she was working at home, and then, she used to do, like, she was doing laundry and that for the hotel and things like that. You know. Keeping her busy. And all the family was over there. So, I went up there in September 7th, 1957. I moved from Edmonton up there with my kids.

Rhonda What was your mother like?

Shirley What was she like? Oh, she was a real lovable person, quiet.

Rhonda Was she strict?

Shirley No, she wasn't as strict as what Dad was. You didn't get away with nothing with Daddy. But no, Mom, she was quiet. But she made us toe the line; we didn't get away with anything.

Rhonda Who were your parents? What were their names?

Shirley What were their names? Velma and Isaiah.

Rhonda Now, what was your mother's name before she married your father?

Shirley She was an Adams.

Rhonda Do you know how they met?

Shirley Well, they were both . . . Dad, he was born in Clearville, Oklahoma.

Rhonda In what year?

Shirley In 1910.

Rhonda So, he was quite young when he came to Canada.

Shirley Yeah, well, I think he was just a baby because I think it was 1911 or 1912 when they moved out there. But Mom, she was born in Amber Valley. She was born in August the 6th, 1916. Because Mrs. Brody, she was a midwife out there, and she delivered Mom and then she also delivered us when we were born. My sister, Corinne, and myself.

Rhonda Do you remember Mrs. Brody very well? No, because you were too young?

Shirley Yeah, like I say, we moved out of there while I was only, I wasn't quite two years old when we moved to Edmonton. And then when we went back, well, then, Mrs. Brody, I think she had passed already.

Rhonda Do you know what year your parents got married?

Shirley It was in May in 1932. Because when we had their 50th anniversary, it was in May. It was in 1932. In May in 1932.

Rhonda And were you their first child?

Shirley Nope, Corinne. Yeah, Corinne was their first.

Rhonda What was your mom like when you were a teenager?

Shirley Well, she was so busy all the time, but like, we was back out in Amber Valley in our teen years. And you know, when you're out there on the farm and you got nothing and you're trying to make something, you've got six kids to look after and that, they kept pretty busy.

Rhonda Did she have electricity in the house?

Shirley No, we had no power. We didn't have anything. No running water. Yeah. You run down to the well and get it. No, there wasn't any power or nothing. But, you know, that was some of the best years of our life because we had nothing. And so we didn't want, you know, like the kids nowadays. They want everything that they see. You didn't have it, so you didn't want it.

Rhonda How was it for you to basically grow up in the city and then to go back to Amber Valley? Was it a big change for you?

Shirley No, it was like more peaceful because when you're living in the city, there's so many kids and there's so much going on and everything. So, it was kind of a break getting away. Because every summer, we used to spend our holidays out on the farm with Grandma Bowen; she had a store out there in Amber Valley. So we'd go and spend a month out there for our summer holidays.

Rhonda And what was that like?

Shirley It was nice. It was a lot of fun because all of our relatives lived out there.

Rhonda So you'd see your cousins.

Shirley Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Rhonda And what was her store like?

Shirley Well, it was just a log building and then she had the store in the, in the front part of it. And then she had their bedrooms upstairs, and she had her kitchen, and she had a chesterfield in there. But it's just one room at the back and the other part was a store, and then the bedrooms were upstairs.

Rhonda Was she a widow or single?

Shirley Who, Grandma?

Rhonda Yeah, was she a widow? Did she live on her own?

Shirley Nope. Her and Grandpa, they both lived out there.

Rhonda But she ran the store.

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda Did he farm?

Shirley Yeah. And then after a while, then he moved. He bought that other farm. He left her with the one where the store was and then he moved. He got that other farm over there by Mr. Edwards's place and he built a house over there. So they sort of parted ways, but they weren't that far from each other, about two miles, two and a half miles.

Rhonda So they'd split up?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda Oh! Did they ever get divorced?

Shirley I don't ask me, my dear. I don't know. I don't think so.

Rhonda Did she date anybody else after that?

Shirley I don't know. I don't, like I say, I really don't know what went on. Because when we were going out there to stay out there for our summer holidays, we were young. And you don't pay any attention to something like that.

Rhonda When you were out on the farm, did you have chores to do?

Shirley Oh, yes, because, Mom, she used to always get her chickens, and then we had pigs, and then we had cows, and we had horses. We had to look after everything. You had to do your chores. So, on weekends, Daddy used to make us clean the barn out and then we could . . . because, like in the wintertime, we wanted to use the stone-boat to go to school. So, we had to clean the barn out and then go spread that out in the field

so it would be clean for us to take so we could have it to ride to school, the six of us kids, eh?

Rhonda How far from the school did you live?

Shirley We were two and a half miles, I think.

Rhonda So, pretty good walk then.

Shirley Oh yeah, but you get used to it; wasn't that far. Some kids had five miles to walk to school.

Rhonda So, during what years did you go to Toles School?

Shirley 1946 to '50.

Rhonda Who were your teachers?

Shirley Mrs. Dobson was our teacher.

Rhonda What was she like?

Shirley She was really nice.

Rhonda What grades would you have been in at that time?

Shirley Grade 6, 7, 8, and 9, because you couldn't go any higher than Grade 9. After you finish your Grade 9, then if your parents had enough money, then you could stay in the hostel in Athabasca.

Rhonda Did you go on past Grade 9?

Shirley No. Nope.

Rhonda Did you want to?

Shirley Yeah. But if you don't have the resources, you can't. That was a sort of a cut-off point for everybody that was out there. Mrs. Murphy, my cousin Bernice Bowen, that was her grandma. So, she had the post office and the store there in Amber Valley. So, she had to put away enough money so she sent Bernice to school. But Bernice was the only one that went. Later years, they put an addition onto that school out there.

Rhonda You weren't there when that happened, though.

Shirley Nope.

Rhonda So, who are your grandparents; you talked about your grandparents a little bit, but can you tell me, did you know both sets of grandparents?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda And who were they?

Shirley Well, Percy and Ethel was an Adams, and then Ossie and Georgie was the Coleman.

Rhonda OK. And were you close to your grandparents?

Shirley Oh, yeah. Grandma Adams, like when they lived in the Edmonton, we would always. . . Every Sunday, we lived down in the flats there and she lived up on 95th Street, I think. But we went to Sunday school every Sunday and then after Sunday school . . . Well Granddad, he wouldn't go to church with us and what he did, he would make spaghetti. So, we knew that when we got finished with Sunday school we'd go over to Grandma's house and Granddad had the spaghetti ready for the whole family. But he'd never let anyone. . . See, he stowed away on a ship when he was 14 years old and he come from Cape Town and I think he landed in Vancouver. And so, he never got a chance to go back; an Italian family raised him. So, if he got ticked off at you, he'd start talking in Italian. That's what he used to do to my grandma all the time. He'd get mad and he call her Italina and he'd start talking in Italian. And Grandma would get so mad because she couldn't understand him. But, he never he got to go back and see his folks; just never could afford it.

Rhonda Or was it just not safe to go back?

Shirley I don't know. He just never got the chance to go back.

Rhonda So, why did he stow away?

Shirley Well, he wanted to get away from Africa and what was going on over there at times. But he was 14; well, it was him and . . . he wasn't by himself. There was, I don't know how many of them was, but they got off. They stowed away on this freighter ship because they were shipping freight and those boys, they all stowed away on there. And then when it docked in Vancouver, they managed to get out and they didn't get caught or nothing.

Rhonda Did he stay friends with the other guys? Did they remain friends?

Shirley Yeah. Yeah.

Rhonda Quite the adventure when you're that age! Did he know where the ship was going to end up?

Shirley No, he just wanted to get out of Africa.

Rhonda Did he tell you much about his childhood?

Shirley No. You know, back in those days, even when we was out in Amber Valley, being raised right around Grandma Adams and all of them. But I think what it was, that those people, they had such a hard time when they was in the States, and the ones that come from Africa and all of that. And it was so much Jim Crow and all, you know, the hard times, they had to get out of there to get freedom coming to Canada. And they just wanted to forget about that.

Rhonda So you didn't hear much?

Shirley No, no. None of the families. I mean, back in those days, nobody talked about nothing.

Rhonda Did they ever talk about slavery or anything like that? Their parents?

Shirley Nope. You see, that's what they wanted to forget. I mean, if you've been drug through that. Those people that hire them as slaves and that, and then they would break up the family, you know. They'd take in a whole family, okay, but then they'd keep the man and then they'd take and put the wife, and the kids, and the girls, and put them up for sale. Sell them to somebody else, the slaves. And you don't want to keep reminding yourself of that. I think that is why the older people, they talked about what was happening now. They didn't want to talk about what had happened back then.

It is not a memory that you want to hang on to, and I think that's the reason why there was not much conversation about what happened before they got here; got to Canada.

Rhonda Did they talk much about the journey itself?

Shirley Well, some of them would talk about it, but not too much.

Rhonda What about racism? Did your grandparents or your parents explain to you that certain people might not treat you properly because of the color of your skin?

Shirley Oh, yeah. Well, like you'll encounter that no matter where you are, because I know even when my kids started to school then, that was up in Fort Smith. But you're going to get that no matter where you go. And there's still certain parts of Canada where there's some people, you know, they want to stick to their own nationality and that's it. You'll still find that.

Rhonda Now, what about when you were growing up? Did your parents say, this is how you should handle it, if you encounter this?

Shirley Nope! They just let us go. But if anybody come out, were calling us one of those names, they better look out because we retaliate. And that's the only way. I know Randy, he was my second boy; when he started school up there in Fort Smith and those kids up there were mostly Natives. The majority of them were Native kids and that. But when he first started in Grade 1, I had to buy him glasses five times that year because those kids would call him a n----r and, oh boy, the fight was on.

But I remember when we were young, I tell you, we had to fight. Because, like, in the city and that, you know, you got called that a lot. And then they didn't want you to, you know. Like, it was a lot of the parents. Because I mean, like, just kids going to school and we used to play out together and all. But then there was one little girl, she was white. We was going getting ready to go to church. We all went to the same church, too. But her mother, she didn't, you know; she dressed this little girl in the frilly dress and everything. And she didn't want us to touch it to get her little girl's dress dirty. Yeah.

And I tell you, when that woman, when she turned around talking to a bunch of women, we just took a handful of mud and went right down the back of that little girl. Well, I mean, she didn't want us to touch her because our hands were dirty. She didn't want us to get the little girl, you know. When you're only about that high. . . She didn't want us to touch that little girl's dress because we get it dirty on account of our color.

Rhonda Did you encounter that a lot growing up?

Shirley Oh, yeah.

Rhonda Was it worse in the city than in Amber Valley?

Shirley Oh, there was nothing in Amber Valley, because all of us kids, we went to school, it didn't matter, you know, what race or nothing else. You know, it didn't matter. So, you never had no problem because there was only Rosie, and Annie and Johnny Bart, and Guy Godbout, and Walter and Billy Silkie were the only white kids going to school when we were there.

Rhonda And you all got along well?

Shirley Oh, yeah. Or your neighbors; I mean, you grew up together.

Rhonda Were there ever any problems?

Shirley Nope!

Rhonda None of the white kids called you names?

Shirley Nope, nope, nope, nope. They didn't dare. Because they were, like I say, we was raised like. . . Okay. Because we're at Jeff Edwards's farm and then there was Mr. Lowell's farm and then Silkies, they had that same road where Grandma Coleman had

her store, well then, they just lived right down the road from there. And then Rawa, he come into the country there and so he started farming there. And it was gradually going down all the time, but different white people come in there and they started. Because a lot of the people that were there, that settled in that place, well, then when the kids got older, then they ventured away. You know, they started going out to the cities and to the States and all over the place. Well, there wasn't any future out there for them. Okay, if you had a quarter section of land, and you got six kids, what if you can't make it yourself? The parents couldn't make it on that quarter section of land. So, what are the six kids going to do? You will sit there with nothing for the rest of your life? Nope, I don't think so.

That's how come the younger people, like when they got to Grade 9, a lot of them, they went to the city and all over the place, you know, so they could further their education and that? Because you couldn't do it there. You didn't have the money. And there was very few that were able to go out to Edmonton. Bernice, she went to school in Athabasca, because Mrs. Murphy paid for her to stay up there at the hostel, and then she went from there; she went out to Edmonton and went to university and got a teacher's degree.

Rhonda What did you do when you weren't in school in Amber Valley?

Shirley When we wasn't in school?

Rhonda Yeah, like for fun when school was over during the summer.

Shirley During the summer holidays? Oh, we had lots of fun out there in the garden and we had to go scrounge around trying to find berries and stuff in the summertime. And, well, our job; it was a real nice task. We had to go over. . . See, Dad, he just had very little crop to thresh. But then, in the summertime, we had to go over to, Mr. Edwards was the only one that had a threshing machine. So, we had to go over and we spent our summer out there in his field, stooking barley in the field. That was our summer holidays, dear.

Rhonda Did you make money?

Shirley No, you didn't! We had to stook his grain so he could come over and thresh that little handful of grain that Daddy had. No, you didn't get paid for nothing!

Rhonda What other chores did you have to do?

Shirley Well, we had to look after the pigs, and the cows, and the chickens, and the horses, and everything. You know, had your daily chores like everybody else had.

Rhonda So, what would you do when you had time to play?

Shirley When we had time to play? Well, there was very, very few hours to play. We'd always find some kind of game. We had swings and teeter-totter and everything in the yard. We get out there and play ball because there was six of us so we could play ball and stuff and they had the football and everything else in there.

Rhonda That's a lot of sports, then.

Shirley Oh, yeah.

Rhonda Were you a good child, were you well behaved?

Shirley Mediocre. I'm not going to say I was real good or I was real bad. I'm just in between.

Rhonda So if you weren't good, what would happen to you?

Shirley Oh, boy. I tell you, we get lazy, my dad, he'd make you. . . If you did something wrong, whether you thought it was wrong or not, but he'd make you go out and get the willow. And if you come back with a willow that he could break, well, he'd send you back till you got a green one, you know, one that he couldn't break. You got a lacing. Oh, yeah. No, he didn't let you get away with nothing. But like, we'd get away with a lot more with Mom than what we could with Dad. Well, you know, but like today, it makes you feel. . . Okay, sure he would straighten you out and make you do what's right, but we're a lot better off today than some of the young children that you see nowadays. No, no, no, they wouldn't have it.

And I mean, like, growing up in the Dirty Thirties, as they called it, you had to make life of whatever you had that was available there on the farm. You know, we lived off the fat of the land. Dad used to go out by five o'clock in the morning and when he come back home, when we're getting ready for school, then he'd have his five or six prairie chickens. We didn't have cattle so we could have our own beef. So, my cousin Eugene Sneed, and Uncle Oswell, and Daddy; they were the three families would go together and they'd buy a pig. And then, you know, raise it until it was ready to butcher and had to do the same thing with the calf. Because the majority of the people, they had three or four cows, or six. It all depends how big your family. Like, cousin Day's family, I think they had 15 or 16 kids, but then they had more cattle.

But yet they didn't have a bunch beef for killing, you know, like the young calves and that. They would manage. They had to butcher one; they had to keep eating. But that's the way they'd do it; the two or three families that have to go together in order to have enough money to buy this pig when it's a weaner size and then let it grow. And then it was split between three families because there were six of us kids. And there was; I think Eugene had five, Uncle Oz only had the one. But they'd divide it amongst. And then once you've got your meat, they wouldn't butcher until in the fall, because then you keep it in the ice house in the wintertime.

Rhonda How long would that meat last?

Shirley It wouldn't last too long. When you've got eight people eating it, it didn't last that long. But Dad used to take, I think was a cream can. Yeah. And they'd put that meat, cut it, and put it in there and then they'd hang it on a rope down in the well.

Rhonda Got to keep it cool?

Shirley Yeah. You didn't have no refrigeration, so everything that you had, either canned it, or he had a root cellar where we kept all our vegetables in the fall. You put them in the root cellar over the winter.

Rhonda Where is the root cellar? under the house?

Shirley No, no. It was out in the yard, you know, Grandpa had built one out in the yard. They build it out of wood and they covered the whole thing with soil on top of it.

Rhonda And then put grass or whatever, where grass would grow?

Shirley Yeah, but they just take dirt and, you know, they have to cover it over with the soil. So, that's where they kept everything, it would keep it pretty cool then and it didn't freeze. The vegetables didn't freeze in there because they used to put sand in there and then put the vegetables, like the potatoes, and carrots, and the turnips, they put them all in sand inside that root cellar. Just like a gopher, you know; dig a hole in the ground! [laughs] But, I mean that way they had to preserve their food.

Rhonda You're saying that your dad was quite strict with your kids if you were bad. What was he like in other ways, in other contexts? How would you describe your father?

Shirley Well, Daddy, always wanted us kids to be . . . he tried to make us all be like him. You know, just work, work, work all the time. And you had some time to play. But on Saturdays; when we didn't have to go to school on Saturday and Sunday, we figured that we'd get to sleep in because we didn't have to get up and go to school. My dad. Yeah. Seven-thirty, 8 o'clock. "Okay, you kids rise and shine!" "Oh Dad, can't we stay in the bed and sleep? We don't have to go to school today so we got nothing to do." So, he said, "Well, if you haven't got nothing to do," he said, "you get out of that bed and get an early start at it."

You know, you had to get up at that same time every. . . Well, regardless, we still had lots to do because, us girls, we'd take and scrub. Like, we just had wood floors. So, we used to take like, Mom, she made that lye soap. So, we had to take and scrub them. Well, those boards, I'm telling you, we had them just about as white as that. But we had to scrub all the floors in the house and that, and then do the washing because you had to wash your all the clothes by hand, eh? With a scrub board and washtub.

Rhonda Heavy work.

Shirley Yeah, but you have to do what you have to do. We couldn't expect Mom to do it for all six of us kids. So, then you had to do the laundry and do all the floors and that, and you had your outside chores to do on top of that.

Rhonda How long would it take you to do, like on an average day, how many hours would you spend doing chores?

Shirley We'd be out there about three hours because you had to milk the cows, and bring the milk, and you had to separate it. And you had to and feed the pigs, and feed the chickens, and look after the cows, and put feed in the barn for them and stuff like that. So, it'd be about three hours.

Rhonda Heavy labor in a lot of cases.

Shirley Yeah, but you got used to it. But I think that's the majority of us young children, when we was out there on the farm. Because Dad always told us not. . . you know, they had those five-gallon buckets that you put the milk and everything else. And so you had to take it out and throw it in the pigpen. But he always told us, he said, "You never take one of them pails." He said, "If it's over half full, you get another pail." And he said, "You always carry two pails at the same weight." Because you pull your back out. So, we got used to it, but Mom, she'd always have that five gallon so we'd have to put it into two pails. Because Daddy, he said you should never carry a heavy pail; not one on one side. He says, split in two and carry two pails. So you got the same weight on both arms. Yeah, makes sense.

Rhonda What did your dad especially like doing? Did he have a favorite show or a hobby?

Shirley Well, Dad, he was always building something because he made his own sleigh and he made a cutter and everything for on the farm. Now and then he made us kids a small replica. Well, we could pull each other around on it and stuff like that, eh. Of the big sleigh? And he made one for us. And so we used to put the. . . Well, he had that long tongue on it, he made it like a handle on the end? So, then we would bring wood and stuff and we just loaded it in our sleigh in the wintertime. We didn't have a bought sleigh from the store, but he made them there, just a replica of the big ones.

Rhonda So, he was a really handy guy.

Shirley Oh yeah. He used to make everything. And then after when we lived in Fort Smith, he was a carpenter, foreman, a painter/foreman and everything. And then he got into a hobby. He built a replica of his house, you know, like those miniature houses and stuff just like his. And he made birdhouses. You should have saw them things; they was really something. And then he started in on his trains.

Rhonda The model train?

Shirley He started in on them, and I tell you, that took lots of work. Well, this table and those two chairs over there. Well, you know, he got this and he got it out at Louise Falls out there. But this thing was all in pieces and Dad had to put all that back together because the whole thing was all busted up in pieces. He found it out there at one of the campgrounds and I don't know how long; it took him a long time to get all the pieces back in.

Rhonda But he really enjoyed that.

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda What about your mom, did she have any kind of a hobby or any kind of a chore she really liked to do?

Shirley Well, Mom, she would knit. I think she did some crocheting too. But she wasn't into; like me and my sister, we did a lot of crafts.

Rhonda What kind?

Shirley Well, knitting. When I was up north, we was always doing something because I was knitting and crocheting. And I belonged to the [Sanavisa] Guild when I was in Pine Point there. And we did beadwork and we did ceramics. We did everything in there.

Rhonda Did your mom have anything she hated doing? Particular chores she didn't like?

Shirley Oh, she never complained anyway! You know, you get your routine with half a dozen kids. No, Mom never did complain about nothing.

Rhonda Did she like socializing?

Shirley Oh, yeah. The women, like the ones that didn't have an eight-hour job that they had to go do, well then, they'd back and forth from one house to the other and tea and, you know. She was always busy.

Rhonda Did you have any extended family living with you when you were growing up? Like, did any of your grandparents ever live in the same house as your parents and the kids?

Shirley No, no.

Rhonda What were your sisters like?

Shirley Oh, each of us, we were so much alike, you know, we always got along real good with each other. And the brothers, well, my brothers, they were good, too. Oh,

we'd have the odd fight, you know, but that's the way it was. But then other than that, there wasn't much fighting because you started to fight? And, boy, I tell you, [laughs] Mom or Dad would get the best of that fight! Well, the discipline that we had when we were coming up, you're not sorry that you were disciplined the way that we were. We had to grow up because nowadays there's no discipline. The kids are just telling the parents what to do. And see, by the way, a lot of people, they figured that our parents were strict, but they were strict in a loving way. I mean, they weren't mean to us or nothing. And I think for that we're better people for the way we were raised than the way that they're being raised now.

Rhonda Who did you feel closest to when you were growing up? Like in your family, did you have one sister, one brother, or were you really close to your mom? Would you say there was one family member, maybe a cousin?

Shirley I don't know we were sort of what you call a close-knit family, but there was my Grandma Adams. Out of the grandparents, she was one. We were closer to her and Granddad Adams.

Rhonda How come?

Shirley Well, it's because they lived, I don't know. We just start off from when we were small because my sister, Jeanette, Grandma kept her from when she was baby till she was six years old. And then she moved back home with us. But we was always. . . Grandma; she did everything for us.

Rhonda How come she kept Jeanette for six years?

Shirley My dear, I never found out. It was never nothing said about it.

Rhonda So, what would you do with your grandmother?

Shirley Well, Grandma, she'd teach us how to sew and how to knit. And when she's teaching us how to knit, well, what she had, those four-inch spikes? She had that and then we had a ball of string each and we learned how to knit on those four-inch nails.

Rhonda About the right size for small hands.

Shirley Yeah, that's all that she had to teach us, you know, but that's how she taught us knitting. And she don't, like, when she's teaching us how to make a quilt you didn't. . . Now you got patterns and that. But what Grandma did, she took a brown paper bag. She cut us a square like this. And then you had your material. And you're threading the needle, and you had to take like one piece of material, and then you fold it over on the other, and then you'd sew that it onto the paper. And then you'd keep going until you got, what did she call it? What's the name? Just different rags, you know, she had a name for it, but then you take little pieces material, and some of only about that wide, and you just sewed them all together on that paper. And then when you finished it, then

you took the paper from the back of them and you'd have your little square of material. And that's how we made our quilt.

Rhonda How long would that take?

Shirley Oh, it'd take a lot, because the thing is, you didn't have the material all the time. Just whenever she'd go to the city or something and get a bundle of material. They'd go to the Bay and that, someplace, and you get these big bags full of material just in pieces from the manufacturers and stuff. And that's what it was. Well, I know she did a lot of that and the people in those days, they used to get those strips of material and sew them all together. They'd make quilts and then sometimes they made dresses for the little girls. Like Dolly Parton, her coat of many colors? Well, we'd wear it! And flower sacks; we used everything. For tea towels, for pillowcases, and then we'd make. One would take, I think it was four of them? She'd sew them together and that's what we had for sheets for our bed.

Rhonda Now, flour sacks, that's softer; it's more of a fabric then? It's not like a burlap?

Shirley No, no, they were more like a cotton, eh? But that's all you had. So then, when we got older, Mrs. Murphy, she started the girls club at her place out there in Amber Valley. It was like the, what they call it now; they're called the 4H group. But that's what she had; she had this girls club and we used to go up to her place every Saturday, and she taught us how to knit, and to sew, to cook and everything. You know, it was more or less like a 4H group. And we got so we wasn't that bad because that one year, I forget what year it was, but Grandma Adams bought us some material for each one of us girls so we could make our own dress. And so, Mrs. Murphy showed us how to make these dresses. All the girls went to her classes and we made these dresses.

So then, we wondered where were we going to wear them? So, Mr. Risby, he had his church, his tent meetings out there in the schoolyard, and he kept these tent meetings going all summer. So, we didn't get a chance to have something so we could wear our dresses; show off our dresses. So, when my cousin Jack and Tiny got married, we asked Tiny if we could wear our dresses to her wedding and those people were upset. Oh, you should have heard some of them women! "You can't tell who the bride and the groom is because everybody's got on a long dress!" We want to show our dresses. We made them ourselves. But, oh no; they thought it was awful.

Rhonda So, they were really fancy dresses.

Shirley They were a long dress, but they were made; what d'you call it? the chic style? You know, they're sort of fitted in here and the skirt come out wider.

Rhonda Oh, like an Empire style?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda So, fitted at the top.

Shirley Yeah. But it was just a simple pattern because the top; like the front and the back . . . Okay, your pattern was the same in the front and the back when you cut it out, but then you had to cut your neckline and stuff into.

Rhonda Oh, so like an A-line.

Shirley Yeah. But all of us made one. I remember Grandma, she sent us that moire taffeta or something. She didn't show us; she had showed us how to sew different things, but she would not do one stitch and you had to do it yourself. If you didn't sew it yourself, then you didn't pass the test.

Rhonda So you did it all by hand? Machine?

Shirley No, we did it because she had a treadle machine, so we get to use her treadle machine.

Rhonda So, I guess you needed a pretty special event then to wear the dresses. It's not something you just wear every day.

Shirley No, no, you couldn't wear it because it was it was a long dress.

Rhonda So, did everybody do a good job of it?

Shirley Yep. Every one of the girls passed; I think there was 16 of us. But we all passed the test. See, some of the kids, they had a treadle machine at home, like we did. The ones that didn't have one would use Mrs. Murphy's.

But, Dad went to Edmonton. I don't know what he was working at and everything but he had to go in there to work in order to feed us. Because at that time, that was in the '40s when we went back up there. At that time, when we were going to school, that's when they brought in those ration books?

Rhonda During the war?

Shirley It was right after the war, but then they still had brought in those ration books. In each family, when they started bringing them in, we were really happy because you'd have it for your milk, and your butter, and your sugar, and your meat coupons. So, what Dad would do, he'd take the ones for butter and the meat, I think? But anyway, he'd take them to Edmonton and exchange with some of the people that lived in the city so he could get sugar. I think it was the sugar and the meat. And then that way, well then, we could get more sugar. They used to trade them off, but it was it wasn't bad. And then when they started bringing in the family allowance, oh, boy! we were really happy. Once a month, Dad would come over here to Colinton, to the store, and he'd come back with

a piece of baloney, you know, it was the chunk baloney. But we'd all have baloney for our lunch. We never had it before! But that was a real treat for all of us out there.

Rhonda So things really changed then?

Shirley Oh, yeah. No, I tell you what, you'd get out there and whatever you get off of the land, that's what you lived off.

Rhonda When you had the 4-H club you talked about, did the boys have a 4-H club as well?

Shirley Nope. Mrs. . . . she just called it a girls club. And she just taught us, you know, similar to what a 4-H club is now, because she's teaching you the things that you need to learn. So, you go and get married or something and you knew how to do everything in the household and how to how to prepare a meal with what you've got. Because you couldn't go to a store and get it, and that's where we got lots of our learning from. You know; it's to make something out of what you got at home, because if you didn't have it at home, you can't run to the store and get it.

Rhonda How often did you have store-bought food in Amber Valley?

Shirley All we'd get from there is ah, like Mom would buy rice and stuff. But I mean, you didn't go to the store to buy unless it was you run out of baking powder or yeast or something like that, the staples. But other than that, you ate what you had at home.

Rhonda Did you have a best friend when you were a child?

Shirley A best friend?

Rhonda Yeah, best friend at school or in your neighborhood?

Shirley Yeah, well, when we got out there on the farm or even in the city, like, it would just be some of the neighborhood kids and that, eh?

Rhonda So was there someone in particular who you would?

Shirley You know, I guess we're best friends with everybody. Not like. I can't remember having just one specific person as a best friend in the city.

Rhonda How would you compare the way you played in the city with the way you played in the country? Was there a difference in the games you would play or the things you would do?

Shirley Yeah. Well, in the city, well then you were sorta restricted. We used to go skating. And then, well, like my kids was different. When my kids are coming up because they was into everything. But there wasn't that much. We used to go up to the

library quite a bit. And then like on a Sunday, it only cost us a dime, but then we'd go walk up the steps up by the MacDonald Hotel up there? And then we'd get on the streetcar and we'd ride that streetcar out as far as it would go one way. And then we'd turn around and come back. Well, some of the kids; they lived out in Calder area and that. But it will cost you a dime to get on the streetcar and you'd ride all day. Because you ride until they got to that end and then you ride coming back. And then when they started with the busses, what we'd do, we go uptown there, walk up the steps up there by the MacDonald Hotel and we get on a bus and then we'd get a transfer. So, we'd ride as far as we wanted to when we got finished sightseeing there, then we'd get off and we knew where you could transfer. Then we get on a different bus and go on another ride on the streetcars and the busses. Just something to do. It was clean fun; we wasn't hurting nobody, but you could ride a long ways for a dime.

Rhonda And what about the country? You said that you really liked living in Amber Valley again. But did you miss that sort of stuff or?

Shirley No.

Rhonda Were you more sophisticated than the other Amber Valley kids because you lived in the city?

Shirley No. Nobody made any difference. If like, some of the people, they had moved to the States and everything. But every summer they'd all come back to Amber Valley for the picnic and everything. And people didn't make any difference.

Rhonda When your family left Amber Valley and they sold the land, do you know much about how they made that decision? Was that a tough decision to make?

Shirley When we move back to Edmonton? No. It's because Dad, he couldn't find no work or nothing. And we were growing up. So, I mean, we couldn't go any farther in school. So, that's why we moved back to Edmonton.

Rhonda So, it just made sense for the whole family.

Shirley Yeah, because you couldn't advance any farther. After you got through your Grade 9. Okay? Where are you going to go from there?

Rhonda How old were you when your family moved back to the city?

Shirley I was about 16.

Rhonda Did you get a job at that point or did you go back to school?

Shirley No. Well, when we moved back in there, all the other kids, they started back to school again when they got out there. Like Ronnie, my brother, and Carol and them, they were young enough. So, they completed their school. And of course, it wasn't too

long after that I got married and that was it. So, away you go. And Corinne, her and Richard got married. But years after I had my kids and they were well on their way to being almost old enough to be on their own, well then, I went back to school and I took a clerk/typist course. And then I took that, I was highway transport officer. Well then, you had, I just about had my 10 years in, but then you have to take law enforcement and everything. And but before that, I was just working with the kids. And when we lived in Pine Point, well, they were going to school. Some of them was: Seanie was in figure skating, Wilbert was in hockey, and Terry and Randy, they were curling. And Leo, he was into boxing and cadets. But, you know, I'm not sorry that I had my kids when I was young because you more or less grew up with them and you go to all these things that they're participating in and, you know. Because like Annie Byrtus, she I think she was 42 or something when she had Richard when Uncle Oz had come back; he was overseas. And you start out; she had six kids and you start out, I mean, 42 years old.

Rhonda How did you meet your husband?

Shirley He was from Amber Valley.

Rhonda So, you had met him in Amber Valley?

Shirley Yeah, yeah.

Rhonda And how did you come to get married?

Shirley Well, just one of those things. You know, you run into somebody and all of a sudden, you know, you take your love away and you get married.

Rhonda So, you ran into him in Edmonton?

Shirley Nope. Out in Amber Valley. Because they lived out there in Amber Valley. His name was Hinton. And they lived right, because Louise, his sister, Mrs. Hamilton, well, she got married to a Hamilton, but she was a Hinton before. So, we all went to school together. Like, [the Sylver] wasn't going to school then; he was one of the older ones. But we all grew up together out there in Amber Valley. All the time we was out there anyway.

Rhonda So when did you marry him? Was it once you were living in Edmonton, or before that?

Shirley Before.

Rhonda Oh, so you married him when you were still . . . Okay.

Shirley Yeah, I got married out in Amber Valley.

Rhonda Was he your only boyfriend up there?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda The only one you dated?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda So, what did dating involve when you were courting?

Shirley Well, I mean it was sort of a sheltered thing because Dad and them, they wouldn't let us get too far away from the house! No. Like, you take the kids and that in the city and I mean they're all over the place. But out there it's just different. Like when we'd have dances and box socials and when you go to church on Sundays. And then every Sunday we go to a different home, like after church. The kids would all come over to our house this Sunday. Then the next Sunday after church we go to somebody else's house. So, we just made the rounds right around Amber Valley. We go to a different home every Sunday. Like, all the young people?

Rhonda And what would you do?

Shirley Well, we'd get there and we would play games and they'd make lunch and everything. We'd sit around. We would just have ourselves a good old time, get out all them music instruments and singing and everything. It was a good outing. And, you know, we never was at the same place.

Rhonda Was it well chaperoned?

Shirley Oh yeah, the parents were there all the time. But it was just something for the young people. What else are you going to do? But it was a day that we could enjoy. It was our day. But you had to go to church first. No, I mean that's the way we'd get together. And then, a lot of times during the week, like Dad, whenever the family was going to visit another family, they went over to Uncle Oz's or my cousin Eugene, wherever they went, the kids always went with them. They never left the children at home.

Rhonda So, everyone then was part of this kind of community?

Shirley Yeah, like if they wanted to go visiting in the evening or something, well, then they'd throw all the kids in the wagon or in the sleigh and away you go.

Rhonda/Shirley Do you remember the moment when you met your husband? [Oh, no.]

Rhonda/Shirley I mean, seeing him and it was magical or he was just always there? [Yeah.]

Rhonda Do you remember when you started liking him more than a friend?

Shirley [laughs] Not for me to tell you. I don't know.

Rhonda You don't remember your first kiss or anything like that?

Shirley No. I think that was at a dance or something. Yeah, it was at a box social or at a dance or something like that, and then that's when we really started talking. But like, whenever we went out, me and Silver, they wouldn't allow just the two of you to go out together. You always had to have some of those siblings along with! No but, that's the way they were. Like, you see the kids now. They go out and they stay out until three or four o'clock in the morning. But when we went out; like if we call ourselves courting somebody but you never went just the two of you. No way. That just wasn't allowed.

Rhonda How did you know you wanted to marry him? Did he propose? Did you propose?

Shirley No, he did. It's just. . . I don't know. [unintelligible] back into that to something else. No, but he was the one that put his best foot forward. And then we had to talk it over with Dad and Mom. We had to get Dad's approval or else no go.

Rhonda/Shirley So, did your dad approve? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda/Shirley You didn't give him a hard time? [No.]

Rhonda When you were growing up, when you were becoming a teenager, how did your parents explain the birds and the bees to you? Was there any kind of a lecture to stay away from the boys or boys are going to want to try this?

Shirley Mom and Dad never told us nothing, not a thing. They wouldn't tell you. Back in those days, dear, like with Cousin Ivy, well she had those 15, 16 kids, but those women; they didn't talk to the kids.

Rhonda Do you think they were embarrassed or it was just the way it was?

Shirley The parents just didn't. Like, if Dad would sit down with the boys and start telling them about the birds and bees and the do's and don'ts? No.

Rhonda So, there was never a conversation?

Shirley Nope. But like I say, back in those days, people didn't talk about nothing. I don't know why they wouldn't talk. Just like I tell you about the history. Okay? Now what we're trying to do today, if this would have been done 50 years ago, when the older people were still living, they could sit down and tell you about it. It's hard to do it now.

Rhonda So, when you were growing up, did you have an awareness of where babies came from or did you just think Mrs. Brody brought them?

Shirley Yeah. Like I tell you, they didn't educate us. The girls or the boys. Nothing.

Rhonda So, you just learned . . .

Shirley You have to learn by trial and error.

Rhonda Okay!

Shirley No, but now they've got sex education and everything in the schools.

Rhonda Where did you and your husband live after you got married? Did you live with your parents or did you have your own place?

Shirley No. We started out on like his parents did, with their dad. Mr. Hamilton had two houses out there, the old house and the new house. Then we moved to Edmonton and then we got our own place there in Edmonton.

Rhonda Did you like being married?

Shirley Yeah, but a lot of times, you know, like when you see all the other younger people doing things that you couldn't do, you sort of have second thoughts. You just made the best out of what you could, and that's it.

Rhonda/Shirley So you had babies fairly soon after you got married? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda And how many children did you have in total?

Shirley I had the five. I raised two foster children, too.

Rhonda Where were the foster children from?

Shirley From Fort Smith. Because I got Wilbert; he was two years old when I got him; two and a half, and then I got [Seanie] after I had Roxanne. Well, she was small, so I had to be home with her, so. Now, with Wilbert, the welfare asked me to keep him until they had a foster home for him; they never did find one. And then they asked me because they had a receiving home for the kids there, well, the receiving home was full so then they asked me if I'd take Seanie. Well, she was only six weeks old when I got her. But I had that child and she was about eight or nine months old before the social service told me that was Wilbert's sister. I didn't know they were sister and brother 'til she was about nine months old and the social service told me.

Rhonda So, how long did you have them?

Shirley Well, 'til they went on their own. Because Seanie, she lives over at Kinuso here and Wilbert, he's living out in Edmonton.

Rhonda So, while you were raising your family, did you work outside the home? You'd mentioned you'd held a variety of jobs when you were up north.

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda But you worked outside the home.

Shirley Yeah. Well, when I had Roxanne, she was born in 1960. I had her, and so I stayed at home. But then, I used to go to work with Roger every night and he cleaned up the government building up there in Fort Smith. So, I tell you, I wore the wheels right off of that baby carriage trying to go with him to work every night, back and forth. And then the kids, they had odd jobs like cleaning jobs and that. So, they had their own spending money and stuff. But doing the cleaning up there. And then after I had her, well, I had cook's jobs before that; I was cooking for those construction people. But then after I had her, well, then you more less have to. . . Well, when you got that many kids to look after and they're all going to school and everything, that keeps you busy.

Rhonda How long were you and your husband married?

Shirley Well, Sylvester, when we got married, well, Leon was two and a half. When you start bugging up. That was, Leon was born in '53 and he was two and a half years old when his dad took off and left me with them four kids.

Rhonda Where did he go?

Shirley He was just there in Edmonton, but he just wouldn't stay home with me and the kids. I had a rough time I tell you. On welfare and everything else. And then that's when I went up to Fort Smith where Mom and Dad were. In '57. Because the house I was living in, out there on Highway 16. I think it's in that Clover Bar area because I know we used to go up through Forest Heights and then out there on Highway 16, where that chemical plant is out there on the highway? It was a little wee shack; it was so small. I had no power in there or nothing else. Oh, it was something and then the house burnt down. So, the neighbors, they lived on this farm, in these two houses on that farm. And so then they took me and the kids in. And so then Sylvester; the police got a hold of him and then they brought him back down there. But he come in and he says, "Everybody's alive!" And, you know, he bugged off and he never come back. He didn't look to see where we was going to stay that night or nothing else because he had his run-around shack up town there. He never come back.

Shirley So then those people, they were good enough to let us stay there overnight, but they just had a little small house. It was very tiny. I think their whole house was no bigger than this part in that living room there. But they didn't. Where they going to put us? It was in wintertime.

Rhonda That must have been really hard.

Shirley It was in January. Oh! I tell you; I didn't know what. The social service; they got us a place out; so we moved out to Jasper Place. So, I was on welfare for two and a half years and it was hard with the kids. You get \$35 a week.

Rhonda So, when did you get divorced?

Shirley It was 24 years after we married. Yeah, it was 24 years. From '50. So, 24 years; that's where I got my divorce. Long time.

Rhonda What made you finally get a divorce?

Shirley I just. Well, the kids are all getting grown and everything else, and I when I wanted to apply for jobs and different stuff, I said pfft. So, I just changed my name back to my maiden name.

Rhonda/Shirley So, now you're Backstrom. [Yeah.]

Rhonda/Shirley So, was that your second husband? [Yeah.]

Rhonda/Shirley So, you met him up north? [Yeah.]

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda How did you meet him?

Shirley They had Indian cabins out there. Like, I worked out at the border there for four-and-a-half years at the Alberta/Northwest Territory Border Information Centre. And I met him out there through that. I don't know. It's a long story. So, now he's gone so I'm by myself.

Rhonda He passed away?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda When did he pass away?

Shirley In '96. Daddy passed in '96. Danny was '90. My brother-in-law '97. Roger was in '98 and my sister Jannette was in '99. All of them passed away with cancer. I had fun for a while.

Rhonda That's a lot to go through.

Shirley Well, one every year!

Rhonda How did you cope with that?

Shirley Well, see, when my sister got sick, she only had the one daughter. She lived down at Vernon. And so, she wouldn't come up to see my sister, so then I'd went out to Leduc. Because I had to have that orthoscope done on my knee and I couldn't have it done in Edmonton. They sent me to the Leduc Hospital so I stayed with my son out there. And then my sister, she come out there on the 9th of August and so then we had to take her in so they run tests and stuff and then they found out she had cancer. So, I stayed out there at Randy's place for a whole month. And every day I went in to see her at the hospital in Edmonton. And then on the 8th, I think it was 8th of September, they shipped her back up to Yellowknife. But okay, when she went back up there, so then I had to go up there because nobody else in the family.

My brother Ross, he was in Whitehorse. He was sick. My brother Ronnie, he had to look after his sick wife over in Fort Smith. So, I was the only one left in the family that'd go stay with her. So, I stayed with her and she passed away on the 27th of September. But, oh, I don't wish that on nobody to sit and watch somebody go like that. Oh, yi, yi, yi. She had bone cancer and then she had a tumor on her brain and she had bone cancer, too. But you sit in that hospital from 12 to 14 hours every day for two months? Lady, I tell you, oof. When I went home to go to sleep at night, it was like I brought her home with me. But I knew she was in the hospital, but I brought her home with me and I couldn't sleep good.

Rhonda Yeah, it's a very difficult thing to go through.

Shirley Because you just sit there, just watch them deteriorate so fast.

Rhonda Yeah, and they're not themselves anymore.

Shirley Nope, because she was in that coma for about eight, eight or nine days. She went into that coma. She didn't even know you were there.

Rhonda With your second husband, did you date for very long before, like, once you met him? Before you got married?

Shirley Yeah. For a year. Oh, up when you get older, you don't want to be by yourself all the time. Yeah, we were both working for the government because he worked for the highways department and I was working out there at the weight scale in Hay River there.

Rhonda What would you do on dates?

Shirley Well, just the usual thing, you know, both of us talking about our has-beens because he was married before, too. They had seven kids and I had seven with the ones that I raised.

Rhonda Did you date much after your first husband left? Did you date much before you met your second husband? Did you have boyfriends?

Shirley Oh, yeah, I used to go out. I mean, nothing steady.

Rhonda And how did you know he was one?

Shirley I don't know, it's just what happens I guess!

Rhonda Like, how did you decide to get married? Like, did you propose or. . .

Shirley Oh, yeah. But then his wife had left him with those seven kids and oh boy. So, both of us had to go through a divorce before we get married again. Of course, we did live together for what? four years and then we got married.

Rhonda What was your wedding like?

Shirley It was nice. We didn't have a big wedding. It was just mostly family. And then, like all the friends that we had that lived around us there in Hay River, and that. I think there were 75 people altogether. But it was nice because all the women that was coming to the wedding, they fixed a wedding supper and everything. Everybody made something different. It worked out real good.

Rhonda You guys didn't have any more kids together.

Shirley No.

Rhonda What about your first wedding? What was that like? Was that in Amber Valley?

Shirley Yeah, no. We just got married. Albert Risby come over to the house and he married us right out there on the lawn in front of the house. Well, my sister, Corinne, when her and Richard got married, we was in Edmonton there. So, they got married right out on the front lawn of Dad and Mom's house there in Edmonton, and then they went back out to Campsie. Because we went back out there for their dance and everything. They got married right at Dad and Mom's. And it wasn't it wasn't a big lawn either, you know, just in front of the house. But it was okay!

Rhonda What kind of reception did you have for your wedding?

Shirley Well, we had everything because we went out to Enterprise for the reception out there. But like I say, all the women that come there, well, some did turkey, some did ham, some did cabbage rolls, some did just everything, you know. And salads. The ones that lived out there in Enterprise, well then, they all brought something over. It was a real, real good big meal, but nice.

Rhonda And what about your first wedding? Did you have a reception?

Shirley No, we just got married and that was it.

Rhonda No supper or anything?

Shirley Well, yeah. We had supper there at home with our moms right out there on the farm. But there was no reception or nothing. We just got married and that was it.

Rhonda And did you stay there that night or did you go to a hotel?

Shirley No, we went back over because we were going to stay in that house over there at his mom and his place. So, we just went over there and that was it. No, you didn't go to no hotel or nothing at that stage of the game. You didn't have that much money. Because, like most of the people, when they got married, they are all getting married there in Amber Valley Hall? They were getting married and they'd have the supper and stuff there, and people would bring wedding gifts and that. But I mean, that was it! Because they'd have the supper and then the dance after everything was done right there in the hall. But we didn't get married out in the hall.

But they used to have some nice weddings out there for people. I tell you, could they ever cook. Oh, boy, that was a feast day for everybody! But then again, when they had a wedding, all the families that come to that wedding, they brought all those little kids. When the little ones would get tired, they had those sand tables in the back there? They'd take and put a blanket or a quilt or something in the sand table so the little ones would go to sleep there. But people out there, the mother and dad, sometimes they would go. . . The odd time Dad would go up to Aunt Sally and Uncle Roy's to play pinochle. But Mom wouldn't go because she didn't play pinochle. But most of the time when they go for a gathering at somebody's house, they'd take the whole family. There was no such thing as babysitters in those days.

Rhonda When you finished school at Toles, was there any kind of a ceremony for you or a party, when you were done at the end?

Shirley No.

Rhonda What did you want to be when you grew up?

Shirley What did I want to be? I didn't have any specific thing that I wanted to really do. I was just into arts and crafts and stuff like that. I never wanted to be a teacher or doctor or nurse or anything like that.

Rhonda Did any of the other kids have any kind of ambitions as far as a specific career?

Shirley Yeah, well, like, my brother, he was in the County there at the government. My other brother, Rossie, he was a painter with Dad; carpentry and painting all the time.

And then, Corinne, when they went to Uranium, her and Richard, they went up to Uranium City. She was cooking there at the mess house or whatever you call it, she was always cooking. But she was into everything. She just loved catering. That's what she liked to do.

Rhonda Did your parents have any specific ambitions for you kids? Did they want you to do this or do that when you grew up?

Shirley They just sort of let us do whatever we want, you know, whatever occupation you want to go for, you know, go for it.

Rhonda Did you feel there were different expectations on boys or girls growing up in Amber Valley? Did you ever feel that you were expected to do certain things because you were a girl?

Shirley Well, the way it was when we were growing up; okay, the boys were always out doing the chores and out in the field, working in the fields and stuff like that, where we more or less had to do the domestic things around home.

Rhonda So you stayed closer to home to do it.

Shirley Yeah. Well, and when they used to, in the fall, when they'd do the threshing, us girls, we each had our own hay rack, you know? And so, as kids, we had this hay rack and our heads, you know the bottom part of the hay rack where it's on the wheels there? That's about how tall we were. But Dad, he'd get mad because we weren't throwing the bundles far. How are you going to throw them far when you can't even see over top of the rack? And he'd get real irate if we weren't up there in time for him to put our bundles through that threshing machine. But we had to stay home that day because we had to help him thresh that grain.

Rhonda So, you didn't go to school?

Shirley Nope. That was a day that we just didn't go to school.

Rhonda How many days would you miss because of that?

Shirley Well, we'd only be there that one day because Dad didn't have that much to thresh.

Rhonda Once you got married to your first husband, what did the two of you do for fun? Like, did your leisure activities change? Where would you go?

Shirley No, once we moved out to Edmonton and that well then, we was always at my younger brothers' places. We was like two kids; we'd go to dances and everything. Go to ball games, go to the horse races and everything else. But I mean, we carried on activities with my younger brothers and that, eh? So, we just lived the life of Riley. The

kids started coming along, well then. But there was a lot of young couples like our relatives there in that north Edmonton part. And so, we used to all get together all the time and we'd go out movies, go out to the Exhibition and different things, and we'd all go together. And on Sundays we get together and visit back and forth from everybody's house. But it wasn't when you were just all by yourself.

Rhonda/Shirley Did you still go to church? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda What churches did you go to?

Shirley Shiloh Baptist Church with Grandma. She was our Sunday school teacher.

Rhonda So, your absence would have been noted.

Shirley [laughs] But we knew it was a fun day for us because we'd get to go to Sunday school and then we get to go to Grandma's house and we had spaghetti. But Granddad would not; if Grandma was home, he would not make that spaghetti. You know, he never did show her how he made it.

Rhonda And that he learned from his Italian foster parents?

Shirley But he would not show anybody how; he wouldn't make it if anybody was home. And then, he was a porter on the NAR [Northern Alberta Railway] and then he worked up at the shoe shop in Edmonton. Now, I forget the name of it, but he used to be up there shining shoes. And then he used to make dye. The women, they'd buy these shoes and they were sort of a cloth material, sort of a linen-like material? You know, they weren't leather. Some of them were leather, I guess. But he'd dye those shoes the same color as their dress. But he wouldn't even show Uncle Chris; he only had that one boy. He wouldn't show him how to do it.

Rhonda So, he's very protective of its trade secrets, then.

Shirley He had it up here when he died. [Shirley taps her head.] He would not show anybody! Like that spaghetti sauce, oh, it was something out of this world, but he would not make it if any anybody, even if Grandma was at home, he wouldn't make it when Grandma was home. That's the way they are. You know, a lot of people, they put things down on paper. But anything that he had, he had it up here. It's really funny. But I mean, it could have been, you know, stuff that he picked up from the way that they had to live when he was in Africa and that? You know, like if they was out in the bush and they found something that they could do something with, they're not going to show somebody else, because there's too many of them. And I think that's possibly where he picked that up from. You know, he knew it, but he didn't want nobody else to know.

Rhonda So nobody ever learned his secret for spaghetti.

Shirley Mm, mm. Or dyeing shoes either. I think that was Kin's Shoe Repair or something, I forget the name of it, but it was right up on Jasper Avenue there. He used to shine shoes and everything. The men used to go and get their shoes all shined up and everything; were all dressed up in their suits and that. So, that's what he did when he wasn't; like he'd do his run on the railway and then he worked up there at that shoe shop in between time. So, that was something that he really liked to do.

Rhonda When you were out in Amber Valley, you had mentioned that there were white children at school, too. Did the black kids and the white kids date each other when they were teenagers?

Shirley Yeah, well, like I say, we were [chuckles] sort of one big happy family. You know, like any function that we were in, well then, they were all included.

Rhonda Did your parents care if you dated white kids?

Shirley No! My dear, it didn't matter whether you was white, black, royal purple, or yellow. It didn't matter because everybody out there, regardless what nationality, everybody was like one happy family.

Rhonda People can't believe it when I describe Amber Valley to them, that people got along and that the kids who grew up there didn't experience racism. So, people are surprised. That's why I'm asking a lot of questions like that, because I talk about it back in Ottawa with people. No one can believe that it was such a great place to grow up, that it was so good for the kids. So many of the kids have told me that they didn't know what racism was until they came to the city.

Shirley Yeah. Out there, all those people, they were born and raised; we were all born and raised together. Okay, so nobody made any difference, we was all brothers and sisters. It didn't matter what you looked like, but there was no discrimination, nothing out there.

Rhonda And with your kids, you had talked earlier about how your kids had experienced racism growing up and how they handled it, growing up, up north.

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda Did you tell them this might happen?

Shirley Yeah. Oh, yeah. I always talked about it to them because I know when we were going to school out there in the city, that we was forever fighting because they was always calling us n-----s or something else, you know. Oh, it was; but that's the way it is. When you get into the bigger areas, you're going to find that. And especially those kids, the ones that were up in Fort Smith when my kids had to fight so much. Well, what it was, it wasn't the Native kids. It was the white population. But they'd come from everywhere and moved into Fort Smith there. And those kids, they were real brats

because their parents were like that. That's how come those kids are like that because of their parents.

Rhonda Was it something that your children had to endure a lot or was it just sort of sporadic?

Shirley Well, daily, no. Well, it was more like. . . Randy, that first year in school, like I said, I had to buy five new pairs of glasses because he was fighting. That one kid, when he went through the swinging doors, the door swung back and caught Randy right in the face, busted his glasses. But they got them tuned in after a while where they wouldn't pick on them. Because I went down there and tore a strip off of that principal at that school. And I said, "Yeah, you smarten them kids up." I says, "I'm gonna let my kids have at them." And I said, "You'd better not strap them."

Rhonda How did the principal react to that?

Shirley Well, he got after them kids. He was from England. But after that, they never had any problems with it. And the Grey Nuns, they were up there and they were nurses and the teachers, too. So, the kids started out, I think it was Grade 2; from Grade 2 to Grade 9, they taught them French. All the kids had to learn French starting in Grade 2. Which was good because when it comes to departmentals, well then, the kids knew their French, right?

This is the first Colinton history book. I forget what year it was that they had that one done.

Rhonda So, how did you come to live in Colinton?

Shirley Well, when Rod and I come out from Hay River, he wanted to find a place. We went down to Pincher Creek. We drove all over Alberta. Well, before we left Hay River, we come out here five years before we moved out here and he'd bought an acreage over here at about where you go to Jackfish Lake in the Parkview area? But when we moved out here, I couldn't stay in that house because it was an older house and it had sawdust for insulation? Or the shavings. But I couldn't stay in there because I had too many allergies. So, then we went through real estate and got this house.

Rhonda What year was that, that you moved back?

Shirley 1991.

Rhonda And when did he pass away?

Shirley In '98.

Rhonda Were you happy to be back in this area, so close to Amber Valley?

Shirley Well, the thing is, there's only a handful of people left out there now. So, it took a lot of getting used to, but then being active, like in the Royal Purple and everything. And I'm mobile all the time now; secretary for the community club over here. And then I go over to bowl. So I stay busy all the time. But to be back to be close to the people out in Amber Valley, well, everybody's gone from there.

Rhonda/Shirley Are you involved with the Amber Valley Community Centre? [No.]

Rhonda Too busy with your other activities?

Shirley [laughs] I think, my dear, I got all that I can handle here. You know, because you're involved in everything and then when you start trying to get a Boys and Girls Club going around here, and you're going all the time.

Rhonda When you went back to school in Amber Valley, do you remember your first day of school at Toles?

Shirley Yeah.

Rhonda What was it like?

Shirley Well, it was just when you went back and you just had to get used to all the people that was out there on the farm because we hadn't been out there that long before we had to start school. There was . . . I can't remember; there's about 50-some-odd kids there, I think. It had to be. Because with just that one room and they had two desks pushed together and then we had a bench to sit on, like two students together. And that's the way our seating was in there. Teacher had her desk there, and there was two of us sat together.

Rhonda So, what did the desks look like? Was there somewhere underneath, like a drawer?

Shirley Well, it was a desk, a top and then it was an opening that you put your books underneath. Just like a regular school desk.

Rhonda Was the desk at the front, like your table, was it joined to the seat in front of you?

Shirley No, no. No, no. They were all separate. Because the benches you sat on, they weren't connected. The two desks were sitting there and then they had the bench and then the other. But they weren't connected at all.

Rhonda Who did you sit with?

Shirley We switched around back and forth all the time because I was sitting with Louise sometimes and another time, I was sitting with Joyce. I know I was sitting with

Louise Hamilton. And then another time I was sitting with Joyce, it all depended. Like, when we started school again, then we'd take and, you know, just move around. Because I know that one time, I was sitting with my cousin, Laverne Saunders. I was sitting with her. But the teacher, Mrs. Dobson, she didn't make any difference because when we started school in the next year, well, then we will all decide, we're gonna go sit with her this year, you know? Well, that way you just move around, you're not sitting with the same one year after year. Well, everybody got along good there was no fights or nothing.

Rhonda/Shirley There were no fights? [Nope.]

Rhonda/Shirley None of the kids? [Nope.]

Rhonda/Shirley There were never any cliques or anything? Or you stole my boyfriend? [Nope.]

Rhonda/Shirley Or she looked at me funny? [Nope.]

Rhonda How did you get to school when you lived in the city?

Shirley In the city? We had to walk to school.

Rhonda Was it far you had to walk?

Shirley No, it was just a couple of blocks because the first school I went to was down in Rosedale Flats and you only had about a block or so to walk to the school.

Rhonda And did you mind the walk to Toles (School)? You said it was fairly long, maybe a mile and a half?

Shirley Two and a half. We had fun because see, we'd leave our house, we'd go through. . . We're all on the side of Jeff Edwards's field. And then we'd go over, we'd turn the corner and go about another quarter of a mile and that's where Eugene Sneed . . . he was our cousin. Well, then we'd pick up his kids, they would join in with us, and then we'd go on from there to school. And Ralph and Valspa and Junior Whitaker; their kids would come up to Eugene's because Ralph and Valspa were sisters. So Valspa's kids would walk up to Eugene's and then Eugene's kids; we'd all meet up this fork up there in the road and then we go on to school.

Rhonda So, it's sort of like a chance to socialize.

Shirley Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, we'd all wind up at school together, but I forget how far Annie and Rosie and Johnny had to walk, to Barts, because they ended up close to Prosperity. But they had to walk down there because Violet and them, they had quite a ways for them to walk. Barts used to walk down and then Violet and them would get out on the road and they'd all come to school together. And Guy Godbout, I forget which

direction was he come from; him and the Silkies. They come from a different direction. But I think the Barts were the farthest away from the school.

Rhonda And in the winter, you said that you'd clean the barns so that you'd be able to take the. . .

Shirley Stone-boat, that's we had, but we had fun. It was so miserable and cold when you had to walk to school and that. If there was a crust on the snow, Dad wouldn't let us take the horses. Most of the kids, when they would start out, like from up at the other end by Cliff Brown's well then, in the wintertime, they'd let the kids bring the sleigh. So then, the one that lived the farthest, if they were bringing the sleigh, it was like they'd each take a week. So, all the kids all along that way up to the school, they'd all pile in the box. In the summertime, they had it on wheels, on the wagon, and then they'd take it off in the wintertime, put it on the sleigh runners. That's the way everybody went to school.

Rhonda Quite different than the school bus.

Shirley [laughs] Oh, yeah, you had the school bus alright!

Rhonda Did your family ever own a vehicle; did your parents ever own a car when you were growing up?

Shirley Yeah when we were out in Edmonton. But when we were living out there in Amber Valley, the only one that has a vehicle was Jeff Edwards. So, if you needed to go to the hospital or something, well then, you had to pay him to take you in. And Dad and them, once a month they would all chip in their little 75 cents or whatever it was. They'd have to pay Mr. Edwards so he'd bring them into the store. Well, Dad, a lot of times he'd just take the wagon and that Colinton store right over here on the corner? That's where he used to come when Flynn's had that store.

Rhonda Was it a big store? Is it the same store?

Shirley Yeah, it's the same what's there.

Rhonda Longevity.

Shirley Well, they had everything here in Colinton.

Rhonda Can you tell me what the Amber Valley picnic was like when you were growing up there?

Shirley It was the real ball. Well, we couldn't wait for the picnics because there was people out there and they would have had fried chicken and they'd bring potato salad, and lettuce salads and everything. Like you could buy some stuff from them. And we all

got a quarter. You know, you'd take that quarter and you'd eat homemade ice cream all day. You know, ice cream cones? With that 25 cents.

Rhonda So, that's what you do with it?

Shirley Yeah, well, that homemade ice cream, boy was that stuff ever good. You could eat ice cream all day because it was 5 cents for a cone. So, I mean, that was lots of money for us.

Rhonda Who would make the ice cream?

Shirley Well, Mom, and different women would make it. They had to boil this custard that they made and then they put it in an ice cream freezer so there's always a bunch of kids out there sitting and they'd have to turn that thing until it was freezing. So most of those young kids, they were anxious; they'd turn that handle so they'd get a free ice cream cone. But it different; well sometimes, later on in years, then they'd get so they'd bring out watermelon. Oh boy, kids just went crazy over that because they got to have some watermelon. But the ball game is what everybody went for. They had a ball team out of this world out there. They were known all over the place. And like even today, a lot of people talk about that Amber Valley ball club. They're still talking about it.

Rhonda Did you play ball?

Shirley Yeah, we played ball. All of us girls, you know, we're up in our teams but we had our own ball team. We played baseball. We didn't play that slowpitch like they're playing now. We had the real hard ball, the baseball? That's what we played. I laughed. That one year, Edmonton come out here. Oh, those girls, they're busy raving about what they were going to do. They never got one score and we beat them, I tell you! You know, we were toughened up more than what they are in the city. You go around manicuring your fingernails and everything, and we're out there throwing logs around, and the rocks and everything else. And they never got one score in that day. Boy, we laughed!

Rhonda When did the picnic take place?

Shirley First of July.

Rhonda And can you tell me about the Christmas concert?

Shirley Well, those Christmas concerts, they were really good because all of us had our parts and our school teacher, she'd have different plays and stuff that we were in. And the kids, they all sang. All of us would get up there and cover that little stage part there. And then we'd have a singsong of Christmas carols and it was nice. And they have some somebody dressed up like Santa Claus and all the kids, they got those little brown bags with about that much candy in the bottom. But we were happy. [laughs] No, but they were really nice. But that was another thing that the whole family, they participated

and, you know, everybody gets together and gets things all set up for it. And they were really nice.

Rhonda How did your family celebrate Christmas at home?

Shirley Christmas at home? Well, what would we do, Mom, she wouldn't make fruitcake because Dad wouldn't eat it. So all he wanted was his own sad cake. You know, she'd made us kids like a raisin cake. He'd eat the raisins and dates and that, but he didn't want none of that fruit in there. So that's what we had. And Dad? He never bought nobody a card, a present, nothing. He said Christmas is supposed to be celebrating the birth of Christ. And he says that if you got your family together and they're all healthy and you sit down to a meal together, that was Christmas at our house.

Rhonda So, did you kids get presents from your mom?

Shirley Yeah. And Grandma used to always send us a gift, too. But I mean, we knew that every year, Grandma, she would she'd make each one of us girls a dress and make some pants or something for the boys. Boy, I know we used to get a doll. This is small doll, but we'd get a doll until we were 13, then she wouldn't give us gifts at all anymore. And the boys only got a little truck or something, but it was nothing like these things you got to put a car battery in to run like these kids got. No, no. I mean, anything we got, it was just a gift from God, you know, like whatever we got.

Rhonda Did you make your own clothes when you were a kid?

Shirley Yeah, we learned how to sew, to make a doll out of a sock or something. But when we were going to school as girls, we had those brown cotton stockings that come up to here? And we had those blue bloomers; the elastics would come down here to keep your knees warm. And at Christmas time, my brothers, they was always teasing. They call, "Ha, ha! Look at the corduroy. She's wearing corduroys!" You know, they used to call them. But at Christmas time, here the two boys come. "Hey, psst, psst. Think you can give me a loan of one of those corduroy is yours?" Because when we hung the stockings up, our stockings were long. They only had their socks, so they wanted to borrow one of our corduroys to hang up for Santa. Oh, we used to have fun! I mean, we wouldn't say anything to hurt each other, but they wanted to borrow one of our corduroys to hang up because their socks was too short.

Rhonda Did you let them?

Shirley Oh yeah. What's difference? We all of us got the same thing in that sock. Dad would get one box of oranges and then he'd get a bag of apples. So, we'd get an apple and an orange and a handful of peanuts. That was Christmas and we were happy. And there was no power, so we'd just go out and get a tree and bring it in. But we sat there and we had this colored paper and we cut it in strips and then make a chain. And that was our decoration on the tree. That was it. But it was Christmas!

Rhonda Did you have a big meal?

Shirley We'd always have, well, if we didn't have a turkey then we'd have chicken. She'd throw a couple of chickens in that roaster.

Rhonda And did you get other people from the community coming to have supper with you for Christmas?

Shirley Well, Christmas Day was a day was for the family so everybody stayed home. They'd come and visit between Christmas and New Year's, and they'd have the concert and everything out at the hall. Like, in the school, that's where everything was participated in, in the school. But all the families, that was the day that they spent at home.

Rhonda Was there any special family activities you would do on Christmas besides getting your oranges, your apples, and serving dinner?

Shirley No, we just have our dinner and sit around there and, you know, sometimes we'd get presents from somebody else, like from Grandma and all that. And we were just anxious to see what she'd sent us. She'd make each one of us something to wear. And us girls; we all got a doll until we were 13. And then after that, well, it was too bad. But you see, like now, we were happy because we got a new dress and we got this little doll. And an apple, an orange, and a handful of peanuts in our sock. We were happy.

Rhonda Were there any families in Amber Valley who were really prosperous so the kids would get more at Christmas; had more toys?

Shirley No. Because like I said, like Jeff Edwards, he was the only one that had more money than the rest of them. But the thing is, they sort of kept this thing. . . Well, like cousin Videy and cousin Dave. Okay now; you got 14 . . . I think she had 14, 15 kids. But I mean, you got that many kids, okay? The way you start out with the old ones, you just continue that right on down to the last one. They don't get no more of no less. And that's the way the people did.

Rhonda How come Jeff Edwards had more money?

Shirley It's because, when he come out there and the money that he got from his folks in the States.

Rhonda/Shirley So, he brought that with him. [Yeah.]

Rhonda Did your family stay in touch with relatives in the States, like your grandparents? Did they write letters or go visit? Do you recall?

Shirley I know Grandma Adams, she used to write back and forth to someone down in the States, but there wasn't that much correspondence. I know she kept in touch with

this one girl because they went to school together and then Grandma, she was a teacher. And that other woman, they used to correspond back and forth. They had a cousin or something down there that they used to correspond back and forth with.

Rhonda/Shirley But there weren't trips down there or anything like that to visit kin? [No.]

Rhonda If you got in trouble at school, what happened to you?

Shirley If you got in trouble at school, you would get the strap from the teacher and then you get another strap when you got home.

Rhonda Did you ever get the strap?

Shirley Oh, yeah, I mean, once you get it, you don't want the second time!

Rhonda So, it only happened once?

Shirley Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, we were fighting with somebody, I forget who. We got into that one scrap. It was Wilfred Brown and somebody else. But when you come up with a few choice words and the teacher happens to catch what you were saying. Well, oh lord, you'd get it. And she was wicked with that strap.

Rhonda Mrs. Dobson?

Shirley Yeah. Yeah, and then, of course, when you go home, because all the other kids in the family, the children, they'd tell Daddy right away and then, oh lordy. "Next time," he says, "I will get that bar of that soap that your mom made out of that lye." He says, "I'm going to wash your mouth out with it!" [laughs] We could not tell each other to shut up, or call him a liar, or anything. Oh, no, you didn't do that. But, we're none the worst for it.

Rhonda What kind of fight was this you were having at school? What went on in this fight?

Shirley Well, Wilfred now, he was always bugging us kids. All of us girls, we had long hair in braids and he'd come up behind you and he'd get all that braid or he'd pull your ear. He was just a mischievous little devil. I mean, we didn't get into blows or nothing like that.

Rhonda What did you do to him?

Shirley Give him the old elbow right in the gut.

Rhonda And the teacher saw that?

Shirley Yeah, well, it's just a one-room school. That school was no bigger than from here to there. You couldn't get away with too much. But, you know, she could be up at that blackboard writing and if some of them boys was kicking up a fuss at the back of that school, she'd be up there writing on that blackboard. She'd take that brush and she'd swing that thing over her shoulder and she'd hit that kid. She wouldn't even turn around. Oh, you'd better look out boy. But that was her weapon.

Rhonda Was she a good teacher?

Shirley Oh, yes. She was really nice. She was really good. And that one time, when she got sick that spring, there well Jean Lancour, I think it's Jean; Cyril Lancour's daughter from Donatville. She'd come down because Mrs. Dobson had to go out Edmonton to the doctor out there; she was sick for a while. And so, when she come down from Donatville, she'd walk from Donatville down to Amber Valley every day to teach us and then walk back home at night.

Rhonda How far a drive is that?

Shirley I forget how many miles it is up to Donatville. You don't get there in no 15 minutes anyway.

Rhonda Wow!

Shirley It's quite a ways. I forget how far it is, but that's where she lived at, in Donatville. She'd walk down to Amber Valley and teach us and then walk back home at night.

Rhonda Did Mrs. Dobson come back?

Shirley Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rhonda And what was the substitute teacher like?

Shirley Oh, she was wicked. It was in the spring when we was getting ready to do our exams at Easter time. And so like, Pyke, and I think Sonny Carothers, and Winnifred and Louise Hamilton. And there was a couple of Cousin Videy's kids . . . they was left-handed. So, they're doing their exams. They've been writing with their left hand right up to Grade 7. She come down there with that pointer right across their hand, and their hand and just swelled up like that. And the parents did nothing. But you cannot take a child that has gone to Grade 7 and when they're doing their exams; you can't make them change, use their right hand. But that's what she did; she come down and I tell you, when she got finished on those poor kids. Because as soon as she would move away, well then, the kids would start. Well, that buggered up their exam!

But, that's the way she was. But I couldn't see it. I felt so sorry for the kids because there's no; you can't change them. But other than that, well, she wasn't bad. That's the

only two teachers that we had out there. Yeah, when Mom and Dad were going to school, Mrs. Cromwell and Mr. Cromwell were teaching then.

Rhonda Were the Cromwell's still living in Amber Valley when you were there?

Shirley No, not when we went back. They weren't there then. I forget where they moved to. Because they were old. They were the same age as my grandma.

Rhonda I think they moved to B.C. or Winnipeg.

Shirley It could have been Winnipeg.

Rhonda I know they moved around quite a bit after. So, where did Mrs. Dobson live?

Shirley In the teacherage, right there in the yard.

Rhonda And what did it look like?

Shirley It was just a little small. . . well, it looked like a granary. It wasn't that big a place. She had her bedroom and then the part where she had her stove and table and stuff in there. It wasn't that big.

Rhonda Would Mrs. Dobson stay at school and work after you kids went home?

Shirley No.

Rhonda Lesson planning or grading?

Shirley Well, she, I think, used to take most of that and do it at home.

Rhonda Did your parents ever have a meet-the-teacher night? Was there ever a parent-teacher conference or anything like that, or did they just see her in the community?

Shirley I can't remember if Mom and them had to go there for a parent-teacher meeting or not. See, out there on the farm, it is kind of difficult to get them people to; you know, unless you had a weekend or something. I can't remember them going. They might have had one, but I can't remember.

Rhonda Who were your classmates?

Shirley Where? Out there?

Rhonda Yeah, you mentioned some of them already.

Shirley There were so many of them out there. Ah! [Audio of paper being handled.]

Rhonda Are you in that picture? Picture of; it might be from 1942. So, that may have been before you were back.

Shirley The same picture's in the. . .

Rhonda It's in one of the history books.

Shirley I'm not sure if it was in this one or in that other one. Well, you know, it's hard to figure out who the kids are. When was this?

Rhonda I think it was around 1942.

Shirley It had to be because there's Laverne and Hazel. Hazel Edwards; that's Aunty Zora's daughter. Hazel and Laverne and myself was all born in July in 1934. My birthday was the seventh. I'm not sure if was Laverne or Hazel; one was the 19th and one was the 26th. We were all born that year, same year the Dionne quint [quintuplets].

Rhonda So you were the Amber Valley triplets?

Shirley [laughs] No, but we were all born in July in 1934.

Rhonda Did you have birthday parties when you were kids growing up?

Shirley Yeah, we had a little party. Sometimes Mom would let us invite some other kids over, but like I say, there are so many kids to each family. Well. I know she'd make us a cake and maybe Uncle Oz and Aunty would bring their kids over or Eugene would come over with his kids, you know, but it'd just be sort of a family thing.

Rhonda So, do you know any of these kids? We're trying to figure out who this kid is especially. [Referring to a photograph.] The boy who looks angry.

Shirley It's hard to say. Okay, we can start from the top. Tilly. She was the oldest one. Her name was Barbara. There's Tilly. And there was Laverne. There was Stella. There was Charlie and Martine. Jack was finished school then. Jack was finished so there'd be Tilly, Laverne, Joyce, Stella, Lonny, Charlie, and Martine. There were seven or eight of Cousin Videy's kids going there. David, there was a baby, so there had nine of them Saunders in there all at once.

Rhonda Was it about even boys and girls in school, like the same number? Or were there more girls than boys, or more boys than girls?

Shirley There were more girls, more girls than boys.

Rhonda Do you remember who the best students were? Like, we're there a few students that really stood out?

Shirley Who got the highest marks? I know Bernice, my cousin, Bernice Bowen, she was a real whiz in school. And then, Sonny. Oh, what's his name; Alfred is the real name, we called him Sonny. He was good in school. I know Billy and Walter Silkie, they were smart kids and then, the girls; Bernice, she was a real whiz in school. I can't think of any of the others that was real outstanding in school. Everybody was sort of average, but that was the only ones that was really . . . Winifred. Winifred Bowen; he was smart too.

Rhonda/Shirley Do the girls and the boys play together? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda What did you play?

Shirley Oh, we'd get out there with our football. We had a lot of fun. What it was, it wasn't a football. It's a big thing like a basketball. But that's all we had to play with out there. Mrs. Dobson would get up there and play with us, too. Kicking that thing around in the snow. It was fun. And in the summertime, then we played baseball.

Rhonda Was it the girls against the boys? Or was it mixed teams?

Shirley We'd just mix them up the girls and, you know, it was mixed teams. Because every time we went out, it would be different ones on each side. We never did have any regulars on one side playing ball. We'd just get out there. Okay, now who do we pick up? Who's going to be on number one and number two team?

Rhonda Were all the kids good baseball players or were there some not so good?

Shirley Oh yeah, they were all good in baseball. Well, I mean, that's all we had to do, so we did. And like I say, we were a lot harder than the kids coming out of the city because you didn't sit around manicuring your fingernails and that, you had work to do.

Rhonda What about track and field? Did you have field days where you would compete with other schools? Do you remember any of that?

Shirley No, no. We never went to any of the other schools. I can't remember us going because it was too hard to get around, so there were no competitions.

Rhonda Would you have field days of your own? Track and field?

Shirley Oh, yeah, like when you get out there. They used to have those horseshoes, you could play horseshoes or they had races and you get a candy or something if you won the race. They'd always have races. And they'd have that tug-of-war and they played baseball and, you know, there was always some activity to do. And we had sack races and a three-legged race. You know, they'd tie your legs together and have a

three-legged race. Oh boy, it was funny. Especially when they couldn't get their rhythm to go. And then they had to, what was it? They'd take a big spoon, you know, a tablespoon and put that egg in there and you had to see who could get to that another line carrying that egg without dropping it.

Rhonda And that was a school event? Or was that part of the picnics?

Shirley Yeah, that was the picnics. And we used to have fun like that, you know, like we had something at school, we had some time off or something. But that was at the picnics, you know, whenever they'd have it and it was really fun. But like around the school, we was always doing something, some kind outside activities.

Rhonda What subjects did you take in school?

Shirley What subjects did I take? We had to do reading, writing, and arithmetic, and when you got up into Grade 7, then you had your English, your math, your geometry, your social studies. Science. That's a subject we had in the older grades.

Rhonda What's your favorite subject?

Shirley My favorite subject? You know what? I liked the music and the art. I just love art and we did penmanship and all that in school. But I like the music and the art. That was a subject that I really was anxious to do every week.

Rhonda And what was your least favorite subject?

Shirley I hated that English. That was my hardest subject, English.

Rhonda And what would that involve?

Shirley What would you learn in English? Well, you know, like when you got all the grammar and all this stuff that you've got to go through and I found it hard. The others, I did, math. I didn't bother. But that was one subject I just couldn't see. Well, you had to lots of reading. You had to do essays. You had to do this, you had done the other and everything else. But it was something I just couldn't grasp onto a lot of it. That was my hardest subject in school, was English.

Rhonda Did you get field trips at school? Did you ever go for nature walks or . . . because you didn't go to museums or anything?

Shirley No.

Rhonda/Shirley Did you have a lot of homework from Toles? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda How much time did you have to spend doing homework?

Shirley Oh, man, you'd need to spend about an hour and a half, sometimes two hours. It all depends. Like when you're getting ready for your tests and stuff and then you'd have a lot more studying to do.

Rhonda Was there a piano in the school? How was music taught?

Shirley Well, what it was like, when we had music, just you're singing and you had to get used to all the notes and everything else. But it was enjoyable. But there wasn't a piano there. There wasn't a piano or an organ out there.

Rhonda What kind of songs that you sing?

Shirley Well, it was folk songs and that, because we had a music book and you'd sing different folk songs. And then all the Standard Church [of America] songs and hymns and that, we liked singing that. They'd get the whole choir together. It was something else.

Rhonda/Shirley Would you perform as a group? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda Was that part of the Christmas concert?

Shirley No. Well, Mr. Bouvier; he used to come out from Edmonton and he was what they called a talent scout or something. Like, the Search for Talent? They go into the different communities? Because Corinne, Jeanette, and I, we sang together as a group and then Arthur Saunders played the guitar and we made a record. That one year when he called, he made records of everybody that participated. I think I have a copy of that.

Rhonda Did you used to sing at other special events, like at weddings or dances?

Shirley Well, whenever they would have a dance or pie social, or box social, or something, everybody would get around there singing.

Rhonda What's a pie social?

Shirley A pie social? Well now, all the women that come there, they make a pie. So, when you get there within a certain time, they have the dance and then they'll stop the dance and they'll auction off those pies, see who'd get the most money. And whoever buys your pie, then you've got to go and have supper with them. It's fun. And the box social, well, you take a box any size and make a complete lunch in there. Then they raffle off these boxes so whoever buys, bids the highest and buys your box. That's the one you've got to go have supper with.

Shirley And that Uncle Oswell, oh, I tell you! [laughs] He'd run those boys up so high that he figured they didn't have no more money, and no more pocket change, and then he'd drop out! Because he'd find out who made this pie and who made that pie, and when that pie come up for bid, he'd run them up and he didn't have two cents to rub

together to buy it. But a lot of those older men, they'd do that. And they knew that boy was bidding. You know, he's going to bid because he likes her and he's going to bid on that and they'd run him way up! So, they weren't getting much. But it was a fun night.

Rhonda So what would the money be used for?

Shirley Well, if they wanted to buy some new things that we needed in the school or something, they'd put it towards that.

Rhonda So to raise money for different needs?

Shirley Yeah, like if they wanted to buy some more baseballs, and bats and stuff it would all be put back into buying something that they didn't have at the school.

Rhonda So, who would buy your pies or your box lunches?

Shirley Oh, we didn't make very many. I know that one night Uncle Oswell got stuck because he bid real high and he had to buy, so I had to go sit with him. I says, "You bugger!" [laughs.] Those boys, they dropped; they let him have it! So, I had to go sit with him and have supper. But it was a lot of fun, you know, like we made fun with nothing.

Rhonda When it came to taking lunch to school, who made your lunch?

Shirley We each had to make our own.

Rhonda And what would you take?

Shirley Well, most of the time, you know, you're lucky if you had some biscuits and butter. We'd take one of those little wee small mayonnaise jars; we'd take one of that full of beans that had been cooked the night before for supper. We'd have that. And then sometimes we would have peanut butter and jam, mix that together between two biscuits and away you go. Nothing fancy. We didn't always have cake and cookies; we didn't have that all the time because of the shortage of sugar.

Rhonda Did you ever attend any funerals that were held in Toles?

Shirley I know I went to Grandpa Hinton's funeral.

Rhonda What do you remember about it?

Shirley Well, they had a good crowd out there, but it wasn't very long. Like they don't hold funerals as long as some of the churches do. But that's the only one I can remember going to out there.

Rhonda Would there be the service be in the school, and the casket would be there?

Shirley Yeah, yeah. That was the only building they had. They used the school for church, for funerals, for weddings, for everything. That was the only building there. And when I was going to school, they only had that one room. They built on to that, they put another room on there after I was gone. I was back in the Edmonton by then.

Rhonda/Shirley After the funeral, they would take the body to the cemetery? [Yeah.]

Rhonda/Shirley And then would there be a lunch? [Yeah. Yeah.]

Rhonda Where would that be?

Shirley Well, they would all come back to the schoolhouse there because the women would all make lunch and they had lunch there.

Rhonda/Shirley Would there be singing at the funeral? [Oh, yeah.]

Rhonda What kind of songs?

Shirley They would just sing different hymns. "Softly and Tenderly," "Old Rugged Cross." And then there was that one girl, she'd sing, "Nearer My God to Thee." Just the ordinary hymns that they sing at funerals.

Rhonda With Toles being used as the church; there was a church at one time in Amber Valley. Was that built when you lived there?

Shirley That was before my time.

Rhonda It was built before your time? And did you go to church at that church?

Shirley I remember going to church in the schoolhouse.

Rhonda So, who went to the other church?

Shirley Well, the church I know of out there in Amber Valley, like, where Obadiah's house is? Well, it's right in the back, in the back out there in the field. That log building, that used to be the church. Grandpa Bowen, when he first come there, he had the church in his own house. And then they graduated to that building. They had that building out there. But that's the only church I know that was out in Amber Valley; that one on Cousin Willis's place. Because Grandpa Bowen, he's the one that started the church out there in Amber Valley. Called the Apostolic something. But anyway, Cousin Willis, Grandpa Bowen, they were still ministering out there.

Rhonda Who was the minister when you were there? Who was the preacher when you were in Amber Valley?

Shirley Albert Risby.

Rhonda And what was his sermon like?

Shirley It was okay, but I never could. . . [laughs] Those people in that Standard Church; he didn't know what was going on from one week to the next, eh? How that counted just like a cult. Because those people, they'd get out there and they get happy. My Grandma Bowen, when they get out there and get happy justa steppin' er down the aisle there. [laughs] But I never could. . . But you had to go to church. It didn't matter. You had to go. But I just couldn't. Because if his service would have been going with the Bible, then you grasp on to what he's talking about. He'd be talking about this that happened there. And this that's happened. And, you know, the people, all they're going by is what he's telling. It wasn't the same as when we went to Shiloh in Edmonton. He went by that Bible. But that's just the way that Standard Church; it's what it was.

Rhonda So, it was sort of flakey?

Shirley Yeah, but the thing is, he would read some scriptures. But I mean, like, his sermon wasn't . . . Okay, say like we to go to church this Sunday and the minister says, "This Sunday we're going to talk about the Book of John," and the next time, it's Samuel. You know, pick out the scriptures that you want and then just work with that. But Albert, he would just follow that Bible. Most of the time, he was just talking, to me. It was, I don't know, when you went it didn't feel like you'd been to church because there was that Standard religion, you know, but it's not a . . . like, none of them had been ordained ministers. And it's not a recognized church! You can get a book that's got all the churches listed right across Canada? It's got no Standard Church in there.

Rhonda Were most members of the Amber Valley community members of the Standard Church?

Shirley Yep, yep. Because all the women, they wore those blue dresses. It was a sort of a powder blue dress, you know. They were long, but all of them wore it and they wore the little, it was a navy blue little round top hat. They all wore that. You know, there was a uniform because they were Christians. They belonged to that church.

Rhonda Did they wear that every day?

Shirley Like on Sundays when they go to church and that, they'd wear it.

Rhonda Did you have an outfit like that?

Shirley No, because we were raised in the Baptist Church.

Rhonda Yeah, you'd gone to Shiloh for quite a long time. I'd heard that there was a split in the church in Amber Valley. Was that before your time or do you know anything about that?

Shirley A split in a church.

Rhonda Yeah. That there were religious divisions, I guess.

Shirley All I know, them people, they were just fighting with each other. But as far as the church goes, I don't know.

Rhonda What were they fighting about?

Shirley Well, you know, in some families, it's be either the mother; maybe the mother and dad in some families, and sometimes would just be the woman, or just a man, or something. But there wasn't a complete family that belonged to that church. You know, there are big differences at home but not right in the church, and there was so many of them. Yeah, there was a split in the church, all right; there was people busting up like crazy after a while. [laughs] Everybody go their separate ways.

Rhonda Like in families?

Shirley Oh, yeah. There was, like in later years. Well, you know, not when all the kids were at home and stuff like that, but later on they just. . . Because, like I say, if the woman, if she's right into that church and the man he don't believe in that church, well, pfft. They would go for the church every time. I know my brother-in-law, Richard; he was raised over in Campsie, over by Barrhead, and so they got this new preacher and he belonged to the Standard Church. So, he come in there at Campsie. And so, he told Richard's mom that she couldn't live with her husband anymore because he was a divorcee. He'd been married before. So she split up! She took her youngest kids and she took off, left all the rest of them there at home. No, as far as the people out in Amber Valley, there were no splits like that in the families or anything.

Rhonda Not over the church.

Shirley No. Because Albert and them after a while, they moved down to Vancouver, I think.

Rhonda How come they left?

Shirley Well, it's just like I say, people, they only stayed out there for so long and then their kids are all getting older and stuff like that and so they just moved down to Vancouver.

Rhonda Did you enjoy church?

Shirley Oh, yeah, I used to like going down there. Because, everybody, we'd all get together in singing and everything. It was lots of fun! Then we get to go to somebody else's house and eat up all their goodies. No, it was good.

Rhonda Were there any other community groups in Amber Valley? Like groups that adults would belong? Men's groups or women's groups?

Shirley At one time, I'm not sure what year it was, they had the WI.

Rhonda/Shirley The Women's Institute? [Yeah, yeah.]

Rhonda And what did that involve?

Shirley That was Mrs. Murphy and Margaret. There was a bunch of them.

Rhonda So, you were talking about the men in the service; the ones who served and didn't come home? Or, who was overseas?

Shirley Yeah, as far as I can remember. I don't have my other history book here but I mean, I know that there was Bob Lipscombe, and his brother, and Oswalt Lipscombe, Alonzo Edwards, and Booker T. Edwards, Lester Map, Buster Saunders, and Chuck Saunders. Ah, let's think. Well, like Forest Bowen, he was there. And then Lummy Bowen, he was in the service. And then his son, Jesse Bowen, he was in the service. And William Medlock, they called him Bill, but he was in the service, too.

Rhonda Did any of them pass away overseas?

Shirley Nope, they all come home, all the ones that I mentioned, they all came back. But Jesse, when the war was over, it was the second one, when it was over, then they were out celebrating D-Day or whatever they called it, when the war was over? And he was riding in a Jeep and the fellow that was driving, Jesse was sitting upon the back part of the Jeep, and when they went underneath this tree, well the branch caught him right across his throat and that was it. He never, never got to come home. But the war was finished.

Rhonda How did the war affect Amber Valley?

Shirley It didn't. They couldn't do too much to Amber Valley because the ones that went overseas, well, there was always some of the older ones that weren't quite of age for them to enlist in the forces. So, they stayed home and helped the family on the farm.

Rhonda And what about after the war? How did you see Amber Valley changing? Did it change?

Shirley No, well, after the war, there was a lot of the men in service. Well then, they all come back home and they just resumed farming in Amber Valley.

Rhonda Did any of them stay in the city?

Shirley It's a possibility because I can't name all of them that lived out there at that time.

Rhonda Did a lot of the students that you went to school with leave Amber Valley?

Shirley Oh, yeah.

Rhonda How come?

Shirley It's because they wanted to further their education or, you know. . . Because there wasn't any prospect of them getting any farther than where they were in Amber Valley, because there's nothing there that they could go on to, further education or anything.

Rhonda So, if they weren't going to farm or they couldn't buy land?

Shirley The farms that were out there, the older people were using, they were farming and there wasn't enough land for the younger people. They couldn't afford to buy more land from somebody else or, you know. And they went on to further things. The younger people could do because there was nothing left for them out in Amber Valley.

Rhonda Were you sad to leave Amber Valley?

Shirley No, it didn't bother me that much because when we went back in the '40s, we wasn't there that long 'til we move back to Edmonton again. But I spent most of my time out in the city. From when I was a little wee girl.

Rhonda Were your parents politically active?

Shirley Politically active.

Rhonda Yeah, did they vote or did they campaign?

Shirley Oh, yeah. And Dad, he was a council member when we lived up in Fort Smith. He was on the town council and that. And I think that they used to vote for the Progressive Conservative. As far as I know.

Rhonda And what about here when they lived in Amber Valley and Edmonton?

Shirley I don't know, I couldn't tell you who they voted for.

Rhonda/Shirley Do you remember anything about the elections in Amber Valley? [No.]

Rhonda Like if federal or provincial elections were held?

Shirley I can't remember anything like that.

Rhonda Was there a mayor of Amber Valley?

Shirley No! Mr. Edwards said he was a mayor, [laughs] but I never saw the paper.

Rhonda Why did he see himself that way?

Shirley Well, it's because he was in charge. He used to go into the council meetings in Athabasca. I think at one time or another he was on the council for the area. But it wasn't the mayor's position, he was just on the council. Like for the education and that, you know how they have the different council people. So that's what he was on. And I think he also sat in on the meeting they had for agriculture, he was something on that board of agriculture, too. But not mayor.

Rhonda Do you know which way people in Amber Valley tended to vote? Was it Social Credit, or was it Conservative or Liberal? Was that something you were even really aware of growing up?

Shirley No. Because I think way back then, I don't know whether they voted for Social Credit or who they voted for because, you know, until you were old enough to actually vote yourself you didn't pay that much attention to it.

Rhonda How was Amber Valley run? Was there sort of a group of people who got together if decisions needed to be made or like to coordinate the picnic or to run the school?

Shirley No. Like the school, I know, Mr. Edwards. For the ball team and that, he was the manager for the Amber Valley ball team. But making other decisions and that well. . . Like for the school and the teacher, that all comes from the Board of Education in Alberta. So, all they had to do was to let them know in the Alberta Board of Education when they needed a teacher out there and when one would be one available in the area. But any other decisions made out there when they're going to have this or that, well everybody'd just get together there at the schoolhouse. They'd make their decisions that way.

Rhonda So, the schoolhouse played a pretty important role.

Shirley Oh, yeah. That school; it was used for everything. We've got the community club, you know, the big community hall? Well, the schoolhouse in Amber Valley was used for everything. It was the only building out there. And when we wanted to have a barn dance, when somebody build a new barn, well, then we'd have a real hay day over there. We could have a dance up in the loft? That was a lot of fun.

Rhonda We can wrap it up?

Shirley Yep!

Rhonda All right, well done. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

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