

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Jean Golonka recording 2017.mp3
http://digiport.athabasca.ca/aasmp/people/j_golonka.htm

Narrator: Jean Golonka
Interviewer: Mark Boersma
June 21, 2017

[Start of Interview]

Mark Hi, my name is Mark Boersma, and I'm interviewing Jean Golonka. Her maiden name was Fowlie, her father's name was Charles Fowlie, and her mother's name was Nora Howe. Her birth date was the 20th of April, 1926 and she was born in Athabasca, Alberta. Her spouse's name was Thomas Golonka.

Mark You can just start wherever you like to tell me about how your life was. You were born in Athabasca, here?

Jean I was born here in Athabasca. My mother remembers that the trees were out in leaf and the robins were singing. We lived in a house which has since been demolished, but would have been about two and a half blocks north [south] of the river on 49th Street. My father was very annoyed when he came home one day in October of, no that would have been November of 1926 to find that my mother had put me outside to sleep and the temperature registered down at the Union Hotel at minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Mrs. Nancekivell and her family were living just next door and the Nancekivell girls used to come over and spend lots of time with me.

The Denault family lived just across the street. We didn't have a well on our property, and not too many people did, but south towards what is presently the high school hill, the Chapin family lived, and we got water there out of a well. It had a rope and a pail and a pulley. And that was how we got our drinking water and water for cooking. But also, I remember there were two rain barrels at the side of the house where we caught rainwater. And that's what my mom used for washing when it was available, and melted snow in the wintertime.

My mom was a great tennis player. The tennis court at that time was where the apartment block [Fowler Block] stands now that is just kitty-corner to the Burger Bar. Cliff Hitts was one of the gentlemen living here in town at that time. He was a carpenter, but he also loved to play tennis. So, whenever available, he would get in touch with my mother and they would have a game of tennis, and then when they had a tournament, they played as partners.

As I was about maybe, when I was three, four and five, the Sunday ritual for me was for my dad to take me down to Charlie Marchand's Café—or it was known as the Royal Cafe later, and it still stands there today—in order to buy five cents worth of maple buds or, as I called them, chocky buds. Now, at that time, Athabasca didn't have any cement walks. They were wooden sidewalks. And if any of you are familiar with wooden sidewalks, you know that there's about a half to three-quarter inch space between the boards. Well, I'd been told to hold on to my money, but one day I

was playing with it. And guess what? My nickel went down one of those cracks. There were tears! And I think my father was trying to teach me a lesson. And he said, "Well, I guess there's no chocky buds today." I don't remember the outcome; I would suspect that, being my dad, he probably relented and got me some.

During this time in Athabasca, my favorite playmate lived down the street in the house directly next to where the United Church manse would be, but it's not anymore. That house, at one time, was a two-storey house, and the Davy Jones family lived there and they had a daughter named Cecil. Cecil and I used to play together all the time. Now, at this time, diphtheria was still common. We didn't have an immunization for it. And just down the street, a little girl; I can't remember her first name, but her surname was Cawthorpe, got diphtheria. They put her into quarantine, which was a building which the nurses also used as a residence, and it would have been right to the north of where the present Legion is now. Mrs. Jones, Cecil's mother, and my mother, told us that we had to stay away from there. I can remember when I went to Cecil's to play... By this time, we had moved, and we were living in the house which is now directly to the west of the old Brick School, the residence still stands there. So, I'd go out the door, I'd go in behind the old Brick School, walk as far as I could through the schoolyard, and then come out down the block. I don't know whether I thought that was going to protect me or not, but that's how we did it.

Blueberries were something that everybody picked in those days, and you didn't have to go very far. All you had to do was go across the river on the ferry, up the hill, and there the blueberries were. And then, of course, we would come back and come home again on the ferry. At that time, the person who my mother liked to pick blueberries with was Mrs. Phillip King, and they had a son called Don. So, I have a picture of Don and I sitting in front of the blueberry pails.

Mark So, were the blueberries for jam, or just for eating?

Jean Mostly they were canned and we used them as fruit in the wintertime. Mom would can maybe 20 to 30 quarts of them. They were good!

Mom was also a very good friend of Mrs. Verano, a teacher. She was of Scottish background, but she also spoke fluent French. Her husband was the barber down at the Union Hotel. They had two children, Joe and Marilyn. Marilyn and I were the same age. Each of us had a little red wagon, so our mothers decided that they would take us and go and get some sand in our wagons so we could have a sandbox. And it seems rather ironic because where we went for the sand was up what is now the hill to the high school, and at that time there were no buildings up here whatever. There was a sort of, a well to me, I thought it was a lake, but I realize now it was only a slough, and we came and filled our wagons with sand. And this is the ironic part, it's where my house presently stands. When we first bought this lot here there were still some cattails growing here. I've been in this house since 1966.

At that time, Mr. Parker, Mr. Charles Parker senior, had a store directly across from where CIBC is now, to the north. The downstairs part was the store and the upstairs was what we called Parker's Hall, and that's where all the social events took place. One of the things that I can vaguely remember, because I would have been about five at the time, was that one of the Keir boys, who came from the South Athabasca

area, used to put on what they called a Chautauqua show. And what I can remember is that he had a series of these marionette dolls that you worked with strings, and of course, they would tell a little story. And apparently, I was very intrigued with them because I'm told that I left my seat, and I walked up and stood right underneath the stage and stared at these dolls.

During those times, Mickey [James Henry] McIntosh used to fly his plane down from Calling Lake and other lakes up in the area, but I remember them talking of Calling Lake, and he would have fish. This would be during the wintertime; he'd come down and land on the ice of the river and the ladies, when they knew he was coming, would all be down there in order to buy some fish.

Our radios at that time were with a wet battery. We used earphones and there were only two sets of earphones for the set that we had at home. So, my mother had one set, my dad would have the other, but I would sit on my dad's knee and snuggle up nice and close and of course I could hear too, what was being played. Now, we didn't [listen to] the radio very long at a time because the wet battery only lasted so long. And then you had to take it off and take it down to one of the garages and they would charge it up again. And then you'd carry your battery home.

Mark I never heard of a wet battery before. How big was that?

Jean Well, actually, it's a battery very much like we have in our cars today. And most of them came with a sort of a fixture around them that you could hook on a piece of rope and carry them. You had to be very careful because there was acid and you could get burnt with the acid in them.

I think all early Athabascans probably remember the parrot that used to be in the telegraph office. A parrot could talk and we won't say some of the words he used to say.

In 1929 was when the Depression hit here in Athabasca and all over Canada and the world too, I guess. My father had a homestead about 10 miles east of Colinton. And because Mr. Alex MacLeod no longer could afford to keep him as a clerk at the store, we moved out to the farm. So, I started school in 1932 at a school known as Plum Lake. I couldn't go to school all year because in order to get to school by a dry road, it was seven miles. But once it froze up, we could go across Kinikinik Lake, and it was about three miles to school. So, I went to school for four months the first winter.

Mark And you could probably walk those three miles, could you? Or not? Or did they have transportation?

Jean No, there was not transportation, but my dad and a neighbor made sort of a toboggan and they would take this other gentleman's daughter, who was Jean Grimshaw, and I. They would take us across the lake and then let us walk about the last mile and a half. The next winter, the Grimshaws had left the area and I only got to school three months. Well, at this point, my dad decided that this was no way to get a child educated. So, looking around at Meanook, and at Boyle, and at Colinton, he decided that he should try to go into business. So, with \$500, that was after we

sold most everything, we went into partnership with a Mr. Clarence Tade in Colinton, and for the next 20 years that was the home of the Fowlies.

Mark And what business did he open?

Jean Now, that's a good question. It was a general store and by a general store, we sold groceries, we sold dry goods, all lines of clothing, we sold hardware, nails, bolts, haywire, anything you could name. We had a gas pump out in front, and we also sold coal oil and high-test gas for lamps.

My father became the agency for the Treasury Branch. He sold driver's licenses. He was the insurance agent for the Alberta Crop and Hail Insurance. Farmers brought cream in, in cream cans, which were put in our cellar, and in the morning my father would get up about 5:30 and get those cans of cream over to the station in order to meet the train three times a week. A train came from Edmonton to Athabasca Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and went back on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. Sometimes there were extra trains. One of the interesting things that I remember about the train was that about a little better than a mile north of Colinton, on the track there was what they called the wye. And that was where the train engine turned around and pushed the train into Athabasca so that the engine would be facing the right way in order to take the train back the next morning into Edmonton.

I took my Grades 3 to 11 in Colinton and that was during the war years. During those war years... Perhaps I should back up just a bit before the war years.

Mark I was going to say. Why don't you tell me a little bit more about the school? Like, how many kids were in your class? Were there boys and girls?

Jean Colinton School was a two-room school. Grades 1 to 6 were in one room and Grades 7 to 11 were in the senior room. There were two teachers. When I came to Colinton, I'd only been in school seven months but I was eight years old. And when you're eight years old, you should be in Grade 3 so, they put me in Grade 3. That was an interesting year. Well, the Grade 3 class at that particular year, it diminished greatly after that, but there were 19 of us in there. And at that time, they used to put your standing in class [on the board]. And I was 19 to start with, but I wasn't 19 by the end of the year. With the help of my father, we struggled every night and I managed to catch up what I didn't know.

Mark Your dad was a big support to you.

Jean Oh yes, very much so. Well, he certainly believed in education. School years were fun years. Almost every night, didn't matter what season of the year, the kids that lived in town would gather in front of the hotel in Colinton and we'd decide what game we were going to play. It might have been hide and seek. It might have been Auntie Auntie I Over. It might have been Red Rover, whatever it would be. And we would play from about 7 o'clock until the bus came in about 8:00. And then, that was sort of our curfew. We knew then, that once the bus was in, we had to go home.

In the wintertime there was a skating rink and it was natural ice. Colinton and Athabasca had a real ... well, I guess what would you call it? I can't think of the word

I want to say. Anyway, we both had good hockey teams and there was, I guess the word is rivalry, that I'm looking for. There was really good rivalry and our teacher, the senior teacher, Mr. Roxburgh, was a very good hockey player.

Mark So, did you play hockey, too?

Jean No, girls did not play hockey in those days! That was unheard of. Only the boys played hockey.

Mark So, what did the girls do?

Jean We went and watched and cheered them on. Mind you, we skated, although I never. Times were hard and while we made a success of the store, there wasn't money for extra things, so I never had a pair of skates. Never had a bicycle. I only had my little red wagon.

Mark So, I'll bet that school was heated with stoves, too. Right? Firewood?

Jean We were very fortunate in that school because they had already installed a furnace, but the furnace burned wood. In the fall, different farmers would bring in loads of wood and it would be piled out behind the school, and that reminds me of another incident. We girls, usually in the spring, but sometimes in the summer but usually in the spring, we liked to play horse. And so, what we would do ... at that time, a man by the name of Mr. Pete Quilley who used to deliver bread from the city to all the stores between Edmonton and Athabasca. And when he would deliver it, he would have it in boxes and it was tied with about a one-eighth inch twine. I would save all that twine and then we girls would braid that together and then that made our lines and things in order for us to play horse. Well, one day we decided that the woodpile would make a pretty good barn, so we took the wood pile apart and made it all into stalls and so on, and we had a great time playing out there. But we were still in the junior room, and when the principal of the school went out and saw it, he made us re-pile all the wood. The wood kept drier when it was properly piled rather than scattered around. And it was, I guess, a hazard, too, because anybody could have tripped over it and whatnot. But anyway, it was fun.

Another interesting thing in those days in Colinton and this was pre-war, there were a band of gypsies that used to come once a year through Colinton and make their way up to Lac La Biche. They'd stay for part of the summer, not too long as I remember. And then they would make their way back again. And at that time, unfortunately, although we did not find them to be that way, gypsies were people that you were supposed to watch because they were supposedly light-fingered and some of your property might disappear. But it's something that just no longer happens. It's something of the past.

During the war years, all the Alaska Highway traffic came on the old #2 Highway, which made its way through every little town. Between Athabasca and Meanook there were 13 bridges crossing over sometimes little creeks and sometimes it was just ... it was easier, I guess, to build a bridge than to fill in the road to make it smooth. As the convoys came through, sometimes at Colinton, if you were wishing to

get onto the highway to come to Athabasca, you'd have to sit and wait 15 minutes while the convoy went through.

Jean You couldn't get labor during the war, so I stayed an extra year in Colinton and took an extra year of schooling. In the high school, because there were Grades 7 to 11 in the one room, you were not allowed to take a full year's high school. The teacher just couldn't possibly cope with all of it. So, we were restricted to taking about, what at that time, was known as 25 credits. You had to have 35 credits for a full year. So, I stayed an extra year in high school and took an extra 25 credits before I went to Alberta College to take my Grade 12.

Mark Was that mandatory at that time, to have a full 35 credits?

Jean Well, in order to complete your high school, you had to have 105 credits. Three years, at 35 credits a year. And then you had to take certain courses in order for senior matric[ulation], which I think is still part of the high school curriculum today. And fortunately, I took them so I had no trouble getting into university to take my teacher training.

Mark That's pretty good. You caught up fast.

Jean Well, from where I started, yes! 1944 was when I was ready to start my first year of university. The war was still on but in the spring, of course, the war was over. And what a celebration that was. But those of us who were at university were called war-emergency students. Some went in and took six-week's training and came out to teach, others of us stayed the full university year of seven months and then came out to teach. I stayed the full seven months. My first two months of teaching were out at Rodger's Chapter, which no longer exists. It was about 10 miles out of Athabasca. At that school I did not have too many students because that school had been closed. And some new families had moved into the district and so there were then enough students who had been sent to other schools to reopen that school. So, it was an interesting couple of months for me.

Mark I'm sure. And, how many kids would you have had in your first class?

Jean I had about 14 or 15 only, which wasn't bad to start with. And it was just on the edge of the Amber Valley settlement so, some of my students were Black. And some had been going to two other schools. So, it was kind of interesting getting us all back together again, but it was good.

Mark/Jean/Mark Did you find any racism going on out there? [No. Racism didn't ...] It didn't enter the picture, eh?

Jean Not with the children. I don't know whether... To my knowledge, Amber Valley was a community where White and Black intermingled really very, very well. A number of the people from Amber Valley dealt in our general store in Colinton, so I knew all the families so, it was not really a new experience for me at all.

Mark So, what subjects did you teach in school?

Jean When you went out to teach, I had Grades 1 to 8 that first year; so you taught every subject in Grade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... You taught math, reading, language, social studies, science. You were supposed to do a little bit of music, a little bit of art. You also were encouraged that you should get them out for some phys. ed.

Mark And now, phys. ed is mandatory I'm pretty sure. And art is an option, which I liked. And what was the one you said before that?

Jean Music?

Mark Music, yeah. And what did you do for music? Did you have a piano? Or recorders?

Jean We had recorders and how I hated those things. But at least I was able to probably get somewhere near the right note to start a song on. And we did some rhythm work and we tried to do a little bit of singing, dances and that.

Jean My second year of teaching, I went out to South Athabasca to teach and that was also a rural school.

Mark A bigger school?

Jean Yes, I had over 20 in that school, but still the same grades. And the next year, I was planning on going back to South Athabasca, as far as I knew, but the middle of August I got a phone call from the superintendent saying that there'd been some changes here in the Athabasca School, and there was no primary teacher and he was assigning me to teach Grade 1 here in Athabasca.

Mark Just Grade 1 by itself?

Jean Just Grade 1 by itself.

Mark So, Athabasca must have been growing at that time.

Jean It was starting to. I did not expect what happened, nor did anybody else. I started out with about 38 in Grade 1, and very soon we started mushrooming. And by January there were 47 in Grade 1, and the Grade 2 class had either 42 or 43.

Jean They had built a shop for the high school students to start being able to take shop courses down where the present Outreach School is. And they did some work and turned the upper floor of the shop into a school classroom. You can imagine how noisy that must have been. I didn't teach up there, but the Grade 2 class and my class each had some students taken out of it. I think I ended up with 32 in the end.

Mark Still, that's a lot of kids to teach.

Jean Well, that was the norm in those days. You were expected to have 30, 32, 35.

Mark I think 30 is probably pretty normal for now, at least in Athabasca.

Jean Well, in the junior grades, it's much less than that. But in the high school, it does get up to that. When I first came here to teach in Athabasca, there was no plumbing in the school, and so we had little shacks out behind. And the same thing, the teachers who went down by the shop to teach, they had the same circumstances to deal with. School continued with one grade in each room for those four years that I taught here the first time. By then, they were realizing that they had to do something, so the first four rooms were built up where the present high school is. We called them the chicken coop because they had all those windows up high. And they're still there today. But that part of the school was the chicken coop. Because, before that, we had classrooms all over town. There were classes in the Roman Catholic Church. There were classes in the United Church.

Mark A good use of resources that are already there.

Jean Well, that's all they could do. And then, centralization had started, so they brought in two schools from out in the country. One of them was West Athabasca, which I did teach in. It's where the school is now, that they are setting aside as a sort of a pioneer resource. I don't know just what they're calling it, it's down there beside the Outreach School. If you go just north of the Outreach School, there is an old schoolhouse and that was West Athabasca.

Mark Oh, and it's still there, isn't it. It has a sign on it that says it was the old schoolhouse.

Jean Mm hmm. And there's the old desks in there, and a lot of the old books. When I taught in it, it was right where the present Outreach School is, and they built a sort of an adjoining hallway to the second school they brought in. I had a Grade 1 class in West Athabasca and Doris Allan had a Grade 2 class just to the east of me in the next room. Rather interesting that year. At that time, the beaver had not been re-introduced to any extent into this community because they had been all trapped out. Mr. Champion was the fellow who dealt with wildlife and whatnot and his son Donald was in my room. And so, in the spring they had captured, live-trapped some female beaver with their young. And so, this one morning before he took these out across the river to put them into wherever he was putting them, he brought them over to the school and we all went out and had a look at this female beaver—the mother beaver. And she had these two little beaver kits or whatever they call them. It was the first time that I had ever seen a beaver. And of course, naturally, it was the first time that all the kids had ever seen a beaver. Something you remember!

Mark I'm guessing you had textbooks when you were in school.

Jean Yes, by this time we had readers for the elementary students. Of course, the high school and that had their textbooks. But there were no science books or anything like that for the elementary grades. The teacher had a guide and you just worked from that. We had the readers. By that time, it was the Dick and Jane series, and we had the workbooks that went with it. So we thought we were pretty fortunate.

Mark So, there were pictures, actually, in those books.

Jean Oh, very interesting pictures, yes. Dick and Jane, and Sally and Spot.

Jean In 1947–48 when I came to Athabasca to teach, the Immigration Hall was still here and it was bigger than Parker's Hall so, that is where the high school graduations were held. The teachers were responsible for getting all the decorations and whatnot up, and we also, believe it or not, made the certificates that were given to the high school students. With some help from some of the parents from the very, very active Home and School [Association].

Mark And of course you wouldn't have had the computer to make it on.

Jean Oh no, it was all handwork, all hand done. All done with the black Waterman's ink in a bottle and the wide nib in order to do a little bit of well, not really calligraphy, but sort of a form of calligraphy to say their names and then the name of the school and so on.

Jean I taught here for four years until June of 1951, and then we moved out to Bickerdike, and that's where my older son was born. Within the year, we were back in Perryvale and I was not expecting to teach, but I think I was in Perryvale about five days when the superintendent of schools came and said, "We're badly in need of teachers, will you come back and start teaching in September?" And I said, "Well, I can't really. I have a little baby here, seven months old." "We'll get you a baby sitter."

Mark Ah, they were desperate, were they?

Jean Well at that time, yes, they were still desperate for teachers. So, in September of 1952 I started back teaching at Perryvale. Hopefully, it was going to be in the primary grades, but circumstances worked out that I ended up getting the Grades 7 and 8 room of 32 students and I wondered how I was going to cope with that.

Mark Yeah, I was thinking, I've taught Grade 4 to about Grade 12; different things, and the junior highs are definitely the most challenging, I think, in my experience.

Jean Well, yes, I would say so. But I look back on those years very, very fondly. They proved to be very, very rewarding years, and I'm still friends with a great many of those students that I had back at that time. In fact, the Perryvale reunions, we go back and we work together to put them together. They were good years. No skating rink or anything at the schools in those days, so my husband fixed up a little engine and we were able to flood the creek with this water pump down by the railway tracks. And so phys. ed in the wintertime was we ate our lunch at recess and then went skating at noon hour down on the creek or skating rink, as we called it. And then, sometimes we were maybe 5 or 10 minutes late getting back. But at least we had some outdoor phys. ed. On real cold days you couldn't go down, but if it was a decent day we'd go down.

Those were the days, when I was at Perryvale teaching Grades 7 and 8, when Christmas concerts were still all the rage. At that time, Perryvale was a four-room school and the hall was probably about a quarter of a mile, maybe, from the school. So down we'd all walk to practice for two times in the hall before the actual night of the concert. And in those days, it was common that a Christmas concert would be held, say, one night. Perryvale would plan their concert, Rochester would plan theirs

for another night, Colinton would plan theirs for another night, and often parents would go from school to school. That used to be what happened, too, that year I taught at South Athabasca. You had your Christmas concert and people came from all the districts that were close around, and, if they brought their children, they would bring a little gift. And then every child got a gift and a bag of candy. And then afterwards, usually, the Christmas concert ended with the lunch. The ladies would bring lunch. We'd have lunch, and then there'd be a dance. That was a big social event. But that happens no more.

Jean After teaching 14 years in Perryvale, we built our home here in 1966 in Athabasca. I better backtrack a little bit. I taught four years of Grades 7 and 8 in Perryvale, and then I taught the Grades 1 and 2 class for the next few years. The last year I was in Perryvale, the school was almost shutting down and I had Grades 4, 5 and 6 and had to act as the principal as well. That was another experience! So, in 1966, we moved back up here to Athabasca and by that time the Athabasca School had grown considerably.

Jean And I should backtrack once more. The last year I was in Perryvale, Athabasca School here was absolutely overcrowded. They were in the process of building what is now, what do they call it, the Athabasca Elementary School?

Mark LTIS? Landing Trail?

Jean Landing Trail, yes. However, the contractor and the builder didn't get the school finished on time. So, when school was ready to start in September, they had about 100 children that they had no place to put them. So strange as it may seem, the country kids were all bussed in here to Athabasca, but four rooms of town children—two rooms were bussed to Colinton, and two rooms were bussed to Perryvale. In Perryvale, we had a Grade 5 and a Grade 6 room. Mrs. Pat Hunter had the Grade 5 room and Mrs. Anita Elgert had the Grade 6 room. They rode the bus with the children.

Jean Now, there was a good deal of parental opposition by the parents here in Athabasca that their children had to leave town and go to Perryvale. However, it worked out that the children thought it was great because at that point, they had never had the use of a gym and so on. Well, they built a gym here, but they only were able to use it a very short time when they had to change the gym into two classrooms in order to accommodate the overflow. Well, anyway, by 1966, ready to start in September of '66, they had got the LTIS school ready. But then, disaster struck up there, too. Two rooms decided to fall off and the Grades 5 and 6 class were able to roll a ball from one room to the other. So they declared that it was totally unsafe. And so, they had to tear down those two rooms. That was part of the history of LTIS, only in those days it was AES, Athabasca Elementary School, and we were known as the AES Chipmunks. We had it on our hats and our sweatshirts.

Mark And probably a team mascot?

Jean We didn't have a mascot. Well, there were all kinds of chipmunks around the schoolyard. They just lived there.

Mark Were there sports teams from the different areas? Like, did they play hockey against each other?

Jean No, not at that time. We had a track meet every spring but that was the only inter-games thing there would be. But that was only to accommodate the Calling Lake School and children from the Hutterite Colony would come in sometimes. Not always.

Mark So, what kind of things did you do at a track meet?

Jean Long jump, short jump, all kinds of different forms of racing, pole vaulting. The younger kids would throw bean bags. And of course, the highlight was always that the ladies always had a hot dog stand at noon and nobody brought lunch that day. Mind you, me, there were an odd few children who would have to bring their lunch, but most of them were able to have hot dogs and pop. No ice cream, just hot dogs and pop. I think they had softball games in the afternoon, but that was only for the older ones. There were also a lot of relay races and the children enjoyed those. My, that was hard to teach the young ones though, how to do a relay race. The baton was dropped more than it was carried sometimes!

Jean It was when I came back in 1966 to teach here; up to this point, the women always had to wear dresses, and skirts and suits. However, we had a man and wife come to teach here, and the gentleman, Mr. Edwards, went to the high school and his wife Betty came down to teach at the elementary school. It was at the point that lady's pantsuits were just beginning to come into fashion. So, Betty Edwards arrived in a pantsuit at school one day. We were all horrified! This just wasn't the thing to do! Well, she said that it was being done in the city schools and we had heard that it was being done in other schools. So, somebody went to the superintendent and said, "Would you allow the lady teachers to wear pantsuits?" He said, "Yes, you can wear pantsuits but they must be pantsuits." They could not just be slacks and a blouse. "They must be pantsuits." So guess what? When [teachers'] convention came in October of that year, just about every lady teacher came back with a pantsuit. They were in style. And they have been ever since. And at that time, of course, the men were still wearing suits to school. The casual way of dressing had not come into being yet.

Jean I kept on teaching until I had completed 40 years in 1987. I was 61 at that time and I had three little grandchildren, so I went babysitting the three little grandchildren so their mother could come back to teaching. And so, now I've been retired for 30 years. It'll be 30 years, the end of June. I taught for 40 years, but I've been retired now for 30.

Mark Teaching for 40 years is quite an accomplishment. I'm sure it was very challenging.

Jean Challenging, but good years, very good years. And it's interesting. Once in a while, doesn't happen very often, but somebody that I had as a student while I was still Miss Fowlie will meet me on the street: "Miss Fowlie, how are you?" Back to my maiden name. Doesn't happen too often, but once in a while it does. I think back then the classes were smaller and there was more of a closeness.

Jean While I was teaching at the elementary school, that's when we tried some team teaching. It was okay, but many of the teachers did not like it at all. I didn't mind it. It was okay. In the Grade 1 classes, what we did was each one of us taught our own basic core subjects. But phys. ed, art, science and social studies, one teacher taught all the social studies to the four classes. Each changed rooms. One taught science, one taught phys. ed, and one taught art. I taught the science.

Mark So, at that time, the teachers were starting to get areas of specialty, eh? Specializing in areas.

Jean A lot of us had come out teaching with only one year of training. So, most of us went back, not all, but a majority went back, with evening credit courses and summer school, and got our degrees. Where now, you come out with a degree.

Mark And how long was the degree?

Jean Four years. And at that time, too, you specialized in your area. I took early childhood education, but as my minor, I took special education. Because I ended up over here when we didn't have special education teachers, then I took special education classes. And that was another very challenging thing. And those are the students who, to this day, they see you, they remember you. And, of course, the ones that I taught, they're adults, they've got families of their own now. And of course, because I taught the lower grades for all those years, now they're all grown up. They come and speak. Well, you know, there's something about them that, yes, you remember them, but okay, who is this now?

Jean And in those first years when I was teaching, there was no kindergarten. So it was really interesting when the little ones first started to school. They hadn't had any kindergarten, you see at all, no playschool, no kindergarten. They came directly from home and they were so shy. Not the town children so much because they played around, but the country children hadn't had that opportunity.

Jean I still think, and maybe I'm wrong, that you put in your hours at school and you put in at least that much time again, or time and a half, and sometimes twice, depending on what the load is.

Mark Yeah, depending on what time of the year because, report cards would come around, and I'd lose weekends, right? A couple of weekends gone just trying to do a good job on report cards.

Jean And the report cards seemed to be something that administration liked to change. I think they were thinking that they were improving and some did prove to be maybe an improvement. Others, nope, we didn't have them very long.

Mark So where did you meet your husband?

Jean I was teaching here. He came to work in Colinton and he was an avid curler and so we met at the curling rink.

Mark So how long had you been teaching before then?

Jean My second year here in Athabasca.

Mark Yeah, I'm always interested in where people meet their spouses because nowadays, lots of people meet their spouses in university.

Jean That is true.

Mark Would you like to talk about your children at all? I want to know about Ron. I want to know what kind of kid Ron was because I know him. He has that deep voice and he's so gentle. He's like the gentle giant, right?

Jean Yes, he does have that. Well, I had two boys. Ron who was born in 1951 and Dick who was born in 1955. Both of them went to university. Ron chose, after some hunting, education as his profession. Dick chose to work with Alberta Transportation. Both are now retired. Ron and Maxine don't have a family, they just have two Yorkie pups, which I think sometimes are as much work, or more, than a family. And Dick and Paulette have my three precious grandchildren. Richie is presently working on his doctorate in epidemiology, and he's working with the Department of Health. Marie got her degree at the U of A and then she went to Grant MacEwan and did some work with music. She's presently married and thoroughly enjoying life on about 10 acres of land out here east of Athabasca. And Alex spent four years at Augustana College in Environmental Studies, and he's presently in the process of owning a tree farm and doing landscaping. So it's pretty nice having them all so close.

Mark It sounds like they've found jobs that it's something they enjoy doing. Which is, I think, really important these days. You've got to like your job, you need to like your work. And I did, I liked teaching. I enjoyed it. And even the junior high kids I enjoyed. The junior highs were more interesting. There was always more going on.

Jean But there was with me, as far as junior high. I found the curriculum in junior high was fascinating. You could get into current events and things with them, which I'd always found sort of interesting.

Mark Do you remember a favorite community dance or celebration or anything like that?

Jean Well, the community dances, when I was growing up in Colinton, there was a community dance to go to every weekend. We used to have dances locally and then Doug Harold had a dance hall at Baptiste Lake. That was a great place to go on a Saturday. Usually Saturday night dance 'til midnight. Could only dance 'til midnight! Just about every little community during the summer would have a picnic, which would be ballgames, races and whatnot, and then a dance in the evening. Everything seemed to end up with a dance. It was just sort of the thing to do. And quite a few card parties, too, in those days. The card parties were often a way to raise money during the war for the Red Cross and so on. That was the era of the box social. Do you know what a box social is? Well, the girls, and ladies, married ladies, too, you all had to decorate a box and then you had to make lunch for two and put it in that box. Which would be sandwiches and goodies. The coffee was always made

in a boiler on the stove. You hid your box and you took it in and it was placed up at the front. And then at suppertime, there was an auctioneer, and he would auction off the boxes and it made for a lot of fun. Now, the women would usually let the men know which was their box, their husbands so that they... But it was great rivalry sometimes between the boys as to who would get whose box. And, of course, they wouldn't know who they were bidding on. So, that was a fun thing to do.

Mark And once again, a good way to meet people that you don't already know. I have one more question for you. What advice would you give your grandchildren's generation?

Jean Well, my grandchildren are now all adults.

Mark What kind of advice would you give the kids of today?

Jean I guess, do your best and enjoy every moment. Life is what you make it. Life is what you make it.

Mark Yup, and you get out what you put into it.

Jean And it can be a joy, if you want it to be.

Mark And we all have our hard times, too.

Jean Oh yes, it wouldn't be life if you didn't.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Virginia Nilsson
Proof-read by: Margaret Anderson

February, 2022