

Vi Overholt interview

by Vi Kowalchuk and Anne Rypien

Kowalchuk: This interview uh with Mrs. Vi Overholt of Athabasca is being conducted by Vi Kowalchuk and Anne Rypien on behalf of the Athabasca Historical Society, and is being recorded on January the 15th, 1988, at the Athabasca Archives. All right, Mrs. Overholt, what is your full name?

Overholt: ^{Viola} ~~Vinola~~ Elizabeth Overholt.

Kowalchuk: All right, and your address is Athabasca even though you're living at what we would consider Sawdy.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: And where were you born?

Overholt: I was born in Gateway, Oregon.

Kowalchuk: Gateway, Oregon, and the year?

Overholt: 1916.

Kowalchuk: 1916, and would you give us your father's name and occupation.

Overholt: My father was his name was George Jouston. His uh occupation was farming and he also did other odd jobs at whatever he could get.

Kowalchuk: All right, and your mother's name?

Overholt: Mary Katherine Jouston.

Kowalchuk: Now, could you give us her maiden name?

Overholt: Turner.

Kowalchuk: Turner, all right. Uh what was their family background? Can you tell me your father's background, where would his family come from?

Overholt: His uh family were uh French and Irish. The French immigrated; the Irish had been here for quite some time.

Kowalchuk: Oh yes. You remember when the French immigrated here?

Overholt: I don't know.

Kowalchuk: You don't know, and the mother, and your mom?

Overholt: Uh well her family had been in Kentucky for up to 200 years.

Kowalchuk: Really.

Overholt: And she was French-Scotch.

Kowalchuk: French-Scotch, all right. Uh so when did you come to this area?

Overholt: On January the 2nd, 1924.

Kowalchuk: 1924, mhm. Now, were there some circumstances, I remember Anne telling me that you were an adopted child, and I wonder if you'd mind giving us something of the of that background.

Overholt: Well, my mother and dad, some say, didn't get along. And uh they uh they're my mother left when I was between two and three. They had been doing a lot of fighting, she left, and uh the court awarded custody of my sister and I to my father, and she had my brother who was only a few months old, and uh eventually, mother got custody of us, but she uh was working at cooking at ranches, and she could have the little boy with her but not three children at most of the ranches. So we were in the Salvation Army home in Calgary and she was paying board for us.

Kowalchuk: Now, how did you happen to come to Calgary?

Overholt: Calgary.

Kowalchuk: Are you talking about Calgary, Alberta?

Overholt: Yes, yes, my family came to Alberta in 1918.

Kowalchuk: So they actually split up when they were here in Alberta?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Okay, I see.

Overholt: That's where I got misplaced.

Kowalchuk: That's where you got misplaced, all right. So then, you were in Calgary in a Salvation Army home. That's interesting.

Overholt: And my mother was paying board for us.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Overholt: And uh because I was uh well between three and four, somewhere—I'm not sure of the age—uh one day two tall dark, wearing dark clothes, two women come in and asked me if I would like to go for a ride in a car. I'd never been in a car. So I went with ^{them} ~~him~~, and in the other end of the hall there was one of the women working there was holding my sister who was two years old ^{or than I} and she was screaming at me not to go with her. I never saw her again until 1939.

Kowalchuk: Is that right.

Overholt: They uh I was brought to the children's home in Edmonton and put up for adoption.

Kowalchuk: Well, who were these two ladies? Could you explain that?

Overholt: They worked for the Salvation Army, and the only thing I remember just after I got in the car, one woman asked why they hadn't taken the two of us. Another one said the older girl will remember her mother. This one won't.

Kowalchuk: How sad, my goodness.

Overholt: And my mother found out where I was because of me ~~me~~ being taken illegally, and the Salvation Army didn't let her know that I was gone for three months.

Kowalchuk: So this was done illegally?

Overholt: So she found out where I was, but with understanding and written statement that she wouldn't cause trouble for the family that had adopted me.

Kowalchuk: So an Edmonton family adopted you?

Overholt: No, no, I was in two foster homes in Edmonton for a year or so and then at seven I come up to Athabasca.

Kowalchuk: Now, would you tell us about that. How did you come?

Overholt: Well, they were they had no children.

Kowalchuk: The Overholt, you're speaking of the Overholts, now?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: All right, so when you were seven, the Overholt family adopted you, legally adopted you this time.

Overholt: Yes.

Rypien: And that's the Harry Overholt?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Now, this is what I want to know. The Harry Overholt family.

Overholt: Harry and Mabel Overholt.

Kowalchuk: Harry and Mabel. All right, uh you say they had no family of their own.

Overholt: No, they had no children of their own.

Kowalchuk: Did they ever adopt anyone after they adopted you?

Overholt: No, no one.

Rypien: They had foster children.

Overholt: Foster children staying there, but I was the only one they adopted.

Kowalchuk: All right. Uh so were you happy about coming, you had uh, when you were seven . . .

Overholt: Uh when you're seven, you don't have much to say.

Kowalchuk: That's right.

Rypien: Much choice either.

Kowalchuk: Much choice either, that's what I'm thinking. This is right. How did things go for you then? Can you tell us . . .

Overholt: Actually, quite well.

Kowalchuk: Can you, do you remember anything of Athabasca at that early age?

Overholt: Uh yes. The train came in five days a week, for one thing.

Kowalchuk: Did you come by train?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: You came in by train, mhm.

Rypien: And that was uh, what age were you then?

Overholt: I was seven.

Rypien: No, but I mean what year was that?

Overholt: 1924.

Kowalchuk: So they came, the Overholts brought you by train. Then how did you travel to the Sawdy area? Do you recall?

Overholt: Uh I believe we stayed at George Roger's house overnight and the team must have been in his barn because we went out to Sawdy the next day.

Kowalchuk: Now Rogers . . .

Rypien: That's . . . house.

Overholt: He lived in town.

Kowalchuk: Oh did he.

Overholt: Down toward Muskeg Creek, and uh he had a delivery stable.

Kowalchuk: In Athabasca?

Overholt: Yeah, the west side.

Kowalchuk: Now Rogers, that is no relation to the Rogers that later on lived at Fairhaven.

Overholt: Yes, same Rogers.

Kowalchuk: Same Rogers. You mean the Rogers that . . .

Overholt: Edith's dad, Edith's dad, yes.

Rypien: Which was uh Eva Rogers is Decter Dexter Dexter Overholt's daughter.

Kowalchuk: Oh.

Rypien: Or Harry's sister.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see. So okay, so there's the relationship. All right. So you stayed in town and then the next day you went off to Sawdy.

Overholt: Yes, yes.

Kowalchuk: How long did it take you to get out there?

Overholt: It's about a three to three and a half hour trip.

Kowalchuk: I would think so. What time of year was this?

Overholt: Uh January, and it was cold.

Kowalchuk: Yes, so you just must have driven right across the river on the ice.

Overholt: Yes, mmhm. At that time, that's the way . . .

Kowalchuk: That's the way we did it, eh.

Overholt: The only way.

Kowalchuk: The only way, that's right. Uh I meant to ask you, did you live in any other places, just those that you've mentioned now before you came to Athabasca, were there any other areas, just the States and then Calgary?

Overholt: Uh and Dutchess, that's where my father had the homestead.

Kowalchuk: Dutchess, Alberta?

Overholt: Yes, and then when mother got custody of my sister and I, we went to Calgary in the Salvation Army home.

Kowalchuk: Mhm. Okay, so your reasons for coming were you just at that age you didn't have any reasons. You were just adopted and you like Anne said, you didn't really have much choice. So, do you remember anything else? What was your first impression of Athabasca? I know you were pretty young then, but you say there was a railway.

Overholt: Yes, you came in on the train, there was I would think around twenty stores in Athabasca at that time. And they almost all sold groceries.

Kowalchuk: Almost all of them sold groceries, yes.

Rypien: Groceries and clothing, it was sort of a . . .

Overholt: There was only one clothing store.

Kowalchuk: Which was that?

Overholt: It's where Landing Motors is now.

Rypien: Atlanda store, that used to be Atlanda store.

Overholt: It was uh that same one, yes.

Kowalchuk: But it wasn't owned by . . .

Overholt: I can't think of the name.

Kowalchuk: Oh you can't. We could probably look that up in our some of our old Echos. Do you remember anything else? Did you eat a meal in town at all?

Overholt: I imagine we ate at Roger's.

Kowalchuk: I see. Not in a cafe?

Overholt: This was about 5:00 at night.

Kowalchuk: Oh yes. Mhm. How long was your train trip, by the way?

Overholt: Well, it would be under three hours.

Kowalchuk: From Edmonton to Athabasca—under three hours, eh?

Overholt: They moved right along.

Kowalchuk: They must have. Okay, uh so you got to Sawdy. You spent uh first few years there or or your childhood.

Overholt: All, all of my life there.

Kowalchuk: Actually, well that's true. You've never really moved away since then, that's true. All right, did you go to school there?

Overholt: Yes, at Youngville.

Kowalchuk: That was the Youngbill, Youngville, Youngstill . . .

Overholt: Youngville. /

Kowalchuk: All right, what do you remember of those days?

Overholt: Sometimes going to school was very cold. Nobody had in the twenties such things as knee boots and you fall off the corduroy in the muskeg, very wet and uncomfortable.

Kowalchuk: Oh, so there was a kind of a corduroy road over . . .

Overholt: Yes, a trail.

Kowalchuk: Trail, over the muskeg. Mm, how far did you have to go to school?

Overholt: A little over a half a mile. The distance wasn't bad.

Kowalchuk: Oh, so that wasn't too bad for you. I imagine some of the other students had . . .

Overholt: Oh yes, up to four miles.

Kowalchuk: Up to four miles. Can you name some of the other families that attended with you?

Overholt: Uh Rieps.

Kowalchuk: Rieps

Overholt: Psysyks.

Rypien: What was the original Riep father's name?

Overholt: Steve Riep.

Kowalchuk: Steve Riep, and his family then . . . Okay, that wasn't a brother to Harry. That would have been a . . .

Overholt: Steve is Harry's father.

Kowalchuk: Oh, Steve is Harry's father. That's right, I forgot.

Rypien: Harry and Tom, and you know, uh . . .

Overholt: Bart, Mike . . .

Kowalchuk: Oh yes, I see. So those boys would have gone in that . . . All right and who else did you say?

Overholt: And Soluk and family.

Kowalchuk: Soluk, oh they were there then.

Overholt: Yes, Dan Soluk, all of Dan Soluk's children, Mike and John, Peter, Steve . . .

Kowalchuk: Oh yes, oh yes. All right.

Overholt: Weldons.

Kowalchuk: Weldons, yes.

Overholt: Sterling, there was three.

Kowalchuk: Sterlings.

Overholt: Three girls going when I went to school.

Rypien: Any of the Lattisher girls go there?

Overholt: No, they had left about uh oh before 1920. The old fellow retired and moved to Lac La Biche, and the girls had married.

Rypien: Was there not a Webb . . .

Overholt: John Webb, yes. But he was a bachelor. Had no family.

Kowalchuk: Were there any McKel^ybeys?

Overholt: Yes, mmhm.

Kowalchuk: And were the Rypiens there?

Overholt: They came in 1926, was it?

Rypien: 28.

Kowalchuk: 28. And when did the Artym family come in there?

Overholt: After 1930.

Kowalchuk: Oh quite a bit, oh after 1930, later, all right. So that pretty well takes care of the families there that were living.

Rypien: What about Sawdy?

Overholt: They left the one that started the Post Office.

Kowalchuk: Yes, there was a Post Office.

Overholt: Yes, and uh that's uh . . .

Rypien: First started by a man by the name of Sawdy.

Kowalchuk: Which the district is na who who the district is named after. All right.

Overholt: But he left uh during or possibly just at the start of the First World War.

Kowalchuk: Oh.

Overholt: And he moved back to the States. He and his three sons.

Kowalchuk: Oh, he was an American.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: I see. Uh so who took over the Post Office, then?

Overholt: Uh Harry and Mabel Overholt.

Kowalchuk: Overholt, I see.

Overholt: And then, at a later date, I took over the Post Office.

Kowalchuk: Oh, that'll be interesting. We'll have to hear more then. Uh huh.

That's after you were finished school, then, no doubt.

Rypien: After she was married.

Overholt: After I was married.

Kowalchuk: After you were married, all right. So then you would did you start what grade did you get into when you first started, what grade did they put you in?
Right in . . .

Overholt: I was uh I was already in Grade 2.

Kowalchuk: Oh, so you did attend school in Edmonton?

Overholt: Mmhm.

Kowalchuk: Oh, you did. Started your education there.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: And then continued on at Sawdy, Grade 2, and you continued on . . .

Overholt: To Grade 8.

Kowalchuk: Grade 8.

Overholt: That's as high as you could go.

Kowalchuk: In those days, yes. And so you didn't continue on because the school here in Athabasca was . . .

Overholt: No, you'd have to board.

Kowalchuk: That's right, you'd have to board or where there was in the in the twenties, the late twenties there were no busses, no school busses.

Overholt: There was no school busses. In the late thirties they had the, oh where you can board, the Anglican church . . .

Kowalchuk: The Anglican church ^{hostel.} hostile.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Yes, yes.

Overholt: That there was no such thing as that before.

Kowalchuk: So you'd have had to board with a private family, then.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Yes, and that would have been costly, I suppose, eh? You don't remember how much it would have cost you?

Overholt: No, I have no idea.

Kowalchuk: No, no. All right, so what did you do when you finished Grade 8? Or can you, first of all, before we go on to that, can you remember some of your teachers?

Overholt: Oh yes. Mrs. Watson was my first teacher. And uh the second one was named Martha, I can't think of her second name. And Eileen McCullough.

Kowalchuk: Is that any relation to the McCulloughs that were in . . .

Kowalchuk: No.

Overholt: They come from Sutherland.

Rypien: Was that the one that became a Mrs. Montalbeté?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Oh.

Overholt: And uh Bill Thompson, Hugh Russell who later became an R.C.M.P., and he was superintendent of K-division.

Kowalchuk: In Edmonton?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Interesting, oh.

Overholt: And uh when uh Mr. Shaw died . . .

Kowalchuk: Is that Tiny Shaw you're speaking of?

Overholt: They were very good friends and met while he was teaching here, and uh and they kept up the friendship and he come up for his funeral and then he come out to visit, well, he was at my place, he was at Bruno's, Rypiens.

Kowalchuk: Oh, now you mentioned a Mr. Thompson. Now, we have some Thompsons or at least we had some just west of Athabasca. No relation there either. Mmhm. So those were your teachers. What do you remember, oh, go continue, sorry.

Overholt: And Ann Carmichael and Eileen Butler were the last teachers that I had.

Kowalchuk: Is that right, Butler.

Overholt: They were both from Edmonton.

Kowalchuk: Oh, Edmonton teachers. Mmhm, what do you recall about those days at school? What were some of the things that . . .

Rypien: Tell her about the type of desks you had, the stove and . . .

Overholt: Well, we had uh like a barrelled arm, a big stove that used . . .

Rypien: Four or five gallon drum, was it?

Overholt: No, it was a bought stove but uh it used four-foot wood, and if the fire wasn't started an hour before school, our school would be pretty cold.

Kowalchuk: In the winter time.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Who would have brought your wood?

Overholt: Well, different ones got the job of bringing wood.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Overholt: And there was always wood there. And uh it was split but the true problem was sometimes it was up to the one building fires to make the kindling to get it going and uh . . .

Kowalchuk: Yes. Did you ever do the janitor work, so-called janitor work?

Overholt: No.

Kowalchuk: No, I was just thinking you didn't live that far away so uh you would have been . . .

Rypien: Usually somebody that there was boys in the family.

Kowalchuk: Yeah, yeah, right. All right, uh so you had this big stove and desks. How many students would have been there on the average, say?

Overholt: Well, there was at least thirty when I was going to school, and I think around 1938, 36, 38, there was over forty in the school.

Kowalchuk: Oh my.

Overholt: Grades one to eight.

Kowalchuk: Still Grade 8. They wouldn't have had Grade 9 even in the forties, eh?

Overholt: No.

Rypien: Now, Vi, in the early years of your childhood, what were the desks like?

Overholt: The same. They had the same desks when I come there, and these were the original ones that they had when the school was closed.

Rypien: So, they had bought desks?

Overholt: Oh yes, sure.

Rypien: What about uh George Weldon was telling me that they the first when he first started school there, they had just planks set up on blocks as the first . . .

Overholt: I don't know unless the desks hadn't been delivered, but they when there was eight children old enough to go to school, and a lot of them should have been a grade back because there hadn't been school, and they got a grant from the government, and they bought a nice teacher's desk and chair. It didn't have wheels on it. Kids could have fun with that. (All laugh)

Kowalchuk: Oh yes, I think so. But your desk uh one person, for one student.

Overholt: Mhm.

Kowalchuk: And the books would have gone underneath.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Did you have an ink well?

Overholt: Yes, and the pencil slot.

Kowalchuk: And the pencil slot, yes. Mmhm, oh yes. But really very few books in those days?

Overholt: They uh when I first went to school, they had a really nice library.

Kowalchuk: Did you?

Overholt: Yes. And they gradually went home I imagine with the students and never come back.

Rypien: How did you acquire that library?

Overholt: Through the grant that the government gave for starting the school.

Rypien: See, that's different than at Big Coulee, we didn't have anything.

Kowalchuk: I'm just thinking . . .

Rypien: And that was in the thirties.

Kowalchuk: Yes, I remember you saying. There was so few, so little . . .

Overholt: One of the the reason the school is na—was named Youngville, Dave Young was one of the ones that pushed to get a school. And he was one, he and Sam McKelvey and uh Chris Smelze decided on what the money was going to be spent for and they picked out good books, a few for small children, but the others the teacher would read the last half hour in school.

Kowalchuk: Wasn't that a fun time?

Overholt: Yeah.

Kowalchuk: Used to really enjoy that. Now those men that you mentioned, were they on the school board then?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Now that's a good point that you mentioned. Uh, you see, I'm talking about Sawdy, but the school itself was named Youngville whereas the community was named Sawdy.

Rypien: And Dave Young was a veteran of the First World War, and he came and he settled on the quarter that's across from, you know, the present location where uh the Sutherlands live now.

Kowalchuk: Oh yes, oh yes.

Rypien: Or it used to be Husak.

Kowalchuk: Husak, yes.

Rypien: On the west side of where Sutherlands . . .

Overholt: He didn't homestead that.

Rypien: Oh, he didn't?

Overholt: No, but I can't remember, it was a Scotch family lived there, but I can't remember their name. No the _____ were somewhere in Fairhaven.

Kowalchuk: I hope we can hear you girls. Okay. Uh, oh I was going to ask you did the teacher have a strap?

Overholt: Yes, and some of them were very good at using it.

Kowalchuk: Were they? So there was some corporal punishment administered, I presume.

Overholt: Well, it was almost a necessity. There was these big boys that uh figured they didn't have to listen to the teacher.

Kowalchuk: Mm, mmhm.

Rypien: There was quite a few pranks by these big boys, pulled off by them.

Kowalchuk: I suppose, can you can you think of some reasons for a teacher strapping a student? What would be a prank that was played on them?

Rypien: Locking the door, remember, Mike was even talking about that, locking the door on the teacher and they were holding the door keeping the teacher from getting out, and the teacher thought, well, I'll be smart. He got out the window and was half way home, and the kids were still holding the door.

Kowalchuk: Oh, my goodness, isn't that interesting?

Overholt: I know some pranks that uh a lot worse than that.

Kowalchuk: Can you tell us one on tape?

Overholt: Not on tape.

Kowalchuk: Not on tape, okay. (all laugh) All right, can you tell us can you tell us others that may not have been as as severe or bad.

Overholt: One that I thought that maybe they should have had a strapping for and this was much later.

Kowalchuk: This would have been in the thirties now.

Overholt: Uh thirties, early forties, I'm not sure, but uh the bigger boys had caught a rabbit, they were very thick, and—maybe you've heard about this one—they put it in the drawer of the teacher's desk.

Kowalchuk: No.

Overholt: And she come to school and uh very carefully tucked her lunch in the rabbit. There was nothing to suggest there was anything in there. But when uh noon come, she opened the door. No lunch.

Kowalchuk: Really. Good gracious. Well, it could have been worse. They could have put a mouse in there or some a lot of the boys used to do.

Overholt: Oh, that happened a number of times.

Kowalchuk: That was, eh, I know, that's a favourite one.

Overholt: But uh the two of the boys had to go home and get their mom to make up some lunch for the teacher.

Kowalchuk: Really, oh, so that's how that was squared away. Interesting, mmhm. I was going to ask you, when what year did the Rypien boys start school there?

Rypien: In 28.

Kowalchuk: 28, oh, so that would have been about the time that you uh you were attending. Anything else about school that you would like to tell us that you can think of?

Rypien: What type of sports or extracurricular activities?

Overholt: Well, uh one thing about a country school, there was uh somebody would take charge of the little kids and teach them games, get them going in different games that they could play, but we played ball, we played different games in the snow in the winter, besides snowball fighting.

Kowalchuk: Fox and goose, or . . .

Overholt: Yes, that was one of the favourites.

Rypien: _____ was another game they used to play.

Overholt: And uh the that uh we always had something to do, and other than a ball and bat, we didn't need anything to uh . . .

Kowalchuk: That's true, to entertain you.

Rypien: Well, I remember Mike even talking about the boys would often climb trees and stuff . . . slide down hills and . . .

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: By the way . . . yeah, right. Did anybody travel by horse?

Overholt: No, but uh John ^{Fesuk}~~Pysk~~'s sister who was started school at seven, she travelled by dog sled. Two dogs pulled into school and she had two older brothers that would look after them.

Kowalchuk: Oh for goodness sakes. I was going to ask. Oh my goodness, isn't that something?

Overholt: And once in a while the dogs would see something interesting in the bush so she'd get dumped out but her brothers would rescue her.

Kowalchuk: Oh good gracious, eh, isn't that something. But she was really the only one that travelled, others walked.

Overholt: Yes, they all walked.

Kowalchuk: Yeah, uh, oh do you remember any concerts?

Overholt: Every year we had a Christmas concert.

Kowalchuk: Big thing, wasn't it?

Overholt: Oh yes, and uh you know everybody or almost everybody enjoyed being in it. I think the ones that objected still enjoyed it.

Kowalchuk: Is that right? Why would they object?

Overholt: Oh, some of the boys, you know.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see. They were too cool then, eh? Uh, I guess . . .

Rypien: There was also the school picnics at the end of the year which was a traditional thing.

Overholt: Mhm, yes.

Kowalchuk: Oh yeah, that would include all the family, no doubt.

Overholt: Yes, all the family.

Kowalchuk: Did your school as a ball and make up a ball team and ever go to another school to play ball?

Overholt: Oh yes, not when I was going to school but later when like Norman was going to school.

Kowalchuk: Your son.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: All right, so that would have been in the forties.

Overholt: Yes.

Rypien: Vi, just wondering, now when we were going to school the highlight of the school picnic was homemade ice cream. Did you have that?

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: Oh, is that right?

Rypien: That was a special treat.

Kowalchuk: Well, I guess, because you didn't see that too often. How would you, explain how you would have made that.

Overholt: Well, uh the ones that had ice, you know that was covered with sawdust, they would use that ice to make the ice cream and you know, everybody was milking cows, they had cream, but uh Mike's mother, she always brought a gallon and so did Katherine Rypien.

Kowalchuk: Is that right?

Overholt: It was just delicious!

Kowalchuk: I guess. What so you'd have ice in sawdust together.

Rypien: And you had uh block houses specially built with double walls insulated by shavings, and you in the spring of the year you cut blocks of ice and stack them in there and then cover it with ice, and that was your . . .

Kowalchuk: Covered it with . . .

Overholt: Shavings.

Rypien: Shavings, yeah.

Kowalchuk: To prevent it from melting.

Rypien: And that was also used as a place to keep your cream and meat from spoiling, and that was a sort of out outdoor fridge.

Kowalchuk: Uh huh, and uh so now you put the cream the fresh cream . . .

Overholt: Well, they had uh ice cream freezer.

Rypien: But some that didn't had ice cream pails, and you just turned it back and forth.

Kowalchuk: Manually.

Overholt: Yeah, and you used salt, pour salt . . .

Kowalchuk: Around the outside, yes.

Rypien: Over the ice, and that would uh and take the lid off periodically, stir it in so that the crust of ice cream that formed around the outside would blend in with the, you know, inside the pail.

Kowalchuk: Inside, yes. What would you put in for flavouring?

Overholt: Well, there was a variety of flavours.

Rypien: Vanilla was the main one.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Is that right?

Overholt: But uh some made like a custard and uh . . .

Rypien: Yes, you could use a boiled type of uh you know like you do a say a custard sauce now but you use that type of . . .

Overholt: With the cream.

Rypien: Or some just use the raw eggs and the milk and cream and a bit of salt and sugar, of course.

Kowalchuk: And did you have ice cream cones, or just did you have to use dishes?

Overholt: Uh some of the time we had ice cream cones.

Rypien: It was a treat that you could afford to have ice cream cones.

Kowalchuk: Oh sure.

Rypien: But if not, well, there was everything from lids off a tin, anything just to . . .

Kowalchuk: You weren't fussy . . . (Mike speaks in background, can't hear everything he says) Speak up Mike, so we can hear you. Oh that's on, yes, go ahead, go ahead.

Mike: Anyway, we used to make this ice cream for uh dessert and you know, Bernard and I would eat that whole thing.

Kowalchuk: Is that right? It was a real treat. Sure.

Overholt: And you were young and had very good appetites.

Kowalchuk: I suppose, I should say, yeah. Okay, we covered concerts and uh do we want to say anything more about concerts before we leave that? That was always Santa Claus was somebody always in the community.

Overholt: Oh yes, somebody from the community.

Kowalchuk: And he did come in his red suit, didn't he?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Uh what kind of treats would you get say in the thirties?

Overholt: Well, apples, oranges.

Mike: Lots of hard candy.

Kowalchuk: Yes, there were candy, hard candy was plentiful. What else would you get?

Overholt: Apples and oranges.

Kowalchuk: You would, the Jap oranges?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Mmhm.

Rypien: At at the in your school and at that earlier date, did you also get a gift? Were there box socials before the concerts?

Overholt: Yes, there was almost always a box social and uh that supplied the gifts and the treats.

Rypien: Raised the money.

Kowalchuk: Uh, interesting, Ann. Now a box social was something that we don't see or hear of any more. So tell us about a box social.

Overholt: Well, uh every all the women bought and girls brought boxes for supper and they were raffled to the highest or sold to the highest bidder. A few of them cheated, let the boyfriends take the box.

Kowalchuk: Yes, and once in a while a man would get someone else to buy his sweetheart's box, eh? So nobody would bid him up, eh?

Rypien: That's right, that was done. But uh the boxes . . .

Kowalchuk: Describe the boxes.

Rypien: Were sometimes quite elaborately decorated, beautifully with crepe paper.

Kowalchuk: Yes, I remember my mother making one. Crepe paper was the thing, and you'd make it, I distinctly remember my mother making a beautiful pink car.

Rypien: They had the old grape baskets. They had them in the shape of houses, oh just very creative.

Kowalchuk: Very creative, isn't that something.

Mike: Hearts.

Rypien: Hearts.

Kowalchuk: Hearts, yes.

Overholt: But the box that went the highest in price that I remember in the twenties was a plain wooden box. And it was the same box every year. Everybody knew it.

Kowalchuk: Really?

Overholt: But it was Mrs. Haub, you know, Mrs. Haub senior, and she was a good cook.

Kowalchuk: I was going to say.

Overholt: And she had a lot in there.

Kowalchuk: The lunch must have been the thing that got everybody.

Overholt: Yes, and her very interesting conversation.

Kowalchuk: Really, well. Now, how much was her box sold for?

Overholt: Well, I imagine it would go for possibly twelve dollars.

Kowalchuk: That would have been a high price in those days. Yes, I know I've heard of mother and dad talking about boxes going as high as fifteen; twenty was almost unheard of, I think, in those days.

Rypien: Yes, that's right. That's like Walter and Jack and Herb and Bob's mother, and she her husband never was here. She moved down here with the Haub boys uh before the First World War.

Kowalchuk: Did she?

Rypien: And uh, you know, . . .

Kowalchuk: As a as a widow?

Overholt: Yes, I think so.

Rypien: And they never talked about their dad. But she raised the family here. They were pretty well grown up at that time.

Kowalchuk: So the money realized from this box social would then be used to buy maybe the treats for the school . . .

Overholt: Yes, and the Christmas gifts.

Kowalchuk: And the Christmas gifts. You'd never exchange names, eh?

Overholt: No.

Kowalchuk: Did you buy your teacher a gift?

Overholt: I am not positive. I think the parents put money in for the teacher's gift. But we never collected money.

Kowalchuk: Parents bought the gift. What would one gift be? Can you think of something one of the teachers got, or, of course, as a child . . .

Overholt: I imagine five or six dollars which at that time went a long ways.

Kowalchuk: You don't mean you gave her a gift of money?

Overholt: No.

Kowalchuk: They would just buy her something for that amount.

Overholt: Buy her something for that amount.

Kowalchuk: Yes, oh yes, it would go a long way in those days. Yeah, yeah. Uh all right, so you're finished school. Did you want to say anything more about school?

Rypien: I was just going to say, now I was just curious, in Big Coulee, we always had some of the parents of the children make a stage. Now was that the case at Sawdy?

Overholt: No.

Rypien: Because it had to be elevated so that the . . .

Kowalchuk: True.

Overholt: In Sawdy Hall, there was the stage.

Kowalchuk: Oh you put on the concert in the hall.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Rather than your school.

Overholt: And there was people come out from Athabasca and Fairhaven, you know.

Kowalchuk: Yes, the district people all over used to, yes, they would come and attend, so you had a full house, didn't you?

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: Well, those were uh kind of interesting times for the people. I mean they didn't get out that much and didn't see that many things, so . . .

Mike: Well, that Christmas concert, that was a big due.

Kowalchuk: Yes. Would you have dances, too?

Overholt: Yes, there was dances after the concert.

Kowalchuk: After the concert.

Rypien: See, Sawdy Hall, I think, was built even before uh Youngville school.

Kowalchuk: Was it?

Rypien: Yeah, it was built before the school was even, 1912.

Kowalchuk: Well, that's interesting.

Rypien: Yes.

Kowalchuk: That the community felt they should have a community centre before a school.

Rypien: Well, there was a lot of the people there that had no children and they still wanted . . .

Kowalchuk: Oh, wanted a place to socialize.

Rypien: Socialize, yes.

Kowalchuk: I see.

Rypien: See there was like Sam McKelvey came and he wasn't married, like this Webb wasn't married, what about Bert Hillston, was he? He wasn't there then.

Overholt: No, uh yes, he was there, but he wasn't married.

Rypien: There was a lot of bachelors and uh so they felt the need of a community centre.

Kowalchuk: Sure, sure, of course. Uh when did you, you know, you were Grade 8, how old were you when you finished Grade 8.

Overholt: Fourteen.

Kowalchuk: Fourteen, so did you stay home for a few years before you were married.

Overholt: Yeah, couple years.

Kowalchuk: A couple of years? You worked on the farm? You were sixteen when you got married?

Overholt: Yeah.

Kowalchuk: Sixteen, and tell us who did you marry?

Overholt: I married my husband's neph or my foster-father's nephew.

Kowalchuk: Nephew, and his name is?

Overholt: Walter.

Kowalchuk: Walter.

Rypien: Son of Louie Overholt.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Son of Louie. Mmhm. So tell us about your wedding.

Overholt: Well, it was a very quiet wedding. Just members of the family.

Kowalchuk: Did you have a white dress?

Overholt: No.

Kowalchuk: What kind of a dress?

Overholt: Blue.

Kowalchuk: Did you get a special new blue dress?

Overholt: Mhm. Yes.

Rypien: Uh, Vi, uh Vi Kowalchuk, I'd like to add now because Vi was probably too modest. She was a very beautiful, slim, tall, young girl with beautiful flowing blond wavy hair.

Kowalchuk: Really?

Rypien: Not blond, uh yeah blond. Not really blond, but beautiful uh long flowing hair. I remember . . .

Man's voice in background: Right down to her lower back.

Kowalchuk: Is that right? At 16. Isn't that something. Well, did you get to go on a honeymoon, or not?

Overholt: At 1931 nobody was going on honeymoons. (Laughs)

Kowalchuk: Exactly, exactly. So you got married in 1931.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: No, so you just, now where did you live when you got married?

Overholt: About uh a mile from where I'm living right now.

Kowalchuk: Mm. Did your husband have a house there already?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Tell us about your courtship, we should go back a little bit. You knew of course . . .

Overholt: Well, I'd known him ever since I came there.

Kowalchuk: Did you go out socially before you were married?

Overholt: At that time, we were very strictly chaperoned.

Kowalchuk: I would imagine, I would imagine.

Overholt: But you went everyone, even the small children, went to the dances.

Kowalchuk: That's true. It was a family affair, wasn't it?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: So you would have gone out with your future husband but in the in the presence of others.

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: Mmhm. Yeah. Uh so you lived about a mile, so you got settled into your new home. Can you tell us a little about that?

Overholt: Well uh at that time the winters were much colder than they have been for a few years.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Overholt: And my husband worked in camps most winters.

Kowalchuk: Lumber camps?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Mhm. So you were left home alone?

Overholt: Yeah.

Rypien: He was helping to operate a sawmill at that time.

Overholt: Well there was a sawmill on Overholts and he helped log there so that that year too he was home nights, but then later he worked for McCormick cutting ties, and he was away for, well come home for Christmas.

Kowalchuk: So he was away for months at a time, eh?

Overholt: Yeah.

Rypien: And that was way up north?

Kowalchuk: I was going to ask, uh . . .

Overholt: It was up by Long View only on the other side of the river.

Kowalchuk: So that's up river, not down river? You're talking about upper?

Overholt: Yeah.

Rypien: No, no, northwest, yeah that's upper.

Kowalchuk: Upper, northwest. Yes. Did he make good money?

Overholt: No.

Kowalchuk: How much would he make a month?

Overholt: Uh I'm not real sure. Would they make any more than thirty dollars a month?

Man's voice in background: No, I think when Bruno and Joe worked for McCormick they went out for fifteen dollars a month.

Overholt: Could be, yes.

Kowalchuk: Oh, in the early thirties.

Rypien: And uh one year and that was before Joe and Bruno were working I remember Paul ^{Lupiezowice} Lepiezowich saying he put in a bad winter, you know, like they had a bad year, McCormick's, and he never did get paid after that whole intern in.

Kowalchuk: Oh, dear, dear. I suppose if things weren't that good.

Overholt: That's Jill Brown, Mabel Overholt's father.

Kowalchuk: Okay, we're just looking at a photograph now. Yeah, they're not going to understand that on the tape. Uh, all right, uh what describe your home when you were first married.

Overholt: It was a log house and two rooms.

Kowalchuk: Two rooms.

Overholt: Mmhm. And uh part of the furniture was homemade.

Kowalchuk: Was it, but your husband made it.

Rypien: What size about Vi?

Overholt: Mm, about uh fourteen by twenty. Something like that.

Rypien: Some people's living rooms are bigger than that.

Kowalchuk: Uh what would you have had in your house. What type of furniture?

Overholt: Uh just what was absolutely necessary. A bed and a handmade dresser that he had made, a table and chairs, and he made the cupboards.

Kowalchuk: A kitchen table and chairs.

Overholt: Mmhm. And of course the heater and the cookstove. And the cookstove was quite little.

Kowalchuk: Woodstove.

Overholt: Woodstove, yes. But uh it had two doors on the oven and one day I was baking bread and the neighbour boy come in and his feet were cold so he opened this oven door and stuck his feet in the oven.

Kowalchuk: Oh, while you were baking the bread eh? (Laughs)

Overholt: And the bread was in there.

Rypien: I've never heard of a two-door oven.

Overholt: And uh it where the ashes come out, there was a shelf there that you could set something on that was frozen. Down toward the bottom of the oven.

Rypien: Yeah, underneath the oven.

Kowalchuk: Is that right?

Overholt: You took the ashes out of a door on the side of the stove that you . . .

Kowalchuk: He would have bought the stove in town here.

Overholt: No, he got it second-hand some place. I don't know where.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see. So uh course you I was going to say how did you like baking the bread.

Overholt: Well, I had to learn.

Kowalchuk: You had to learn, eh.

Overholt: The oven did fine. It was just that uh I thought I knew how to cook but I had never made bread.

Kowalchuk: Until you were married.

Overholt: Discovered there was a little more to it than I thought.

Kowalchuk: Is that right? So did you just learn on your own, or go back you did.

Overholt: Well, ^{Konior} Mrs. Connier was a big help.

Kowalchuk: Was she? One of the neighbours?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Yes, isn't that nice, she came and gave you a few lessons, eh.

Overholt: Well, no, she just told me what I should do. And that was knead the dough for half an hour after I had it all mashed up. And it did improve it wonderfully.

Kowalchuk: All right, you would have had a garden?

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: You grew a lot of your own vegetables, I imagine.

Overholt: Milked a couple of cows, and uh as the herd increased, the eight cows.

Kowalchuk: Had your own milk and butter?

Overholt: Oh yes.

Kowalchuk: Did you raise chickens?

Overholt: Mmhm.

Kowalchuk: Any hogs?

Overholt: Not too many. We usually had one that we would butcher but uh . . .

Kowalchuk: When would you butcher a hog?

Overholt: In the fall.

Kowalchuk: In the fall so that you had your meat for the winter, eh?

Overholt: It was until about 1940, I don't think we raised any pigs of our own.

Kowalchuk: How often would you come into town when you were first married?

Overholt: Maybe every four to six months. Not that often.

Kowalchuk: Really? But what kind of supplies.

Overholt: Well, that's when I would go to town. My husband went to town much more often.

Kowalchuk: I think the men in those days did go to town more often.

Overholt: For a number of years, he hauled the mail for Sawdy Post Office so he went in every Saturday.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see. So when you were married, now who was running the Post Office?

Overholt: My foster mother, Mabel Overholt.

Kowalchuk: Your foster mother was running it, okay. So your husband would go in what, once a week?

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Once a week, you say.

Rypien: Her foster mother was her aunt, you now her aunt by marriage.

Kowalchuk: By marriage, yes. Unusual situation to say the least. Uh what kind of groceries would your husband buy when he came in?

Overholt: Just uh the absolute necessities. He never bought meat, and sugar and tea or coffee, flour, yeast.

Rypien: Baking powder.

Overholt: Mmhm, yes. And if you were lucky you might be able to buy some raisins.

Kowalchuk: That was a treat.

Overholt: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Of course, of course, so you wouldn't have any idea of what your weekly grocery bill would be.

Overholt: I imagine it would be around four dollars.

Kowalchuk: Four dollars.

Overholt: Four dollars, yes.

Kowalchuk: Isn't that something? Very good.

Rypien: Did your husband or anyone in your husband's family ever grind the wheat locally because this is what they did in Big Coulee district.

Overholt: Yeah.

Rypien: You did that quite a bit.

Kowalchuk: So you would take some wheat in to Athabasca to be ground here at the mill.

Overholt: Yes you could. My husband never did. The farm we were living on the barley ripened. Wheat wouldn't. That took care of that. Oats and barley.

Rypien: Peaty soil.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see.

Rypien: It wasn't sandy like around our way.

Kowalchuk: Oh. So you would have to buy all your flour then?

Overholt: A dollar a bag at that time.

Kowalchuk: A big bag. 20 lb. bag?

Overholt: A 100-lb.

Kowalchuk: A 100 lbs. Oh my! You didn't.

Overholt: They didn't even sell 20 lb. bags.

Kowalchuk: No, I guess not.

Rypien: Uh pardon me.

Kowalchuk: Speak up so we can hear you.

Rypien: Wasn't there a flour mill where they milled flour here locally in Athabasca?

Overholt: There was, yes.

Kowalchuk: Yes, because Mr. Martenyk just told me about it here the other day.

Rypien: Because I remember even you know as a young girl myself. But they weren't too happy with the quality of the flour and a lot of them if they could afford it would prefer to buy the say Robin Hood or Purity flour or whatever was available in the stores, but it was always in 100-lb. bags.

Kowalchuk: We're just about finished, so we're going to as soon as the tape is finished, I think we're almost done, we'll take a coffee break here. Uh hm so isn't it funny. These male chauvinists would go to town more often than the women.

Overholt: Oh sure, of course.

Kowalchuk: The women had . . . yes you didn't complain.

Overholt: You want to bet on it?

Kowalchuk: Oh, some people had no choice eh?

Overholt: No. Uh we couldn't take a small child or . . .

Kowalchuk: When did you have your first child?

Overholt: 1933.

Kowalchuk: '33. Uh huh, so that was a couple of years later.

Overholt: Yes. I had five children.

Kowalchuk: I was going to say eventually you had five in all. So you were busy, weren't you? Uh keeping them, did you sew?

Overholt: Oh yes. Sew, knit. I uh we had sheep.

Kowalchuk: Did you?

Overholt: I spun wool and knit sweaters, socks, mitts.

Kowalchuk: You had your own spinning wheel?

Overholt: Mhm.

Kowalchuk: Did you?

Overholt: I still have it.

Kowalchuk: You still have it. Do you? Oh, for goodness sake.

Rypien: I was going to mention that before.

Kowalchuk: That's very good, right. That is, because, you know, yes knitting all the woollen socks and mitts, that would help.

Rypien: One other reason like why women didn't go into town for one thing you know, they just didn't have the clothes, really.

Kowalchuk: I suppose.

Overholt: The clothes, and there was so little money that it went for these, you know, what you . . .

Rypien: Basically necessities.

Kowalchuk: That's right.

Overholt: The food you had to have.

Kowalchuk: Well, it would be pretty well an all day trip to come to town.

Overholt: It was, yes.

Kowalchuk: So what would you pack your husband a lunch or would he eat at the cafe here, in the hotel or . . .

Overholt: Well, sometimes he would want lunch. A lot of times he didn't eat.

Kowalchuk: He didn't. Yeah, he just managed to get home when he got back.

Overholt: Have supper when he got back.

Kowalchuk: Sure, sure. And you know in the winter time when the days were so short, he'd probably go in the dark and come back in the dark.

Overholt: At seven in the morning he'd leave.

Kowalchuk: Sure, yeah.

Overholt: And get back five, six.

Kowalchuk: Right. You had more than just the team of horses to come to town. You probably used horses in the early thirties on the farm.

Overholt: Yes, and uh for farming, for travelling too.

Kowalchuk: Travelling to and from, yes yes. Did you visit neighbours a lot in those days?

Overholt: Well, the ones that were closer that you could walk to.

Kowalchuk: Oh, you walked.

Rypien: But originally Dexter Overholt did have oxen to work with.

Overholt: Farmed with oxen.

Kowalchuk: Now this is your . . .

Overholt: My husband's grandfather. ✓

Kowalchuk: Did he?

Overholt: Well he's the one with the . . .

Rypien: Dexter Overholt is Harry's Dad.

Kowalchuk: That's right. So he had oxen to travel to and from . . .

Overholt: Yes, he farmed with oxen for about four or five years.

Kowalchuk: Did he? That would have been in the twenties then.

Overholt: No, that was before that.

Kowalchuk: Before that. Oh, I see. Mm. All right, we've got you married now.

Rypien: Five children.

Kowalchuk: Five children. Uh how did the depression affect you people?

Overholt: Well it was very tough but uh you did the best you could. And you know

. . .

Rypien: There was no social assistance.

Kowalchuk: No social assistance. Did you recall getting coupons for sugar and . . .

Overholt: No.

Rypien: That was sugar during the war years.

Kowalchuk: That was later on.

Rypien: Yes, 38, 39.

Kowalchuk: That was later on. That's right.

Overholt: After the war it started.

Kowalchuk: After the war already.

Rypien: It was after 39.

Kowalchuk: Yeah, so you really had a tough time during the depression.

Overholt: Yes, oh yes, everyone did.

Kowalchuk: The depression hit here about what, '33, '34?

Rypien: No.

Kowalchuk: '28, wasn't that early, eh?

Rypien: When Mike's dad came they bought ^{wheat} ~~wheat~~ for was it over two dollars a bushel?

Man's voice in background: For seed, yeah.

Rypien: And that fall they sold it for twenty-eight cents a bushel.

Kowalchuk: Oh dear. Mm. Times were tough.

Man's voice in background: It cost eight cents a bushel to thrash it.

Kowalchuk: Yes, you didn't make . . .

Overholt: You didn't make very much.

Kowalchuk: That's for sure. But still, during the depression the farm people were much better off than the say the town or country or the city people.

Overholt: Well the ones in town could get welfare. Only a few in the country.

Kowalchuk: Oh. What would . . .

Overholt: They seemed to manage to get welfare.

Kowalchuk: You don't know what would qualify them to get welfare?

Overholt: Well uh the ones in town other than possibly a garden they couldn't raise anything, you know.

Kowalchuk: Mmhm, and didn't have a job. Now what would qualify someone out in the country though I'm wondering.

Rypien: It was welfare, uh just excuse me for a minute, they got welfare but not in the sense of a handout but they got a sort of a like they would work on the road. It was a dole type of thing they called it.

Overholt: If they got welfare, they had to work it out.

(ONE SIDE ONLY -- Tape One, Side A ends here)