

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project Transcription of Wilma Cooke-001b.mp3

https://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/w_cooke.htm

Narrator: Wilma Cooke
Interviewer: Wendy Schinnell
March 4, 2018

[Start of Interview]

Wendy I am recording Wilma Cooke of Athabasca, Alberta, on March 4th, 2018. My name is Wendy Schinnell and I am interviewing Wilma Cooke on behalf of the Athabasca United Church Seniors' Memory Project. Hello, Wilma, will you please state your name and the date.

Wilma My name is Wilma Catherine Cooke and the date is March the 4th, 2018. I'm welcoming this opportunity because I've had a wonderful time reliving my childhood in trying to decide what to talk about. My family originally came to Athabasca in 1911. My grandparents, George and Kate Lewis, came from North Sydney, Nova Scotia. My grandfather had a sailboat. It was large and he used to travel down to the British West Indies and bring goods back to Nova Scotia for trade. As I grew older and learned more about history, I suspect that the reason that he stopped doing this was that the steam ships came in. They were so much more efficient than sailboats. Sailing ships were no longer used for trade. So my granddad and grandmother came to Athabasca with eight children. I think one of them may have been born after they got here. Anyway, they had a large family. They came by rail to Edmonton and there was no railroad service to Athabasca at that time. They came by wagon up the old Colinton Highway with all their goods and all their children. My mother was five years old at the time. She had a very interesting life. Granddad and the neighbors built the small church and the school, which is now being used as a community center for South Athabasca. They have a lot of activities there. That's where my mom and her brothers and sisters went to school. I'll just mention my family because there's quite a few of them that lived in the Athabasca area.

Vesta was the oldest sister. I'm not quite sure if these are in the right order. Alvah, Seymour (Sim), Walton (Wal) Ray, Margaret, Hazel, Katherine, and Grace. Sim's picture hangs outside the brick building on Main Street. The building now houses Penny's Headquarters, a hair salon. Sim was injured in the First World War. He lost a leg and had been gassed. He got a job as a telephone operator, which was brand new at the end of the war. He spent the rest of his life working in the telephone office and telephone exchange. He was well known in the district. Wal, the next son lived in Athabasca for all of his life. He also was in the First World War. I don't believe he had any injuries. The next son was Ray, who was also in the First World War. I'm not sure what he did. When I was a very young child and, in my teens, he was the manager of the Union Hotel. It was a very nice building in those days, much nicer than it is now.

Margaret married Ed James. There are a lot of the James family living in the Athabasca area. Hazel married Bill Minns. There are a lot of the Minns family in the area. I'll talk about my mother later. The youngest daughter was Grace Conquest. She married a fellow who died shortly after World War Two. He was in a hunting accident and their family have all moved away.

Wilma My mother went to school in South Athabasca and my one aunt, Alvah, was married to Mike Thorne, who was an RCMP officer, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police in those days. There are lots of stories. He was stationed in the area of Fort McMurray. He covered all the northern part of Athabasca. I often see stories of the NWMP. His daughter was honored when they had the RCMP Ride here because of the ties that she had through her father. He was stationed in a remote area. I can't remember the name of the town, way up north in the Northwest Territories. He had been stationed there just after he and Auntie Alvah got married, and there were no white women there. There was just a school for the native children that was run by the Catholic nuns. It wasn't so long ago that I heard of it. It's still there, quite different now. There was no road in or anything, and there were no white people there. Auntie Alvah didn't want to go there without a companion, a female companion. Mom went and took, probably Grade 11 up there with the nuns and the native students. Then she came back to Athabasca and she went to the Brick School for her final year of high school. That was the only school Athabasca had at the time. Mom went to Normal School. She taught for several years at Grosmont School, which used to be called Nine Mile Corner, just on the way to Baptiste Lake. I was given some cheques that were Mom's cancelled pay cheques that had been in storage for years. I must take them over to the Archives because that would be very interested in having them.

Dad was born in the United States. James Dean Galloway was his name. Galloway was my maiden name. My father came here as a young man. After several years, he and mom got married and she had to quit teaching. In those days, women weren't allowed to teach if they were married. They had a large family. I had a brother that died when he was 10 from sugar diabetes, which was very difficult, hard to control in those days. I had a sister who died when she was about three or four months old; she had spinal meningitis. The treatment was not good in those days. The six of us, six surviving children had such a wonderful life growing up in Athabasca. I always say we grew up in the best of times. It was just so neat. We had chores to do when we were kids but you could go outside and play any time. There was just a standard rule. There was a fire siren that used to ring every noon hour at 12 o'clock. I think it was for the population because not everybody had watches in those days like they do now. We had to make tracks for home at 12 noon. Other than that, it was safe to go and play. We had all sorts of games and some bikes for bike riding. In the winter we used to ski down the hill. I don't know the numbers in the streets. They weren't numbered until I moved back here. The street in front of where Dr. Berger's office is, that street was the best ski hill for kids in the wintertime. Before they paved Athabasca streets, the roads and the hills were much steeper.

I learned to drive in Athabasca and I always say if you can drive in the winter in Athabasca, you can drive anywhere. That hill was never used in the wintertime. Not many people used their cars in those days. Dad always put our car up on blocks in the garage and he put the battery down in the basement. People walked everywhere; the town was smaller than the area that Athabasca now covers. So it wasn't that much of a problem. That was a wonderful ski hill. I remember one winter I was going to make myself a little ski jump because I heard about ski jumping at night. I took the snow and packed it down so that I had a little sort of jump and skied on that for a while, and fell off and knocked the wind out of myself. I was scared to death. I thought I was dying. There was nobody around. No, I thought I would just lie there and die. That's one of my miserable memories of when I grew up.

Wilma We walked everywhere we went. The adults and children didn't use cars the way we do now. I remember the sidewalks were wooden and the town built new wooden sidewalks just about the time I was going to school. It was really neat.

Wendy How many kids were in school in any grade?

Wilma There were quite a few, because when I started Grade 1, the only school was the Brick School. There were six rooms and two in the basement, and then two on each floor. There were two classes in each room. That's interesting because that was the only school until I think it was probably the end of the war when they built an annex, which is now the library and the pottery club. That was I think originally two rooms with a typing room in between because they were now offering typing classes. I was in about Grade 6 or 7 when we went moved into the new school, which had the lower grades. I know there was Grade 9 there because they were the ones that had typing class, not the younger grades. It had to have been about 1945. We were at the age where we were thought it was so romantic. My teacher was Jessie Rollings who was born here, I think. She had married Roy Rollings and he had either been in the war or he'd been a soldier when they got married. I think he was already in the services and had left. All of us girls thought this was so romantic. Mrs. Rollings' husband was coming home. I still remember that. That was the first addition they had to the school. They built an addition about a year or so after I left the school. It was a shop building. It was the next block over and down there. That was all the schools we had in those days, the one building with two stories. I always think it was interesting because my mother said that her name, her initials were scratched and on the top southwest corner, the top floor at those wonderful windows. It was really a neat school. I liked it. She said that her boyfriend had carved her initials there. She didn't tell me that until I was quite a bit older.

Wendy/Wilma You did all your education here in Athabasca? Yes.

Wilma I want to talk about the social life that we had in Athabasca because there was no such thing as television. We did have movies. I think once a week there was a movie, held where the present Provincial Building on Main Street is located. Years ago, there was a grocery store, Parker's Store on that site. On the second floor, they had a big room, like a hall. There were chairs there. Athabasca has always been involved in

drama. I remember going to live theater there. Nancy Appleby used to have dances in there when I was a teenager and older. The Catholic Church members used to have a very, very good drama group. I remember some of the older plays, but the first one I ever went to see was Lawrence of Arabia, which was a popular play in about 1939. I don't think I had started school yet, but I remember going there with Mom and Dad and a couple of my older brothers and sisters. Mr. Ashacker was the telephone operator. He had the office next to the telegraph office. He was part of the Catholic group and he was also a bit of a comedian. He was doing this sort of warm-up before the play started. I can still remember this joke he told. He said that when you go up to heaven you had to climb this stepladder, with this blackboard that went way up, up through the clouds. As you climbed, you had to write all your sins on this blackboard. He said, "When I was just halfway up and I met Dean Galloway coming down for more chalk." Well, I thought that was wonderful, that my dad was recognized. I had no idea what the joke meant. I've always remembered that. I'm 85, so that was 79 years ago. It obviously made an impression on me.

Wilma My parents and everybody had social lives. You visited much more than we do now. You'd have friends in for an evening. Both parents played bridge. Mom played in the bridge club that she joined that had 12 women. Alice Donahue was one of them. The library is named after her. She was a dear lady. There were three tables set up so that 12 women could play. When Mom died, I think they still had 10 of the original members. They would meet every week, taking turns to meet at somebody's house. Mom would bake and bake, as it was a big social thing for them. They might get another couple in during the wintertime. They'd often have a couple in to play bridge or they'd be going to somebody's house.

We had a curling rink from the time I can remember. The first one was down the street where Buy-Low is now. That was the end of the town region, almost a block over. There was the curling rink, and there was a livery stable there because a lot of the farmers came to town with horses. Curling was very big and always has been. Then they built another rink, across from the Anglican Church. There was the skating rink, and because we lived a block away—our house was where the Native Friendship Center is now—in the wintertime, you'd go to bed with the window open a bit and you'd hear all the music from the skating rink. I can remember all the waltzes, the Blue Danube and things like that.

They had clubs like Eastern Star and the Masons. My dad was on the school board. Mom belonged to Women's Auxiliary. The volunteer fire department is another memory. I don't know when it happened, but I was still a kid when the Catholic Church burned down. It was a wooden building and it was about the same size as the present one is. It was in the middle of the night, probably early morning, I don't know. It was dark anyway. We heard a lot of commotion with people coming to help and things. It was wintertime. That hill was really steep. All of a sudden, you'd hear clang, clang, and the bell had come off. It had fallen from the steeple, which had burned and it was rolling. They could still see red, just red, red, red. It was rolling down that steep hill—clang, clang, clang. That was interesting.

I remember the ski jump. The Schinkinger boys—Kurt and Tony. Tony was the mayor here for a number of years. They were a wonderful family, all of them. You may be able see pictures of the jump, a real rickety thing in the Archives. The huge thing was built where the Western Hotel is now located. I can remember going there. I can't remember that road being there, it must have been because it was the road to Edmonton. I couldn't tell you what year, but I would say in the 50s sometime, Kurt was still going to school. Tony was really good up there. It was a huge thing. They'd get up there just like you see them do these jumps and go flying down. Not my thing at all!

Summers were wonderful here; we had a cottage at the lake. It wasn't fancy or anything, but we spent a lot of time out there. Dad liked to go for picnics and we'd go all over the country. Mom used to try and turn some of them into berry picking things. Dad worked as a United Grain Grower's elevator agent when the elevators were here. The women that lived in the country in those days used to make extra money by picking berries because money was very scarce. If Dad knew that Mom was planning a berry picking, when the ladies came into the elevator with their husbands, Dad would usually manage to find the berries that she wanted. He was not a berry picker. I inherited that, I'm afraid. Ball tournaments were a big thing. Where the high school is now, that used to be the ball park. They had little buildings or booths where organizations would be selling hot dogs and pop if it was a tournament.

Wilma That was always a popular thing to do on a Sunday afternoon, go up there. For younger people, we had Teen Town, which had dances just about every Saturday night, supervised, of course. In those days there was a big turnout and dances were very popular. They were held at the Municipal Hall; I think that's what it was called. It was down next to the river, where the park is now. It was a wooded area. You always had to walk across the railroad track and walk through the trees to get down there. It had been an Immigration Hall, that's what it was. It had been built in the 1910s, when they were encouraging immigrants to come and settle here. So many of the farmers came from Europe and they had an Immigration Hall there for them to live in. They had kept it as a social place. That was before we had anything else that size. It was used for other purposes. My first husband was a schoolteacher here, and he'd been in the war for a very short time. They had air cadets down there. He used to go all the time to help with the air cadets. It was sort of a community hall, really. It was the only thing we had for a hall in those days. It's gone now. It was a very nice building, with hardwood floors, and hot and cold running water.

The lake was always one of my favorite spots when I came back to Athabasca, I had to go to the lake. We bought a house out at Baptiste Lake, because I had so many, many memories there. They had a church camp there that we used to go to. The Anglican Church had a camp which they had built. There were a few cottages which are at Sunset Beach, some further down from Sunset Beach. I think there were about 8 or 10 cottages. The road ended at the end of these cottages and it was just a trail really, probably half a mile before you could get to the camp. This was after the war and there were a lot of English girls that would come over to work in the church. They had a van, I

guess the diocese had this van and workers would go off into the wilderness, where there were no churches, that sort of thing. They would spend the summer doing that and they helped supervise the camp. That was fun. I actually taught swimming there one year, the last year I went.

Wendy/Wilma What was the population of Baptiste Lake? It really hadn't grown. It was still probably only the same 8 or 10 cottages. There might have been a few more. Not at all like it is now. No, no, no. There was a few there, and then a few by where Appleby's is. They had a house there and they had a nice beach. They had a pier and Nancy had set up a little sort of coffee shop where she'd have donuts or hot dogs, and pop, coffee, and things like that for sale on Sundays. That was really the only public beach at the time.

Wilma We had the cabin and we had a wonderful time out there. That's pretty well what we did for entertainment. We always were busy, always had something to do; you can go anywhere with children. It was never a problem. I had a brother Dan, who was 10 years younger than me. I can't believe as an adult some of the stories you tell about how the whole area was their playground. Of my own family, my brothers and sisters, Norma was my older sister, and she worked at the creamery. After she got married, they left. They came back all the time, but she never came back to Athabasca to live. She passed away. My next sister had a very bad heart. Everybody in my family has heart conditions.

Wendy My family's plight as well.

Wilma Both my parents died of heart problems. Dad died in 1949, with still four of us in school when dad passed away. He was only 49, Mom passed away when she was 73. Pat (Patricia) was the second oldest. She worked at Hunter's Garage when it was downtown, in that spot that I wish they would do something with it. Patricia moved away after she got married. I was the next in line. I'll just go through the rest of the family and then give you my background.

Next brother was Dale. He was obviously the good looking one in the family. He never lived in Athabasca. After he finished school, he lived in either BC or Alberta. He was back often. He was killed in a car accident, a month after my first husband passed away. Dale had bought the bulk dealership down in Vulcan. He had three daughters and they'd been up in the Peace River country. They were in high school. They thought it would be better for them to be living where they could get more education. So they had moved down there. They'd only been there for a couple of years, I think. Dale was coming back from a meeting in Calgary. A truck full of grain went through an intersection, didn't stop and hit him. That was terrible.

Danny was the baby of the family and we all spoiled him terribly. We don't know how he turned out to be such a fine man. Dan Galloway, you might have known him. He came back to Athabasca and was very influential here. He was mayor of the village that he lived in at Baptiste Lake. He came back here after he retired and he was president of

the Seniors', and he helped build the Senior's Centre and volunteered there a lot. He died of a heart attack just a little over a year and a half ago. That's my brothers and sisters.

I finished my school here in Athabasca and I could not wait to leave. I thought my life would begin when I left Athabasca. I couldn't wait to get out of here. I worked in Edmonton for a while, didn't really like it in an office. I was working for an insurance company. I had a friend who was going to join the Air Force, so we both joined the Air Force. I didn't tell my mother until after I'd done it. I think we would have had a few conversations about that. Anyway, it worked out fine. I was in the Air Force for just a couple of years. I was the telegraph operator. I was stationed up in Whitehorse because that was the time of the Cold War and we had to take down all the messages that the Russians were sending over the airwaves. It was all in code. It didn't mean anything to us. If it was in Russian, it still wouldn't have meant anything to us. It was an interesting couple of years.

I'd been coming back to Athabasca off and on. When I was in Grade 12, there was a new teacher who came to Athabasca. His name was Tony Korble. He taught the elementary grades. He liked teaching Grades 7 and 8. I remember that the only thing I knew about him was that he had hand-printed all the diplomas for the Grade 12 graduates. He was quite an artist. He'd handmade all 20 graduation certificates. When I came back to Athabasca, I met him several times through some friends. We started to go together and we were married. We had a son, while we were living here in Athabasca.

Wilma Then we went to Edmonton for a couple of years. We bought a house there and got settled. Tony had been in the Air Force during the war. He'd ridden his bike something like 40 miles from the school he was in. He was 18 and, you know, this was exciting. So he enlisted and joined the Air Force, and he was a pilot. He finished his training and the war was just about over in Europe. So, he was stationed at an Air Force Base on Vancouver Island, just outside of Victoria, just waiting to be transferred to the war in Japan, which was still going on. Then thank goodness that was ended. He came back to teaching, finished his degree at university once we moved to Edmonton. We'd only been in our house about four or five years. I think my son was in Grade 1.

We read about an exchange program so he applied for it. He got an exchange with a teacher in Wales. We went to Cardiff, Wales for a year and lived there. Tony taught school, which was a wonderful experience. That's when I got my first car. We bought a small car over there. If we got it out of the country, before a year, and if we brought it in to Canada after we'd had it a year, we didn't have to pay the duty on the car. I think it was \$1,300 or something without the tax. We managed to bring it back as we came back by boat. We flew over, but we came back on the Empress of Canada. It was a one-year-old ship, a beautiful ship. We had to come back by ship because we had the car. It was small but it was my car. I've had a car ever since.

It was a neat experience, just wonderful. We travelled three months in the spring because they gave the exchange teachers an extra week so that they could take advantage of the exchange. So we spent three weeks on the continent and then we traveled all around Scotland, and England, and Wales while we were there that year. We had another two to three weeks before we had to come back. That was a wonderful experience. We sold our house in Edmonton so we bought another one. We were only there for five years when we decided to move to Vancouver Island. Tony applied for a job there. We moved to Vancouver Island. I went to university there, University of Victoria. I received my degree in education. I spent the next 18 years teaching math in high school, which was really good. I just loved it, just a wonderful experience.

Wendy How many women math teachers were there?

Wilma That was a very interesting part. It was the beginning of the year of the women's revolution, sort of, that first couple of years. I'm not very firm, not very aggressive or anything. I can remember when I first went to the math and science department. We had a meeting every month. The first meeting I went to the head of the department said, "Jimmy, can I get you to keep the minutes?" I said, "No, I don't think so. That's not necessarily a woman's job." I'm sure I said it little more strongly than that. Anyway, it was very interesting. Very interesting.

Wendy/Wilma Were you treated well? Oh, gosh, yes. Oh, yes. I did some practice teaching when I was at university with younger grades. I had a much better rapport with the teenage kids. I had no trouble. It was a rebellious time for teenagers. There were a lot of problems. I got along fine with them and I had to be firm. I had a few jokes pulled on me.

Wendy/Wilma What year are we talking about? I started teaching in late 60s. I was talking today about some kid in his long hair and that was such an issue at that time, just a terrible issue. We had this one boy in Grade 11. He had really long blond hair, very nice, neat. There was a military base where my husband had been stationed, a small base where the boy's father was in charge. I don't know if he was called the commander. Anyway, his father was the very gung-ho military type. The student had two older brothers and they were just like their dad—military haircuts and all that. This poor kid came home from school and they'd been after him to get his hair cut. The brothers grabbed him and held him down on the floor and his dad cut his hair off, not well. I just thought that would be a terrible experience for a boy. I don't know how he turned out. There were issues. There were a lot of issues. There were a lot of problems. I think the kids today are more adjusted to what is going on in their lives. It was a terrible time for some of them if they didn't believe in the norms. There was sort of an awakening of kids, the beginning of independence and a lot of strikes.

Wilma My one fear when I started university was that there wouldn't be any university around to finish my degree. I remember reading about universities where they were throwing all the equipment out the windows of upper floors and ruining things. There was always a protest somewhere.

Wendy/Wilma That was in the air, when unions were developing? Yes. I can remember one day a girl at university came up to me and said, "Are you going to the border, to the protest on Saturday?" I said, "Where is it?" She said, "It's at the border with the United States." There was a bus and then you had to take a two-hour ferry trip from Vancouver Island to get to the mainland, and then probably half an hour, maybe three quarters to the border crossing to go to a protest. I said, "What are you protesting about?" "Well, I don't know but it would be fun." That was the in thing to do at that time. It was the beginning of getting some freedom, being away from home and making your own decisions to make a big difference. That was quite interesting to me. Actually, students can have a lot of power. In this shooting that happened down in the States, I'm really hopeful about the attitude of those students. I hope they continue that because I don't know if you remember, but in that same period somewhere, the war in Vietnam was on and was still unpopular in the States. There were protests all the time down there about this war, which probably should not have happened. There was a protest at a university. I can't remember where it was, but they called in the National Guard and they shot 18 American students. I'm not sure, but I would not be surprised if that had some effect on ending the war. That's what they were protesting. It was a terrible thing, and they recognized that it was a terrible thing. Somebody had to give the order to shoot American students. By the time they get to university, hopefully they know what they're doing.

Wendy Speaking of that last conversation about the guns, what were the gun laws like back in the day when you were growing up? Were your grandparents and parents able to display their firearms in their homes or was everything locked up?

Wilma I don't think it would have been locked up, I'm sure. To be honest, I don't know if Grandad had any guns. I actually don't remember him. He died when I was about six. I have one vague memory, where I might have been sitting on his knee. My dad was a hunter. People that had guns were hunters. In those days, hunting was a valuable source of a meat supply. We had the local creamery. Before people had freezers in their homes you could rent freezer space in the creamery and the local meat market if you butchered a farm animal or shot wild meat. I remember when I was growing up, I came back to Athabasca one weekend and I shut the car door on my finger. It was so painful. I'd gone to see Doctor Wright who pierced it to get some of the pressure off. It was fine. He was talking to me and he said, "You know, when you were born you spoiled a good hunting trip that your dad and I were supposed to go on that weekend." Dad had guns, but he kept them at the grain elevator. They were never in the house.

Wendy/Wilma Was the hunting good? Oh, yes. We used to have deer meat and Mom was a wonderful cook. Some wild game has to be treated differently. We all enjoyed it. You go hunting for birds in the fall, too, for prairie chickens. That was very common. I think everybody did that pretty well. I think in the States, it was much like that at that time. It's just that silly business that they've got now. It's just grown. I saw them interviewing somebody on TV about the gun clubs in Canada. He talked just like the

NRA talks down there about how it's no. . . To me that's the thin edge of the wedge. They started on this. I don't think anybody eats wild game anymore.

Wendy Oh, yes. My husband is an avid hunter and has a trap line. Speaking of which, since we're on this topic, when you grew up around here, were you ever exposed to the trappers who were coming in on the river taking in their furs?

Wilma No, but I remember the store. What was his name? It used to be the Sears store. Mr. Birkigt was the fur trader. Trappers would bring their furs to him. His wife kept the business up after he died and she just passed away a few years ago in the Lodge. She was wonderful. She looked after the business for these fur trappers.

Wendy When did she end her business here and the sale of furs?

Wilma It was while I was living at the coast; it was when my first husband was still alive. It would have been before he passed away in 1978. Mom bought each of my brothers a pair of leather gauntlets with the Indian beadwork on them and she bought the girls slippers. The reason I remember my first husband was still alive, he said those have to go in the garage. He couldn't stand the smell of them. I liked the smell. He didn't want them in the closet anyway. I gave them to a couple of grandnephews. I told them to hang on to these. It's a dying art, they're beautiful.

Wendy I have a couple pair myself.

Wilma There still are some trappers. What's his name? I didn't know him. Their house burned down. An older couple, both of them little short people. He's always gone out trapping. I doubt if he is now because he's probably my age. It must have been about 10 years ago when I'd come here and my sister-in-law was telling me that that his kids had bought him a snowmobile with a starter or something. He was still going out. And I remember even a few years ago he was still going out on the trapline. I don't know if he did it because he had to or just because he loved being on the trapline.

Wendy My husband still has a very active trapline north of Fort McMurray. So I understand the love.

Wilma I didn't know that. I didn't realize that there may still be people doing it around here.

Wendy There is an active Trappers Association here in Athabasca still. I was just wondering when you talk about the trappers coming in to Athabasca, you remember this when you were little? Right up until about the 70s, you say?

Wilma I think it would be about then sometime.

I was talking about Tony and I, we came back here, then we moved to the coast. He passed away while we lived on the Island. He'd come back to Edmonton as his brother

had passed away. He had flown back for the funeral, and he had a brain aneurysm. He was in the University Hospital for about six weeks. I came back and stayed at my brother's, and then they flew him home. Tony lived for about two years after that. Then he had a stroke and passed away.

Wendy When did you move back to Athabasca?

Wilma Well, my second husband and I got married about three, four years after Tony passed away. We both had just retired. I had known his wife before, I had met him a couple of times. His wife and I had been good friends. She had surgery for lung cancer and unfortunately, she was not able to walk. She had to use a wheelchair. After she got out of the hospital, we started to go out for lunch once a week. It was mostly just the two of us. Then Len, her husband and I saw more of each other afterwards. He'd been in the Navy and he retired about a month before we got married. After my first husband passed away, I'd sold the house we had, which I'm sorry I did. We lived in a lot of places, but this was by the ocean. It was a gorgeous place. We lived there for almost 20 years.

I needed a new life, so I sold the house and I moved to a new gated community where you had to be 55 to purchase. I was 58. It would have been in the 80s. It was a gated community around the golf course with nice homes and the ocean. I bought a house there. Len and I started going out together and decided to get married. He was a golfer, a good golfer. I never had time to do these things. I was taking bridge lessons. I was taking golfing lessons and taking piano lessons, That's wonderful therapy. I bought a piano about four or five months after Tony passed away and it just took over my life. I was in Grade 6 after three years. I had a good music teacher. After Len and I got married, I took golf lessons and we were now golfing as a couple.

Len and I spent a lot of time at the golf course and it wasn't long until I was playing more golf than piano. We started going down to Arizona for the winter. I couldn't believe when I came back after six months of not playing, how stiff my muscles were. So the piano went by the wayside. We golfed at our local golf course and then when we went down south to the States. We would take our time going down, stopping at many nice courses. It was a great way of life.

Wendy/Wilma How many friends of yours are your age now? They're not all living. Some of them have retired and are living in assisted living, or those homes with condos where they provide meals. Those are very popular. There's a lot of them in Sydney. That's where my first house was, the one that I loved. When I went out for a visit last year, I looked at condos there with the idea of maybe I'll go back there. I realized that all the friends out there are older than me or close to the same age. It just wasn't the right thing. I couldn't stand another move.

Wendy/Wilma You're really quite happy retiring here? Yes. It was because we had to as my second husband had a stroke and we had a big house at the lake. The yard was a lot of work and he wasn't able to do any of it. I did it for about three or four years and I

couldn't hire people to come and work because nobody wanted to go there to do it. So we decided that it was time to move. I moved here because I had to. I didn't really like it, but I just love it now. It was a wise move to make and I'll stay here as long as I can.

Wendy You are in awesome condition for your age of 85. You're 30 years older than me, it's great. You look like you're probably as limber and agile as I feel myself.

Wilma I had open-heart surgery about seven years ago. They didn't expect me to live. They gave me the option of having the surgery or not having it because they were afraid it wasn't going to be successful, which sounds awful. But at the time, I decided to have it. I've only got three ventricles that work. One of them is completely gone. I've since had to go back and have some stents. So, because I only have the three, I have about 60% of the stamina I should have for my age, so I get tired easily or I don't do much physical work. I have a cleaning lady once every two weeks. I can manage the rest, but I wear out easily. You do the best you can with what you've got.

Wendy Do you have any words of wisdom for other people to live to be the age of 85 and look as happy as you look. You have a smile on your face. What is your secret to your happiness?

Wilma I think it's probably the upbringing I had. I had a wonderful childhood. I really believe I grew up in the best of times. I really do. There were very little social pressures in a small community like Athabasca. Everybody was the same. Some people may have been wealthier than others, but to be honest, we weren't aware of it. I never thought of it. I was lucky my first husband was just a wonderful man. We were both fairly young, so we kind of grew together to be best of friends.

That January, when I said I wasn't out of the house twice except to see doctors, I needed something to do. I don't stay in bed all day; I get up and I knit. I finished knitting 10 pairs of socks which I gave to Bernadette for the Lodge. They sell them up there. Knitting and playing Sudoku keep me busy.

Wendy Thank you for your time today, Wilma.

Wilma It's actually been a pleasure. I was kind of dreading it because I didn't know what to expect.

Wendy No, hearing your stories has been wonderful.

[End of Interview]

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