

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Steve Kamelchuk recording 2017.mp3
http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/s_kamelchuk.htm

Narrator: Steve Kamelchuk
Interviewer: Al Wurfel
February 2, 2017

[Start of Interview]

AI Today, it's February the 2, 2017. This is Al Wurfel, and I'm interviewing Steve Kamelchuk in his house in Athabasca. Steve, could you start by giving us your full name?

Steve Okay, my name is Steve Kamelchuk. My wife's name is Helen Mary. I was born in Prosperity Alberta on July 1, 1934. So this makes my age at the present time at 82. My dad's name was Mike. My mother's name was Pearl and my wife's name is Helen Mary. Her maiden name was Mischuk. She went to high school in Plamondon, Alberta. We met in Grassland in 1959 and we were married in 1960. We have four children who are adults. All four married, all four employed. Next question now.

AI So, Steve, first question, I guess, were your parents born in Canada?

Steve No, both my parents were born in the Ukraine. Dad came to Canada in 1914, just before the break of the First World War, and my mother came to Canada in 1929.

AI So you were born on a farm.

Steve I was born on a farm. Prosperity, Alberta, in a two-room log house, no power, no running water, no gas, very primitive kind of conditions.

AI Were they primitive for those days, though, was that usual?

Steve They were probably typical for people in the area at that time, but according to today's standards, they were pretty primitive because we didn't have any of the so-called modern facilities. My mother was assisted by a neighbour lady. She was not a trained nurse, but she assisted the neighbour ladies when they were in labour.

AI What are some of your first memories about life on that farm?

Steve Looking back on things now, things were quite primitive, no modern facilities. It was a lot of hard work in clearing land, planting gardens, carrying water, cutting wood, cleaning out the barns and so on, feeding a few cows and pigs and chickens. It was a lot of hard work, but that was a way of life at that time.

AI Did you have brothers and sisters?

Steve There were four boys in the family. No sisters. My second brother, William by name, passed away in 1954 at age 21. It was a very sad time in our life. My two other brothers, John and Mike, are still farming in the Prosperity area.

AI So can you recall some of the chores and things you had to do on that farm?

Steve There were always plenty of chores to do. We had to cut wood, sometimes by hand, sometimes with a power machine, split the wood, carry it into the house. Heating was done by an airtight heater and the stove, there was no electricity. We had to carry water by pail or with cream cans on a sled for a distance of about maybe three to four hundred yards. We had to clean out the barn every second day. There were horses and cows in the barn. We had to bring hay and straw for feed for them. We had to shovel snow as usual. In the summertime, of course, we worked out in the fields and we always planted a big garden, including lots of potatoes. There was always plenty of work to do.

AI So you planted a big garden. Do you remember ever having a shortage of food around?

Steve There was never a shortage of food. There may have been, according to today's standards, a lack of variety of food. But we can't say that we were hungry. We always had potatoes, carrots, we had chickens. We had our own cows. So there was milk, cream, eggs. There was plenty of food.

AI You went to school where?

Steve We had a school called Hammond School, which was from grades one to six. It was located about two and a half miles from our home. So we walked to school, my brothers and myself, we walked a distance of a little over two miles there and back every day for ten years, up to grade 10. And that was as far as that school went. After that, you had to leave the area to go to school someplace else.

AI You folks walked to school when it was like 40 below.

Steve It made no difference, ten below, 40 below, we walked all the time and we never missed school because of the cold weather. And that's true. So even if it was 40 below, we walked.

AI Can you remember some of the things that happened at school? Like, what did you do at recess?

Steve School in general was a fun place to be. Of course, we had lots of friends and we used to meet up on the road when we'd be walking to school. On the way there, we would maybe set a few traps for weasels and squirrels, and set snares for rabbits and check them on the way home. During recess and noon hours in school and in the summertime, we played softball. In the wintertime, we played hockey. We had no skates, of course, so we just ran with ordinary outdoor boots and homemade sticks. But it was a form of entertainment. We were always busy.

AI Do you think school was as much fun then as it is now or ...

Steve Oh, it's hard to say if it was as entertaining then as now, but it was never, never boring. We in general liked school. We did our homework. We enjoyed being in school. It was a good place to be.

AI So you did your homework at home in the evenings?

Steve We did some homework at home in the evening. There was really no homework before, let's say, grade four. But after that, we had some, usually mathematics – arithmetic – and some reading to do. So we did that at home by a coal oil lamp because we had no electricity. So it was a little difficult, but we managed.

AI Coal oil lamp?

Steve Coal oil lamp, right.

AI So about what time would you shut it down and go to bed?

Steve Well, it was a coal oil lamp with a wick that you would turn up, you light that and it would burn and there was a glass shade over that, and the light was not that bright but if you sat close to the lamp, you could manage to read and write.

AI So, because of the fact that there were no lights, no TV, you would go to bed earlier than nowadays, wouldn't you?

Steve Generally speaking, yes, because at that time we had no TV. As a matter of fact, we didn't even have a radio. We got our first radio when I was about maybe grade six or seven. And of course, it was a battery-powered radio so we had to be kind of conservative with its use because the battery pack would only last about six months and it was around fifteen dollars to replace, so the radio was not on at all times. And so we would go to bed usually between nine and ten o'clock in the evening.

AI And you'd be up ... ?

Steve We'd get up in the morning about 7:30 or so, make a fire in the heater, warm the place up, have breakfast and trudge off to school.

AI Okay. So you went to that school until about grade ten, you said.

Steve Grades one to ten in Hammond School. I was in grade ten in 1951. After that, I had to go elsewhere and that happened to be high school in Athabasca.

Steve How would you get there?

Steve Well, there were no school busses at that time, so we had to arrange for accommodation in a place called the Athabasca Hostel, which was a building about half a block away from the old Brick School. It accommodated about 15 boys, boys

like myself from the outside area. We stayed there, we had a few chores to do and went to the Brick School.

AI How many classrooms did they have in the Brick School at that time?

Steve There were, as I recall, about maybe eight or nine classrooms and it was quite, quite modern, I would say, we had various teachers for various subject areas. No, no real problem with it, with the school situation.

AI How often did you get home?

Steve We didn't go home very often because we were, like, about 30 miles from the home place. My parents did not have a vehicle at that time, so they would not come to town to pick us up. Occasionally we would catch a ride with somebody from the Prosperity area, probably on a Friday night and come back on Sunday. But that didn't happen too often, maybe once every three or four weeks, thereabouts.

AI So what would you do in your spare time in Athabasca, or did you have spare time?

Steve Well, we had some spare time. In the summertime, I would look for odd jobs like painting fences, digging gardens, sweeping out basements. The pay was not great, it was only twenty-five cents an hour at that time, but we were thankful to get a job like that at that time. Other than that we did homework, or else we'd go out on the school ground, which was close by, and we would play catch with the baseball, and had a homemade softball team.

AI So that would have been the Athabasca softball team?

Steve Something like that, yeah.

AI Did you ever travel to play other teams or ... ?

Steve Oh, yes, we did, we occasionally played ball against Amber Valley. We played against Grassland. The teachers would prearrange a meeting like that maybe once every three or four weeks. And that was fun to do that.

AI So then you graduated from the Athabasca school about ... ?

Steve I graduated from the Brick School in 1953. At that time, I remember in the yearbook, there was a statement that that was the largest graduating class in the history of Athabasca. There were 34 of us in the graduating class of 1953.

AI And then what?

Steve And then I went to the U of A [University of Alberta], in Edmonton of course, to register in an education program. I registered in what was then known as the 'TL' Temporary License program, which qualified a teacher to teach grades one to nine at that time. I put in one year at the U of A at that time.

AI How did you pay for that?

Steve Money was very tight, of course, and so I applied for a bursary from the County of Athabasca. They gave me \$300 to pay tuition and help with some of the room and board, but that obligated me to teach in the County of Athabasca for two years after I came out of university, which I did.

AI So that was a one-year program?

Steve It was.

AI What did you do after the end of the program?

Steve It was a one-year program, and so after I came out of there, I came out of the U of A in May, I applied for a job in Imperial Mills for May and June, teaching there. That was my actual first teaching job, May and June. And after that, in September, I went to Smith School, which is in the west end of the county, and I taught there for one year.

AI Any memories about Imperial Mills?

Steve Imperial Mills was a very primitive kind of community, no facilities of any kind. There was a two-room school there. It was a store, a post office, and we were located right on the railway going to Fort McMurray.

AI What was the economic activity then?

Steve The economic activity of most of the people employed there was working in the lumber yard, cutting trees, working sawmills.

AI I see. So you got there on the train?

Steve No, my brother drove me there with a truck. It was a very rugged kind of road, but he drove me there in the first part of May, and I stayed there for the two months. No vehicle.

AI Where did you live?

Steve There was a teacherage there. And actually there was another teacher with me. I had grades one and two, and Mr. Sykes had grades three to eight. So it was a two-room school, and we lived in a teacherage that was provided by the County of Lac La Biche at that time.

AI So can you remember when you lived in that teacherage, like, who did the cooking, how did that all work?

Steve Well, the teacherage was very primitive, it was basically a lumber shack. We had a wood stove, and Mr. Sykes and I cooked together. We didn't cook anything fancy. We would get an odd fish from the local creek. We would have fish and we

would cook potatoes. There was a grocery store. We would buy things like sugar, coffee, tea. It was not a fancy lifestyle, to say the least.

AI What kind of money did you make for those two months?

Steve The pay at that time was, if I remember correctly, \$1,900 a year for a teacher, so the monthly cheque would have been somewhere around \$140, something in that neighbourhood, I don't recall exactly, but in the neighbourhood of \$140 a month.

AI So how much did you have left over after paying groceries and the teacherage?

Steve Didn't have very much left over because groceries – we had to pay for groceries and a few little odds and ends. So basically, it was not a money-making scheme, not by any means.

AI You got some experience.

Steve Yeah.

AI So you spent the summer on the farm then?

Steve Well, no, I didn't spend the summer in the farm. I knew a man in Edmonton who was a carpenter and I worked with him during the months of July and August, building houses. In fact, he kind of pioneered my carpentry days and I learned a few techniques in house building. And I managed to, in fact, build a few homes after that on my own. So I spent the summers with this man.

AI So then in the fall you went to the County of Athabasca. Where did you say you taught that year?

Steve Well no, I didn't go to the town. I went to Smith my first full year after Imperial Mills was in Smith. I taught grades seven and eight for one year, 1954. And after that year, I went back to University of Alberta for an additional three years to obtain my degree.

AI Anything or any memories of Smith?

Steve Smith was a nice, nice enough place, but again, I was grounded, I had no car, no vehicle to get around with so I was basically confined to the little teacherage in which I lived and the school. And it was a kind of a lonely existence at that time.

AI So you spent the whole one year there?

Steve I spent a whole year there. Right. And the pay was not very rewarding. If I remember correctly, the take home pay was \$147 a month. So after putting in the full year, I decided that either I go back to get my degree to increase the pay or change jobs. And what I did, of course, is I went back for three more years at the U of A. And after I came back from U of A, I put in a full year in the town of Athabasca teaching at the high school here.

AI And what did you teach?

Steve Well, I was basically a science teacher, so I taught chemistry, biology and some mathematics.

AI So that covered your obligation to the county for the \$300?

Steve Yes, yes. I was obligated for two years to teach in the county, which I fulfilled that obligation, yes. And after that, I moved to Edmonton and I put in one year in the Edmonton Separate School Board teaching grades seven and eight there, and shortly after that, of course, we got married and the first year after being married, I went to teach in Lamont, Alberta, which is roughly 40 miles east of Edmonton. I was in the high school there, same thing with math and the sciences. It was in many ways a very sad year because that was the year that the train hit a school bus loaded with children. Seventeen students were killed. So it was not a very good year for me. At the end of that year, we moved to the town of Devon. There was an ad for a teacher in Devon and we applied there and moved to Devon, and I taught in Devon High School for six years.

AI Same subjects?

Steve The subjects were the same. I was basically a science teacher – chemistry and biology and some mathematics. And after that, I moved to a private college, a place southwest of Edmonton, a place called Holy Redeemer College, which was a Catholic institute run by the Catholic priests. Their intention was to recruit boys that would eventually join the priesthood. And so I got a job there as a regular high school teacher, and I was there for three years. After that, there was talk that that college is going to shut down, so I looked around and I found a job in Lac La Biche. I moved to Lac La Biche with my family in 1969, and we stayed in Lac La Biche for 20 years, teaching the same thing, basically the math and the sciences.

AI You must have enjoyed Lac La Biche if you were there for 20 years.

Steve Oh, it was okay. Yes, it was a prosperous little town. Yes, we enjoyed it there. After 20 years of course, I retired. I had by that time, I already had 30-some plus years of teaching experience. My age was 55. And at that time you could retire at age 55 with 30 years of experience. So that is what I did – I retired and lived in Athabasca – in Lac La Biche for one year, basically just enjoying life, and then we moved to Athabasca where we are at the present time.

AI Did you basically quit doing any work after you quit?

Steve Well, no. In the meantime, I bought some land and I started to farm. I used to farm after school and in the summertime and in July and August in the Prosperity area, not too far from where my brothers farmed. So I was always busy. I was farming and I built a couple of houses in the meantime. So I was never unemployed.

AI So could you tell us about family life in Lac La Biche?

Steve Family life was okay. We had our four children with us at that time in Lac La Biche. I taught all four of my kids in the high school various subjects, including chemistry and biology. They all graduated – no, all three of them graduated from high school in Lac La Biche. Carmen graduated from high school in Athabasca in 1990. Life was busy in Lac La Biche between teaching, building and farming. I was very busy.

AI What kinds of family things would you do in Lac La Biche?

Steve Well, the kids took piano lessons. They did some skating. I personally did some curling. We had a skidoo, and they would go for skidoo rides out on the lake. We did some ice fishing. There was always something to do.

AI So you enjoyed Lac La Biche?

Steve I did, yeah.

AI How many houses did you say you built?

Steve Well, we rented the house in Lac La Biche – we moved to Lac La Biche, we rented a house for one year, and after that I decided to build our own house. So I built a house pretty well myself, and I built a cabin at the west end of Lac La Biche Lake and I built a couple other houses for other people in the neighbouring area. So I built a total of three houses, I guess you could say. But carpentry was sort of a secondary job for me. I was primarily a schoolteacher and farmer.

AI You enjoyed farming?

Steve I enjoyed farming, yes. It was a lot of hard work. The land that I first bought was all bush. There was no cultivated acreage on it, so I had to hire machines to clear the land and work it all down and pick rocks and so on. It was hard work, but it was a challenge and I enjoyed it. And I did make a few dollars.

AI You're one of the first farmers I've met that would admit that he made a few dollars!

Steve (Laughs) Yes, I did.

AI Okay.

Steve Eventually though, I sold the farm. I retired from farming, I had a farm sale, I sold all my equipment and a couple of years later, around 1992, maybe '93, I sold the land as well. So I am totally divorced from the farm at the present time.

AI Well, with all the work you were doing, I guess it's not fair for me to ask. Did you have hobbies?

Steve Well, yes, I curled full time when I was in Lac La Biche. Of course that was in the wintertime in the evenings when I curled. I enjoyed that very much. I took up oil painting and I must have done around 40 or 50 paintings all told. Some I still have,

some I gave away, a few I sold. I did some woodwork. After we moved to Athabasca, I built a big shop here and I've got all kinds of woodworking equipment, so I enjoy that.

AI Tell us a little about your kids.

Steve Oh, Helen and I are both very pleased with our family and how the kids managed to get through school. They all graduated from high school. Joanne, the oldest daughter, became a schoolteacher and she taught in Plamondon and in Lac La Biche for a number of years. Lee, the number one son, became a dentist and he practiced that for a while and then he went back to medical school in the United States and became a maxillofacial surgeon and he is employed at the present time in Huntsville, Alabama. Lorne also became a dentist and after a few years he went to orthodontic school in Toronto, and he is now an orthodontist in Calgary. Carmen went to the U of A and graduated in physiotherapy. She practiced that for a while, but now she is a full-time mother living in Vancouver. So we are very pleased with the routes that our kids took.

AI What about grandchildren?

Steve We have a total of 11 grandchildren ranging from age 25 down to the age seven or so. We're very pleased with them. We enjoy their company very, very much. Two of them, Joanne's two oldest, are already U of A graduates. The rest are still in school.

AI How would you compare the life your grandchildren are adjusting to as compared to you when you were that age?

Steve Well, the lifestyle for our grandchildren is quite a bit different from what it was for us. For us on the farm, it was a lot of hard work: walk to school, always chores on the farm to do. The kids now don't have the same kind of chores, but they do their homework, they watch TV, they are engaged in certain sports activities in the community. So it's a slightly different type of lifestyle.

AI So you mentioned that you would trap on the way to school and back when you were in elementary school. So what would you do when you caught a rabbit? Would you eat it or what did you do?

Steve No, we trapped basically to make a few dollars. We used to trap weasels, we would get about a dollar and a half to two dollars a weasel pelt. We used to trap squirrels. The squirrels would bring about 50 cents apiece. And we trapped rabbits. We did not eat the rabbit meat. We used to skin the rabbits and sold the pelts for six cents apiece. But money was very tight in those days and so any little income was very welcome.

AI Anything else you kids would do to raise a buck?

Steve Well, we picked blueberries, of course, in the summertime. Picked enough to provide fruit for our family and the surplus we would sell. We would sell in Boyle in exchange for groceries, which came in very handy.

AI You boys would pick blueberries to trade for groceries in Boyle?

Steve That's correct. Yeah.

AI So what would you get for a basket of blueberries?

Steve Well, we sold the blueberries six cents a pound, so if you had a regular kind of milk pail, that would be maybe twenty-five pounds. You got six cents a pound and you would trade that in for groceries like sugar and coffee and tea, and later on for binder twine.

AI Any idea how many pounds of blueberries you guys would pick in a summer to sell?

Steve Well, four of us boys would go picking. We'd walk to the blueberry patch about two miles one way, we'd pick all day, come back home, and we would have a large water pail, which would be about 25 to 30 pounds. And we'd do that every day for maybe three or four weeks in the month of August. And then we sold those in Boyle.

AI So it was a significant amount of money, actually, towards the farm.

Steve Yes, it was. It helped a lot, right. And we were not the only boys doing that. The other family boys would do the same thing, so it was kind of a community venture for us.

AI So who would be buying these things?

Steve The storekeepers in Boyle would buy the blueberries, and as far as we knew, they sold them in Edmonton.

AI Anything else you can think of with regard to family life back on the farm?

Steve Oh, there were lots of pleasant memories. We used to associate with the neighbours, and we would walk to school together. We trapped together, we picked berries together. It was a fun time. There were good times. Yes.

AI You remember going to dances?

Steve We didn't go to dances until maybe age 14, 15, thereabouts ... and when we did go to dances, we didn't dance, we mostly observed and picked beer bottles for sale for in the future.

AI You picked beer bottles.

Steve We picked beer bottles and sold them.

AI So this was the Grassland area you're talking about, the Prosperity area?

Steve Well, the district where I grew up was called Prosperity, but it was in what is now known as the Grassland area, yes. The town of Grassland or the village of Grassland would be about seven miles east of where we grew up on the farm.

AI In those days, there were all kinds of stories about homebrewing in that area. Is there anything you'd like to say about that?

Steve We heard about homebrewing, that is true. But my parents, my dad for example, was not involved in that, I don't think he had any idea how to homebrew, but we had a neighbour or a few that did that, and we heard rumours that they would sell the stuff to people that were so inclined. But we were not involved in that at all.

AI So you have a number of pictures here, would you like to talk about them a little bit?

Steve Well, I have pictures there, which we're going to include in this package, pictures of my family. I have pictures of my four brothers, I have pictures of our kids.. Just ordinary home pictures. I do not have any pictures of my parents because for one thing, when we were small kids, in those days, cameras were very uncommon. My parents did not have a camera. We did not have a camera growing up in the Prosperity area.

AI Would you like to talk about this picture a little bit?

Steve The picture I'm looking at right now is a picture of the four Kamelchuk boys. That picture was taken, I think, in 1951. It was my brother John, the oldest one, my brother William, who passed away at a very young age of 21, myself, and my brother Mike. That was taken in Prosperity a long time ago.

AI On the farm?

Steve On the farm, yes, somewhere around the home place.

AI So you would have been about what age?

Steve I would have been probably 14 or 15 years of age at that time.

AI You were the little guy there?

Steve Yeah. I was number three. John was number one, William was number two, I was three, and my brother Mike was number four.

AI Would you like to talk about that picture?

Steve This picture is a picture of myself sitting on a disc pulled by three horses. The disc was a small, about eight-foot, disc. We used to make summer fallow in those days, and so after the field was plowed, in probably late June, we would have to disc it maybe three or four times during the summer to keep the weeds down. And that's what I was doing in this particular picture.

AI So how many days of discing would you do?

Steve Well, you could disc, if you started, I'd say early in the morning and disc all day. You could disc probably 15 to 20 acres a day.

AI And how many acres of summer fallow?

Steve Well, summer fallow, we would have maybe 60, 70 acres of summer fallow a year, thereabouts. Some years more. Some years less.

AI So that's about ten days of discing then?

Steve Yes, about ten days, yeah.

AI Would you like to talk about that picture?

Steve This is a picture of myself pole vaulting. That was a sport that we just picked up on our own in the Hammond School. There were a number of us boys that did that and I don't recall the height to which I could go, but the picture that is here looks quite impressive the way it was taken. A picture of people in the background, they look kind of small and far away. But it was a fun activity that I enjoyed.

AI Was it a formal track meet, or you just did that for fun?

Steve Well, we used to do that at the track meets, yes. We would have a track meet in either Grassland or in Amber Valley and sometimes even in the town of Athabasca. So yes, I used to pole vault at the track meets. That's correct.

AI You ever win a crest or anything?

Steve Oh, I don't recall if I won anything.

AI Would you like to talk about that?

Steve This is a picture of Helen, and her graduation from high school, that would have been taken probably 1959 or 60.. She graduated from the Plamondon High School and, as a matter of fact, I was her escort at her graduation ceremony.

AI I see.

Steve Within a couple of years we were married.

AI So you met her while she was going to school in Plamondon?

Steve Well, she was. I met her at a dance in Grassland. She was already finished high school. This would have been like in July and August, somewhere in there, she was already done with high school, yeah. That's just a picture of me, I don't know.. somewhere around home. And that picture is a picture of Helen and myself dancing probably in Grassland. We did a lot of dancing. We used to enjoy dancing so we would go to dances in Plamondon, in Boyle, in Grassland, and all over the area.

AI Lac La Biche?

Steve Lac La Biche, yes. We danced a lot. Unfortunately, we don't dance anymore. And this is a picture of our whole family – Helen, myself, and our four kids, all already adults, and I'd say the picture was taken about 1985.

AI So you'd have been living here already?

Steve No, we moved to Athabasca in 1990. So that was still in the Lac La Biche area. And that is already our house here in Athabasca on South Athabasca Road.

AI I heard that you did some flying for a while and you hadn't mentioned that previously.

Steve Yes, that is, I was always interested in airplanes. I found them to be very fascinating machines, and then in about maybe 1975 or so, the AVC [Alberta Vocational Centre] offered a flying course to train people how to fly. And I was interested in that, and of course I registered. There was a substantial fee involved because they brought two airplanes over from Edmonton and an instructor and I enrolled in that. I enjoyed the program very much. I eventually got my private license. And I did a little bit of flying on my own. I rented a plane a few times. But the problem with flying is that if you didn't own your own airplane, you simply didn't fly. If you had your own airplane, of course, it was a costly business, you had to maintain it and so on. So I enjoyed the experience very much. But after a number of years, I just, I gave it up because of the cost involved.

AI So for a while there was lots of fellows around here that had their own planes, but I imagine it happened the same way with all of them, the price of flying just went way up.

Steve Most people that did own a plane found out that it was expensive operation, and so after a number of years when the novelty wore off, they eventually sold out. That's what happened to most of them, that's correct.

AI Would you like to comment on how Athabasca has changed over your lifetime?

Steve Well, I'm not sure that I'm really qualified to explain how Athabasca has changed. When I was here, it was a nice, neat little town. We were not very mobile, we stayed in the hostel, nobody had a vehicle, so we, any movement that we were involved in involved walking. And the school was not too far from the hostel, so that was no problem there. Not too many students had cars, there were an odd few that maybe would come to school with their parents' car, now-and-then kind of thing. Compared to nowadays, if you walk by or drive by the high school now, there are many, many, cars parked there, most of them probably student cars. Of course there are teacher cars, but there are a lot of student cars, which was not common in the days when I went to high school here. So, that is one change that took place.

Steve As far as the curriculum and the teaching and so on is concerned, I don't think that there are very dramatic changes. We still have academic courses in chemistry,

physics, biology and so on. The curriculum keeps being modified every few years and so on. But basically the academic material is pretty well the same that it used to be years ago. We still have departmental exams to do, to contend with and so on, that's still being done. So I don't see a very big change there.

AI What about the emphasis they're talking about now on trades training?

Steve I'm a firm believer in the value of trade schools. I think it's a wonderful thing for a student to go to university. It's a good experience that you can become certificated in a number of ways. But there is nothing wrong with a student going to a trade school and picking up a trade and following that trade as a lifetime occupation. I highly recommend that.

AI Do you have any comments about what's been happening with farming since you were born on the farm 80-some years ago?

Steve Oh, yes, I ...

AI So, any comments on present day compared to then?

Steve I have my opinions about the farm situation. As AI said, I was born on a farm a long time ago. At that time, most farmers had one quarter section of land, a hundred and sixty acres. Most of them got the land that was still full of trees, so they had to clear it by hand or with Caterpillars, which were expensive and not that common in those days. So things have changed. Nowadays, farmers have two, three, four, five, or more quarters, mostly cultivated. It has become a very big business. The land itself is expensive. The cost of machinery is almost prohibitive. A brand new large four-wheel drive tractor is over a quarter million dollars. The same with the combine. So it has become a very expensive business, but in many ways large and profitable. And so there have been many changes on the farm.

AI Any of your kids making a living on the farm?

Steve No. I only had four quarters of land before I gave up the farm. That was not sufficient background for any of my kids to make a living on the farm, so they didn't even entertain the idea and I did not encourage them to do so. They all went to university and farming was out of the question.

AI Do you have any advice for young people today?

Steve Oh, yes – don't quit school. Sometimes there may be discouraging moments in school and so on, but the idea is to be persistent, stay in school, graduate from high school and get further training, if at all possible. That will always be rewarding in the future.

AI So do you think things are better or worse today than they were when you were 18?

Steve By a long shot, better. Lifestyle is a little bit different. There are more opportunities to make a few dollars, there are more opportunities for a diversity of

occupations and so on, so I would say that things have improved dramatically in the last, say, 40 or 50 years.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com
Edited by: Mike Maclean
Proof-read by: Doug Kariel

December, 2020