

**Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Katherine Nelson**

http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/k_nelson.htm

Narrator: Katherine Nelson
Interviewer: Rosemary Neaves
March 13, 2018

[Start of Interview]

Rosemary My name is Rosemary Neaves, and it is March 13th, 2018, and I am with Katherine Nelson in her farm home. Katherine is going to be telling stories about the early days of her life and incidents around the Athabasca area. Her maiden name was Katherine Chilak. Her father's name was Peter Chilak and her mother's name was Mary Sosnowski. Her birth date was June 12th, 1932, and her place of birth was Anyox [Anyox], B.C. Her spouse's name was Earl Herman Nelson.

Rosemary/Katherine So, Katherine, your father was originally from the old country. Did you want to talk a bit about that, just how he came to Canada? I can't remember. He had two sisters in the old country and one got killed.

Rosemary/Katherine The old country being the Ukraine? Yeah.

Katherine And my dad, he worked wherever he could get a job. He used to go down south to help the people thresh down there, years ago when they had nothing, and then he'd come over when the threshing was all done in the south to make a few dollars. John Sypos gave them their first pig to get started with pigs, and I forget who gave them a hen to set on eggs, so that's how they started their chickens, and I forget how they got the cow.

Rosemary So that was the beginning of farming out here. How did he meet your mother?

Katherine I don't really know. Well, he went to Saskatchewan to see his cousin and somehow they met.

Rosemary/Katherine She [your mother] was born and raised in Saskatchewan. Do you remember how old you were when they moved from Anyox? Just a year, not quite even.

Rosemary And you were talking about how they got the land out here.

Katherine Yeah, there must have been an advertisement down there somewhere where you can get homesteads. For ten dollars, they got their homestead, their place, which they had to clear. There was nothing on it. Nothing. And they built that house, it was a log house. The county told me this ... he cut the logs on somebody else's place and he put the whole house together there and he numbered the logs. The guy said he never seen anything like that. They used to peel the logs with a hand peeler, then they put the house together and then when it was all together, they

took it down and hauled the logs to the place where they are now and put them back together again.

Rosemary/Katherine What a lot of work. Oh my goodness, yeah. And they were plastered with hot lime, mud, and straw. Do you remember anything about that lime whitewashing?

Rosemary I've heard of it.

Katherine It was white as white could be all the time. You have to get that hot lime. It would just boil when she [mom] was getting it ready. It would just bubble like you wouldn't believe. You wouldn't want to get any of that on your bare skin or anywhere on your hands, it would eat your skin. And the inside was plastered like that, too, and then whitewashed.

Rosemary/Katherine Was it a fairly large building? It had two rooms, maybe the size of my living room all together. There were two rooms, a kitchen and the other half was a bedroom.

Rosemary/Katherine So there was yourself, you were just one when you came? And then Annie is two and a half years younger than I am, and Mary is two years younger than Annie.

Rosemary/Katherine So the three girls? Yeah.

Katherine And I remember we got more cows. I can remember my mom making butter. We all had to make butter, it was hard. They had that one-pound butter thing, they would fill it up with butter, put it on butter paper, and take the butter to town and sell it. I have that butter mold. And they used to sell the butter because there wasn't enough cream to sell, and they couldn't get there either because they didn't have a way of getting there. I don't know how they managed.

Rosemary/Katherine You were saying that you used to go to town once a year? Once a year we went to town, in the summertime.

Katherine And my mom and dad, my mom went to town in December once every year. The days are short, and they went with horses and it was cold. And there was just the wood stove [at home] and they wouldn't let us have a fire in a wood stove. So, when we come home from school, before they got home from town, we went into the chicken house. They had a little bench there for us and they had a lantern hung up there, so it was light. And we sat there till they come home because it's warm in the chicken house.

Katherine And I remember our petticoats and panties were all made up of flour sacks, the colored flour sacks. Some of them had flowers or diagrams on them. Those were panties [laughs], and all the tea towels were flour sacks, the bed sheets were flour sacks, and the pillowcases were flour sacks.

Rosemary So your mother was quite a seamstress then?

Katherine Yeah, she sewed for the Schmelzles, they had a big family. She used to sew dresses for the kids for concerts. And the McKelveys, that was a big family too, and she used to sew some for them, too. And then she used to get clothes from a Free Press Weekly. You see all those ads in the back, and they used to be able to get good used clothes for next to nothing. I can remember sometimes she would get a bag in the mail, just humongous. There would be everything in there, coats and all kinds of things. Out of those big old coats, she made coats to fit us smaller guys. She used everything. There was no waste.

Rosemary I never heard of Free Press.

Katherine Free Press Weekly, we got that for years. I don't know if it's around anymore or not. They had terrific ads in the back, you know, three or four pages, and you could send for old clothes. Some of them were pretty good, but you would have to remodel them.

Rosemary/Katherine That's a real skill. Yeah, she did lots of sewing.

Rosemary/Katherine Did you girls take on some of it? I used to sew before, all kinds of things, but the last few years, not so much.

Rosemary/Katherine So homesteading was tough? Yeah, it was. Some people had what they called relief, but I don't know, my dad could never get anything for some reason. You have to have a pull from somewhere.

Rosemary/Katherine Was it just the three girls then? Yeah, that was the family.

Rosemary You were talking at one point about the early school and how you used to go across to the school and it was a long way.

Katherine Oh, yeah. There was lots of snow those years. Over the fence posts. And I always had to be the leader to make the track. We went to school in moccasins because they were light. In the wintertime, when we got to the school, the kids' lunches were frozen, so they had a great big barrel heater in the school to keep it warm, and we all put our lunches around the heater to thaw out for dinner.

Katherine Then when we got a little older, I got the janitor job at the school. My sister stayed with me and we weren't that old, but we did it for ten dollars a month. We had to clean the brushes, clean the blackboards, sweep the floors, and pack wood in for the next day for the big barrel heater. And then in the morning, we had to go get a pail of water from Rypiens for everybody to drink and wash their hands.

Rosemary/Katherine How far away was that? Maybe a little further than from here to the road, but that was a ways in the wintertime.

Katherine In the summer, my mom and I washed the school and scrubbed the floors and I forget what else we did. But, you know, the pay wasn't very much. Yeah, those were the days.

Rosemary/Katherine Are there some other things you remember about the school? Did the teachers change quite a bit? Yeah. Amelia McKelvey, she was our teacher. The first teacher we had was Katherine Rypien.

Katherine When I went to school, I did not know one word of English, not one word. We spoke Ukrainian at home all the time. But I did know the months of the year, and I knew the days of the week, and I could count (I forget how far), and I could write my name, but to speak in English for anything, forget it. I didn't know what to say. So, when I started school, they sat me with Josephine Rypien and she kind of helped me along. Isn't that something, that I did not know one word of English? She [Josephine] was pretty. She was nice. She was in grade eight.

Rosemary/Katherine So the school went up to grade eight or grade nine? Just grade eight, and sometime grade nine. I took my grade nine there, by correspondence.

Rosemary And you would have had Christmas concerts?

Katherine Oh, yeah, we had to make all the decorations for the Christmas tree. We had to get cones, I don't know what kind of tree cones, they must have been jack pine or something. They were about this big. They were hard like a rock, and we used to paint them gold and silver. And some of the cones would be off a spruce tree, they're different. And we made popcorn to string. We made all the decorations. We always had a Christmas concert.

Rosemary Anything special you remember about the Christmas concerts?

Katherine I remember one year we went with a wagon because there was no snow. Only one year I remember that we went with a wagon. No snow, but you know that was good. Everybody was there; they had lunch there for everybody after, and it was a nice get together. The concerts were pretty big.

Rosemary How many children would be in the school in those days?

Katherine The first school that I went to was made out of logs, and they had a teacherage built onto it, so the teacher stayed right in there. There must have been 30 kids or more, and she taught from grade one to grade eight, and I think that was really good. I learned lots. I can remember when she taught the other grades, the higher grades, you picked up lots from there. It was interesting.

Rosemary You were eavesdropping, so you're learning a whole lot more?

Katherine We had to learn math. I think every day or second day. We all had to line up, every grade separate, especially the younger grades. We had to learn our multiplication tables. I can add like you wouldn't believe, even now. I don't even have to stop on my numbers, but, you know, one day I took my bills to the bank about two years ago and the machines were down. Do you think those girls could add? Well, I said, "I don't want to come back to town just for that. Just add it up." And you know, they couldn't add it up. They can't add in the bank now. So, I said, "Can I add it?" She said, "How are you going to add it?" And I said, "I'll just add it in my head."

[Laughs] So I added it up. And, you know, they wouldn't do it because the machines were down. Isn't that something? They don't know no math.

Katherine Bailey and Christopher, the twins, when they started school, they couldn't do math to save their life. They just couldn't. He says, "We don't have to learn those things." Well, how are you going to ever know anything? So, then Earl started playing cards with them. They learned pretty good. And then Christopher was really good in math after this, and he liked it. But they thought they didn't have to learn anything.

Katherine When I was janitor at the school, every kid had a multiplication table glued to their desk and then they used these other little things after, and even now, I don't know, some of them can't do math.

Rosemary You know, I think the times table sort of went out of use for a while, and I think the kids really suffered.

Katherine Well, they sure don't know, those that work in the bank. Not one of them could or would add. They said they can't add it. And she said they never had to learn it. But we had to learn them, and the same thing with the multiplication. The teacher would bring a hard seven and three, and whoever got the right answer first got that point. So, I don't know just what, whatever, but anyway, we got something for it. We tried to be the best one and that's how we learned. But now they don't do that.

Rosemary/Katherine How about the spelling? Did you do the spelling bees and stuff like that? Yeah, we had spelling bees. Every grade would line up. They were kind of fun.

Rosemary/Katherine Did the school have a library? No. I forget what year it was when they built the new Youngville school, you know. It was built after that log one. Mary was going to school, so I must have been in about grade five maybe when they built the new school.

Rosemary/Katherine What was the name of that school? Youngville? Yeah. It's part of Calling Lake School now. They took it down there and added on to that school.

Rosemary/Katherine Was the school sort of like a community center? Did you have dances and things like that? We used to go to Sawdy hall for dances. That's where they had the box socials and dances and concerts and everything.

Rosemary Tell me about the box socials.

Katherine They had one every year. The aim was to raise money for something. The ladies had to make a lunch box, no matter what they did to it or how they made it or, you know, it was all kinds of fancy ones. They'd decorate it and put flowers on it, or whatever, out of tissue paper. And then they'd sell them to the guys at the dance, and whoever bought one box, that's the lady he had to have lunch with. [chuckles] It was fun. It was really hilarious.

Rosemary/Katherine And would they follow it up with a dance? Yeah, that was just before supper they'd sell them, and then they had a dance before supper and then they have supper, then they carry on. They were fun.

Rosemary You were telling me a bit about how you made your own toys, and you mentioned the barrels that you took the metal hoops off of.

Katherine Yeah, the barrels that my mom used to make sauerkraut. She used to make 45-gallon drums of sauerkraut. And that never spoils you know. In the wintertime, they just kept it in the building and you just had it all winter, and then eventually the barrels got rotten. So, we took the metal hoops from around them. I had the biggest one, my sisters had the two smallest ones, and that was my life. I never had a bike ever or anything, just those hoops. I'll never forget them. I told Donna, I said, "Put my old broken hook wired one in my coffin when I go." [laughs] I had it out a few years ago and it brought back memories. No matter where we went through the bush, through a path or anything, it would just follow, just go perfect.

Rosemary/Katherine You were just pushing it with your hand? Yeah. And then you kind of trotted behind it as fast as you pushed it, as fast as you went.

Rosemary/Katherine Like your own little sports thing, you're always running along with it, right? Yeah, we had lots of exercise.

Katherine And at night, lots of time in the winter, our thing to do at home, the three of us, by the lamplight on the wall, we'd make figures with our hands like a dog's head or a rabbit. We used to make lots of them. We did that for hours sometimes. That was a pastime.

Rosemary Earlier, you had a story about the baseball.

Katherine Well, when I was old enough, because we had no toys, just our hoops, and play fox and goose and run around. When I was old enough, I could figure out how to send to the Eaton's catalogue, so we girls made the order and I don't know how we got into town, but it did get to town and we got it.

Katherine So the next day after breakfast, after we got it, we went out to play just a little ways from the house. This was a ball and a baseball bat, and I don't know who was batting or who was pitching, but anyway, the ball went, first pitch, a foul ball, but it went high and when it was coming down it went like this at an angle and hit the upstairs window and it just smashed it to smithereens. And right down below on the main floor, my mom and dad were in the kitchen finishing their breakfast at a table by that window and they were watching us play ball. All that glass come down and we sure got heck. [laughs] We had to move away from the house, after. But funny, first bat, first pitch, oh it was a high foul ball and it was just spinning. To see it going like this straight into the window upstairs. It wasn't funny at the time.

Rosemary/Katherine It was funny, tragic? Yeah.

Rosemary And did you do a lot of baseball with your friends?

Katherine At school we used to have small ball games. And Walter Overholt had an old truck, because they had the mail there them days, and he had to go for mail every Saturday, but he would take us kids to Big Coulee, Laura School, Mercury, those schools. We would go back and forth, play ball. We all rode in the back, in an open truck.

Rosemary/Katherine You made your own fun, eh? In the summertime, another thing us kids had was a playhouse.

Rosemary/Katherine On the ground or in a tree? On the ground.

Katherine We made our own shelves out of stuff, whatever, and any old cans we could find and make mud pies and things and all kinds of things. There used to be a red weed that used to grow about this tall. It had these crooked things on it for flowers. They were just as red as red could be. And if you put them in milk, the milk absolutely turned rosy colored. So anyway, that worked until my mom caught us taking milk. [laughs] So that ended that. Anyway, we had the playhouse in the summer.

Rosemary Were you close enough to other children that you would get together with them at their place or they come over?

Katherine Not too much, but when I got bigger and was still going to school, there was Eddie Konior, Norman Overholt and Robert Overholt, McKelveys, Schmelzles, Katie Soluk. And I could make Spanish rice. I never made it since, but I made that hundreds of times, I think. And they would all come to our place for this Spanish rice, and that's all we had and we used to get together.

Katherine Every Saturday we'd go for mail, the kids did, at Walter Overholt's place. He brought it from town and everybody went and got their mail from him.

Rosemary You talked a bit about the ice well, and how you kept food cool.

Katherine I stayed lots of my later years, like 13, 14, 15, I stayed at Kobzeys'. They were my aunt and uncle. And she had cancer then. Oh, she was sick. So, they had five cows they milked. They had chickens and some things I forget now. But anyway, I stayed there, so Danny and I did the work. We milked the cows at night and in the morning before we went to school. So, we had to get up fairly early to milk five cows. But, boy, they gave a pail of milk apiece, and then we'd separate and then we had to take the cream down to the ice well, which was farther than from here to the road. He made the ice well in the muskeg there. I don't know how he got that ice in there, but it was all ice in there. I know a few times he said he spilled it [milk] in the bush because he said we couldn't make it to school. You know, they have to do that and then walk to school half a mile.

Rosemary/Katherine How deep would the ice well be? Oh, it must have been up to the top of those cupboards above the stove.

Rosemary/Katherine Oh, that's pretty high. Yeah, and it was just solid ice in the muskeg. Would be pretty close to maybe six, seven, eight feet deep. There was ice in there all summer.

Rosemary/Katherine Was it big enough that you could walk down into it? Yeah. Oh yeah. We went down in a few times. A few times Danny and I went down in there and we made ice cream. We nearly froze to death. [laughing]

Katherine And then Danny and I, we had to go for cows in the morning and at night. So anyway, I had a heifer that was kind of tame, not too wild. So, I used to ride her... I trained her to ride. And Danny had a steer. This heifer, one time, she got frisky when I got on her back and she ran, and she bucked and bucked me off right in a hole full of nettles. It kind of bugged my leg a little bit, so we didn't know what to do. We didn't want to limp, or Danny's dad would see us and give us heck. So, Danny said there's some horse medicine down in the basement. He said, maybe we can put some of that on. I said, well, that's fine, but it had a smell to it! So, when he [Danny's dad] come in the house, he said, who was using that medicine? [laughs] He wasn't stupid. He said, did you guys touch that medicine down there or anything? I just forget what we told him, but we did rub it on my leg, you know, because we thought it better get it better.

Katherine And, so that's what we did, you know. So, then he told us not to take so long getting the cows. He said, you guys were there for a long time, but we were riding those... I had a heifer and Danny had a steer. We could jump on their back and we had nothing on there, just the bare cow. [laughs]

Rosemary/Katherine So your leg, it [the horse medicine] worked for fixing your leg? Oh, well, yeah. We put it on anyway, but he knew, see. We didn't even think of that.

Rosemary That's a lot of work to do before you go to school?

Katherine That was a lot of work. And, you know, no matter where I stayed, I had to. When I was in grade ten, I stayed at Schmelzles' because I couldn't walk from there. There's no way I could ever get there [school]. I'd be dead in the snowbank somewhere, stuck. So, we would have to milk cows there too before we went to school.

Rosemary/Katherine So you'd be up at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning? Yeah, it was early. There was one time when I come home, one winter when I would go home on the weekend and come back Sunday evening.

Rosemary This is when you were a teenager?

Katherine When I was in grade ten. Yeah. There was one time I should have not made it because I left home sometime in the afternoon and it was already getting dark, and I still had a half a mile to go from that one corner to Schmelzles' and the snow was right up to your waist. And I remember walking one foot up and the other one would go right down to the bottom.

Katherine I got so warm, so warm that I thought to myself, boy, I should just lay down here, have a rest. It was so warm, and not far to Schmelzles'. But I thought maybe I better go because it's getting dark. Yeah, so I battled. That should have been the end of me that time, but it was just one foot down and the other one would go right to your bum, right down again. Boy, that was labor.

Rosemary How did you make progress? I mean, you're just...

Katherine Oh, it took me all afternoon to get there. And so when I got there, Mrs. Schmelzle said, "We didn't think you'd come." And I said, "You know, that crossroad is so blown in. I just about went to sleep there. I felt like it." Yeah, I know. It was terrible, you know.

Katherine And in the summer, I walked from home, morning and night.

Rosemary/Katherine Any idea how many miles that was?

Katherine Four and a half, five miles from our place. That was long, it was hard to go to school them days. Not like now. And one time when I was walking every morning and night in the summer, I was going on the old Peace River trail, that's the trail that I walked on. I had just come straight across and had about a half a mile more to go to Schmelzles, and these three big animals run out of the bush from the left side. They went to the right into the bush, and they stood in the middle of the road and they looked at me with their tongues hanging. I could see their eyes; I could see their teeth. They were just a little ways from me. One was a dark gray, and one was kind of whitish, and one was kind of beige. Huge things, healthy, pretty things. But I thought, what the heck is that? They just got out of Schmelzles' field. They had to be wolves. And they just looked at me and I stood and, you know, I was scared, and then they finally went, they finally went in the bush and I thought, well, I better go or I'm going to miss the bus. And I was scared to go past that spot where they went in the bush. So, when I got to Schmelzles', Mrs. Schmelzle said, "God, what happened to you? You're as white as a ghost." I said, "Well, something came out on the road there. They weren't dogs. I was so close to them, I could see their teeth, they were panting, tongues hanging out. Pretty!" But boy, did that scare me, and I thought they were wolves.

Rosemary/Katherine Did you have any other run-ins with them [wolves]? No, just that one time.

Rosemary Katherine has made some notes about some of the things she's remembered in the last week or so.

Katherine Okay, this was our "pop" because we never, ever seen bought pop or knew there was such a thing. We would go to the well and get a pail of ice-cold water, come to the house and fill a two-liter jar almost full, put a little vinegar and sugar in it, stir it, and put a little bit of baking soda in it. We had to stir it fast and get the lid on the jar or else it would all fizzle out on the cupboard. And that was our pop all the time. It was good. I can't remember the right amount of ingredients, but we didn't have to measure because we made it so often.

Katherine We had no bought toys, we just had a stick horse. We had all kinds of fun with that stick horse. We put it in the barn, and we'd gallop with it and whatever, including fighting horses with it. We just had a great time. And we played hide-and-go-seek among the five-foot bushy willows. There were just hundreds of those little willows, and we'd play hide-and-go-seek in there, that was every day.

Katherine We made mud pies galore. Some of them turned out super good, some not. [laughs] In the summer, we had a playhouse outside by the granary and we had all kinds of different pretend dishes made in tin cans, everything we could find. And we made different food from sweets and seeds and grasses and you name it, and when mother wasn't around, we'd go in the granary and get some skim milk and mix over our pretend food. That was great and we got all kinds of different colored food. That worked until my mom caught us, and that was the end of that. [laughs]

Katherine We milked cows, so we had lots of cottage cheese, cream, milk, buttermilk, sour milk, sour cream. My dad's favorite was sour milk and fried potatoes and butter. The sour milk used to get so thick you could cut it with the knife.

Katherine When he worked in the field in the summer with the horses, and when he'd come in for dinner, lots of times he just went in the chicken house, got some eggs, and just down the hatch they went, and that was his meal. Lots of the farmers would do that.

Katherine Everybody had poverty food, and our poverty food was broken up bread in a soup bowl sprinkled with a little sugar and poured boiling milk over top of that. It was good. We had that many, many times. We had homemade cereal for breakfast.

Katherine Hundreds of times we would have this Ukrainian cereal. Here is the recipe for it. Scald four cups of milk. Put together one cup flour, a quarter teaspoon salt, and one slightly beaten egg, and rub together until a coarse texture is formed. Gradually add flour mixture to the scalded milk, stirring constantly. Cover and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Serve hot with white or brown sugar, and more milk may be added if preferred. This was a very good meal.

Katherine Perogies was another meal made with just potato filling and sour cream.

Katherine We picked lots of blueberries in the fall and we had to walk many, many miles, all the way to Pine Grove Estates to pick the blueberries, and then we had to walk miles back home again packing a few pails home. Our arms would be stretched to the ground.

Katherine Our mom and dad had cows and pigs in the later years, plus chickens, and everyone had some geese and ducks. The geese made our blankets and made our pillows.

Katherine In the winter, the ladies got together and stripped the coarse feathers. We went to different places every time. We'd always go in the evening, strip the feathers, and warm up. Quite a few of us ladies would go.

Rosemary And those are probably the best pillows you've ever had?

Katherine I've still got some of those feather ticks, and honestly, no matter how cold it was, those big eiderdowns, they weren't sewed in the middle or anything. They were just filled with feathers. And boy, you could sleep outside. You don't get cold. They were great.

Katherine We didn't need that much money because we had no money. We just got everything off the place. My mom always had a big garden, a terrific garden, and we would can jars and jars, even canned moose meat and chickens, because there were no fridges. Our fridge was put everything in a big bucket and hang it down the well, so then it would stay cold. Otherwise, we had to can everything.

Rosemary/Katherine That canned chicken was really good, too, wasn't it? Sure, it was good. Yeah, everything, even canned moose meat was really good, you know, fried up with onions. I was surprised at how good it used to be.

Rosemary So listening to that recipe, the only thing you'd have to buy would be the sugar. Is that right?

Katherine Yeah. Then when the war come, everything, the sugar and that, was all on rationing. Everything, coffee, everything was rationed. So, then people turned to honey. One guy started the honey, he had a bunch of beehives, so he sold honey, too. So that was when we were growing up. So where do we go to next?

Rosemary I'm intrigued by the threshing gang.

Katherine Did I say before that the guys slept in the straw stacks? No, well when threshing time came, it was always about eight to ten guys, and there's no place you could put them. Lots of the guys we had came from farther away. They just brought a blanket from home and they slept in the straw stack. They said that was nice and warm. In the morning, we had to have breakfast ready at eight o'clock for everybody, and they would go to work, and then they had coffee about ten o'clock, and then dinner, and then lunch at four o'clock, and then they threshed till late. So, we always had to take lunch out. Earl would always stay behind for some reason. [laughs] He would stay back. We were still going to school yet.

Katherine He always played this record The Dawn Waltz; he played it all night to one o'clock in the morning before he would go to bed. That kept on for a few years like that, never ever thought anything of it. So that's where I met Earl. He once told me that he had me picked out a long time ago, but I don't know if he was telling the truth or not, or just saying that. Every year I'd get a Christmas card from him and all it would say is "Remember The Dawn Waltz?" [laughs]

Katherine So when I went to school, to town, I'd have to walk home, about six or seven miles, morning and night to go to the Swanberg store. And Paul Kavulok had a truck, just a truck with the roof on top, no heat or anything. And that's how we drove to town.

Katherine One time in the fall I was walking and stopped at Schmelzles' and would walk with those kids. And this one time I was walking and maybe about 30 or 40 feet

from me, these three big things ran across the road and that scared me. One was kind of blackish, one was kind of a whitish, and one was kind of a brownie color. And they all looked at me. They were close enough that I could see their teeth and their eyes. I just stood there. And I said, "What big dogs!" But, you know, they were wolves. And then I was scared to go on. After they went in the bush, I was scared to go past where they were, so I was kind of late when I got to Schmelzles'. Mrs. Schmelzle said, "Gee, you're just snow white!" Yeah, I said, something came across the road, three BIG things and they had to be wolves.

Katherine Then after that, that was the end of my school. That was grade 10. It was too hard to go to school those days.

Katherine Earl and I met and started going out together after that. We were married in 1949, December the 9th. That was the first day we could walk across the river on the ice. Charlie Parker met us on the other side, and then Flo Swanberg took us to town, to the river. And we had a dance at Sawdy hall. I think that was the last dance there.

Katherine Then we just lived on the farm, where we farmed right from scratch. Neither one of us had two pennies to rub together, but somehow we made it.

Rosemary Did you buy land of your own, or were you on some rental?

Katherine We had this land here, it was Earl's mom's and dad's place. He was born when his mom was 46. He said he never had a childhood because all the Devlins' and Carlsons' kids were all playing and hollering, and he had to be in bed at eight o'clock. He never, ever made his kids go to bed. He said he'll never forget that he had to go to bed at eight o'clock when everyone else is playing and hollering and the sun was still shining.

Katherine He had to pay for this because his dad was old, in his 80s, when he [Earl] got married. His mom was too, so they couldn't do nothing.

Rosemary Did you build your own house?

Katherine No. We lived wherever we could find a roof. That one that's fallen down, just up the road there, we lived there for a year and a half. Then Eddie Konior brought us a little shack from someplace west of Baptiste Lake. They used it for camp for people working in the bush, it was not very good. What was a kitchen and a bedroom then is now our two bedrooms. We still have it. We added on five times to our house.

Katherine There was no power, no phones. It was different than now. Somehow we made it. That's why I still save everything. Yeah, there's a use for everything.

Katherine We always had chickens. Two years after we were married we got chickens; at 20 [years] and I still have them. I think this is it for my chickens.

Rosemary/Katherine I didn't realize you still had chickens? I still got a few. If I could get rid of them right now, I would.

Rosemary And when did your first child come along? It was Ron that's the oldest?

Katherine Yeah, Ron was born in 1951, Donna was born in 53, Debbie in 57, Sandy in 60, and Wayne in 63. It was a busy household, but you know, Earl never told his kids to EVER go to bed. I used to be treasurer or secretary or something at Fairhaven Hall for years and we'd have meetings there. And Earl was home with the kids, and they were school days. One time the meeting was down that way, so I came up on this road, and I saw the whole house was lit up. It was 11:30, and I thought, what the heck. I could see heads above the windows in the lights, just bobbing and flying around. I thought, what are they doing? So just by the time I drove from there down to here and parked and got in the house, there was not a soul around. It was deader than a doornail, and no lights on, and Earl sitting in this chair reading. And I said, "Are the kids in bed?" And he said, "Oh yeah, a long time ago." I never said anything. But so he never, ever told his kids to go to bed. He said it was terrible when all those kids were playing so early, and at eight o'clock, he had to be in bed. Well, there was not one squeak out of nobody after I got in. I couldn't figure out how that happened. Yeah, those were the days.

Rosemary/Katherine Kids must have loved it when dad was babysitting? Yeah, that time, when I saw the lights, I thought, "Holy smokes, no one is in bed, yet." I could see heads just running around in the house and boy, they were in bed by the time I came in.

Rosemary And when did you start doing the baking and all that that you do now? I mean, you're still going to the market?

Katherine I've still been baking. I catered for about 40 years. Just the last two years, I haven't catered. I catered weddings. I found a piece of paper when I was doing my income tax and I got those couple months every weekend. There was a wedding or something for 40 years. And the farmers' market, I did that ever since they had one, some at Fairhaven. I always went to the farmers' market.

Rosemary/Katherine And you enjoy it, don't you? Must be the cooking part, I guess, I don't know.

Rosemary So, Katherine, what were some of the other things you thought of?

Katherine When we were small, another thing was that we had no toys. But at night, by lamplight, when there were shadows on the wall, we used to sit on the bed and make dog heads, cats, rabbits. We were pretty good at it. Figures out of your fingers, like the shadows... we used to do that every night in the wintertime.

Katherine When everybody went to bed, I used to sit and paint by the coal oil lamp. I just loved drawing and I still like it. Everyone would be in bed and I'd be drawing something.

Katherine Did I say about that janitor job and the things we did at the school?

Rosemary Not much, no.

Katherine Oh, well, when I was a little bit older, about grade seven or something, my sisters and I did the janitor job. We had to pack wood for those big barrel heaters for the next day and sweep the floors and clean the brushes and blackboards and wash the desks if they needed it. We had to walk to get water from the neighbors. For ten dollars a month.

Rosemary/Katherine Wow, was that ten dollars for all your sisters? Yeah.

Rosemary/Katherine So it wasn't ten dollars each? Oh no. Ten dollars. That's how bad the times were.

Rosemary/Katherine So you'd be hauling the water in pails? Yeah, we'd have to take a pail from the school and go to Rypiens' and pump it out of the well to take back to the school.

Katherine I stayed at my uncle's and my aunt's, I worked there since I was 14. I actually stayed there to milk cows before school. It was early that we had to milk the cows and take the cream down to the ice well, and then take the cows back to pasture and then walk half a mile to school from there. We always had to bring the milk cows home in the summer because they used to go out to pasture, which was about two miles away. It was a rented piece of land where you can pasture your cows and you had to put a fence around it. Every day in the summer we had to go for the cows, milk them, and then take them back to pasture.

Katherine And my mom had lots of pigs and she used to grow lots of potatoes, so she would cook potatoes in a big barrel outside and mix it with the grain. And that's how they fed the pigs. Not so expensive.

Katherine Shall I start off now when Earl and I got married?

Katherine Okay, so when we were going out, we had no vehicle, so we used to walk. There were no phones either. So, we would leave home at the same time. He'd leave from up here and I'd leave from my home and we'd meet halfway up the old Peace River trail, the original Peace River trail. Then we'd always come here and then at night we'd go home on the tractor. We had a little Ford tractor, so that was our car. [laughs]

Katherine Then we got married on December the 9th, 1949. It was the first day we could walk across the river in our shoes. There was no snow. It was a beautiful, sunny day. It was a beautiful day, so Flo Swanberg took us to the river from here and Charlie Parker met us on the other side and picked us up and took us to church. The supper was at my mother and dad's place. And from there, we all went to Sawdy hall. In those days, there was no such thing as an invitation to a wedding dance. Everybody went, whoever wanted to go to the dance. And it was just packed. Then when everyone was leaving to go home at about two o'clock in the morning, they went out, then they all came back in. It was just a blizzard; it snowed and blew and there were drifts. Guys couldn't go back [home]. We couldn't drive home. And it just turned cold that night. Lots of the guys had their vehicles froze up because they didn't have antifreeze in them, as there was water in them. So, we didn't get home

until the next day because we couldn't get home. And how it snowed that night. We couldn't get out from the hall to my mother's place because it was drifted in. It was just kind of a wild storm.

Katherine And it got so cold for two months. We got married December the 9th and it wasn't until February the 7th before the weather warmed up. You could walk and you could hear your breath crack. It would freeze. That was how cold it was.

Katherine My mom and dad gave us two heifers for our wedding present. The next spring, when they had calves, one of the heifers had twins, so that was the start of our cows. We got some turkey eggs from my mom, just hens, pluckers. We'd have lots of turkeys. You'd have to put a bell on a turkey if you want to know where they would lay, because they would always go way out into the bush somewhere. Then we got chickens. I've had laying hens for 66 years this year. I said they were our kids. [laughs] It was not much money, but it was a little bit for the kids' schoolbooks, their clothes, and everything. And I can remember that when we got married, Earl smoked. They used to have those packages of tobacco that used to fit in their shirt, and they were only, I think, 69 cents or something. And I know we didn't have enough money to scratch up. We had to really scratch in the house to find 69 cents so he can go buy a package of tobacco. That's how poor the times were. And it didn't hurt us any. I think it did us good.

Rosemary/Katherine Were there other things that gave you cash besides the eggs? Earl worked in the bush every winter.

Rosemary/Katherine I was thinking the farm produce? No, a little bit of grain, maybe.

Rosemary/Katherine Milk? Oh, we had milk but we didn't sell it. It took us a few years to get more milk cows.

Katherine Like I said, we just had a little two room shack that was up north of Baptiste Lake and we got it pulled in. This was one [shack] for the guys that used to cut logs and trees in the bush in the wintertime. It wasn't in use, so we bought that. Eddie Konior pulled it to our place with a cat [caterpillar]. So, we fixed it up and we were there for quite a few years. Then we added the living room on, and then we added this part on, and then we dug the basement and pulled the house on the basement and it just fit perfect. That guy McGee was the carpenter did that. He sure did a good job. It just fit perfect. It was Lupuls that moved the house onto the basement and they only charged \$400 and some. They were here for a few days, too.

Rosemary Lots of history in that house?

Katherine It's been built on five times, otherwise maybe it wouldn't have been quite so big. When we built the living room on, that was when the river flooded, and Richards had lumber there by the river. It was flooded, so it went for sale and we bought that lumber to build that part on. We got shavings, which didn't cost anything, to put in instead of insulation shavings, and they're still good. So that was how we got our house.

Katherine In the wintertime, Earl always worked in the lumber camps out toward Calling Lake with Rypiens, Artymys or somebody else. It was hard work, and then I cooked in the camp for three winters, and my goodness, what they have now to work with! We had a wood stove to cook at Koniors', and the stove was so old and there was not even a side where you would put the wood in to burn. And that's how I cooked, I think for 15 to 20 guys every day, breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper.

Rosemary/Katherine Was that when the children were young? I just had the two.

Rosemary/Katherine Would you take them to the camp? Yeah.

Katherine Then we had more cattle, so Earl stayed home to look after that.

Katherine It was sure tough cooking, you know. There was no water in the camps, no nothing. And I worked there for three years and only got \$120 a month. So that was not very good wages compared to now, but it helped. It was a dollar. And so I did that for three years and then I stayed home.

Katherine We always had a big garden, and we always canned. I had a recipe for a hamburger thing with vegetables, and you'd can it. It was a meal for the kids all the time. Oh, was it ever good. I used to can about 70, 80 quarts of that every fall. Hamburger was only three pounds for a dollar then, and we canned jars and jars. And another one we canned lots was maybe 100 quarts of soup. You'd just put in all your vegetables from the garden when they were ready. I think we had to buy tomato juice or something for it, and that's it. That was a very hearty soup, all vegetables and maybe a little bit of rice or pearl barley, I just forget, but it was good. I canned that for years and years and years, and canned other vegetables and everything. Always had a big garden and lots of canning.

Katherine Lots of picking blueberries on the sand. We had to walk about six miles with these pails of blueberries to get home. But we canned blueberries galore. In fact, I still have two quarts of blueberries canned and they're sitting on the top of my shelf and they look as good as the day I put them in there. I don't want to touch them; I want to see how long they'll keep. And I had three quarts of peas and carrots canned. And I thought, golly, that was still before we got the power. Since the power I haven't done that. So about ten years ago I opened one jar? I said to Earl, "Let's see if it's any good or not. They're just as nice and orange and green in the jars as could be." And it was really good, just perfect. And so the other two jars are sitting beside the blueberries. I'm going to see how long they're going to stay there.

Katherine But everything was in jars, there was no power for a deep freeze. And then as the years went by, we got more stuff and whatever. And got more land, went in the hole, got all this stuff and we had to work to pay for it. Yeah.

Katherine And I baked bread. When the five kids were all home and all going to school at the same time, for a period there, I baked 100 pounds of flour a month. It all went too, boy. We baked bread in the old wooden stove. It was really good. And we had our own milk, our own cream, sour milk, sour cream, buttermilk, butter,

whatever. So that didn't cost us nothing. And we were happy those days. The house was warm, the roof didn't leak, and we had lots to eat.

Katherine We had five children. Ron is 67 now, Donna is 64, Debbie is 60, Sandy is 57 and Wayne is 53.

Katherine We started off with a little two-room building, then we built on five times through the years. The last addition was when we made the basement and got movers, Lupul moving outfit from Edmonton, to pull the house on to the basement. Fit just perfect. It was lots of hard work, but it was good.

Katherine Lots of work for the kids. Sandy said she can remember podding a tub of peas. She said she'll never forget that. But there was food for everybody.

Katherine And now Earl has passed away in 2005 and I'm still here. I don't know what I'll be doing. Yeah, it's kind of a sad situation.

Rosemary You've just finished making up how many loaves of Easter bread?

Katherine Oh God. I just baked for two weeks straight and I think I'm going to have to quit it because boy, I've got arthritis in my thumbs, so they hurt. My back is no good. I'm worn out. So, I don't know what's going to happen.

Rosemary People can't stay away from you because it's all so good, the things that you make. I think you usually sell out completely at the market, don't you?

Katherine Pretty well, yeah. There was one market not so much, a while ago, but pretty well. There is some guy that comes in... next time he comes in I'm going to ask him who he is. I don't know what his name is, but he came about halfway through and he just about cleaned my table off. But I don't know who he is.

Rosemary/Katherine When you say the market, you're talking about every two weeks at the Multiplex? Yeah, at the Multiplex. I don't go to the river. It's too hard. I'm scared to even drive, it's tight in there. So, then I'm free in the summertime, which is kind of good, too.

Rosemary/Katherine In terms of the things you're putting out on those market days, you're doing everything from baking, and it's also the little cabbage rolls and perogies? And when I had eggs, I used to take eggs, too, oh, they all want the eggs. I said, "No, no more eggs."

Rosemary/Katherine I think the last time I was here, you had about 100 perogies in the freezer? I took some to the market and they all went. Cabbage rolls all went.

Rosemary/Katherine You are still enjoying living out here, though, aren't you? Yeah, well, I hate to go anywhere, but, you know, I can't do nothing outside and it's kind of gone to heck.

Rosemary Doesn't look bad to me.

Katherine Oh, it's terrible for what it used to be. I can't cut the grass no more. And the last couple years, I can't walk in the garden for some reason, in that soft soil. If somebody would have told me that a few years ago, I would never have believed it. But honest to God, I cannot walk in the dirt in the garden. It's not firm enough. I said I'll fall down there if I don't watch it. You know, that was all my garden out there. Yeah. That used to be all into garden. But last year that storm wrecked everything. It was Bennetts and me and Bill Ells, Rosalee and Tommy, and little Harvey there... we had no garden. Oh, that was a terrible storm. It took the roof off the little house that we have in the back, took that right off, half of it was on the north side, and the other half of it was on the south side. So, you could see how it was twisting. Broke all these trees up here, and the lightning hit my house.

Katherine It was already finished because I looked out the window to see what's doing, and there was nothing. I sat on the chair there and all of a sudden a crack come, and it was not just a crack of thunder, it was something in the attic. Just like a bulldozer up in there, you know. And I actually got scared and I got out of the kitchen because I thought the ceiling was falling down. After it quieted down, then the lights started going down, down, down. I had no lights. I had to get an electrician, and the wires were all burnt inside there to the light. They were all burnt. I didn't know, but I've never even heard a crack like that, ever. That was scary.

Rosemary Did he figure it was lightning?

Katherine Oh, it was lightning. I lost my fridge. This one and the other one in the porch and burnt the light out... it's scary. I never, ever in my life heard a racket like that. The ceiling is warped too, now. When he came to fix the light, it didn't fit against the ceiling and he said that maybe he didn't tighten the screws. So, he took it all apart again, but the screws were tight. He says, you know, your ceiling is warped. Well, that was from that crack.

Rosemary/Katherine Any other things you'd like to say, or is that pretty well enough? Yeah. Maybe we should just finish.

Rosemary They are wonderful stories, Katherine.

Katherine There's likely some I missed, but you can't tell... [laughs]

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Kathy Ponto
Proof-read by: Rosemary Neaves
March, 2021