

Cloe Day interview

by Vi Kowalchuk

Tape begins with muffled voices, can't make out everything.

Kowalchuk: All right, I think we were talking about the hectograph and you making your report.

Day: Oh yes, that little Red Cross book that we made.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day: I'd heat that hectograph. Set it on the stove, warm it up, and I'd set it out on the snow, cool it off, and then I could make another page right then.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see.

Day: And we made these twelve little books and sent them to different countries through Mrs. Conquest, and do you know all of those in Richmond Park school, before it burned down . . .

Kowalchuk: Olga Shalapay.

Day: Olga Shalapay, and she'll tell you how many, but I think so there were twenty some books back from all over the world that we got back from other schools. We took pictures, you know. Snapshots and pasted, clipped pictures.

Kowalchuk: You had a camera?

Day: An old brownie had a piece of tape on it to keep the light out, but we used it, and also we ~~we~~ clipped pictures, you know, out of papers and magazines, and the kids wrote little stories, poems, explanations about things in Canada, and we'd send it off to South Africa or to New Zealand.

Kowalchuk: That was a learning experience.

Day: And that school burned down, and those books burned with it.

Kowalchuk: Oh, what a shame!

Day: Olga was so upset about that because she thought (telephone rings in background).

Kowalchuk: All right, so the school burned down. This was the first school they built.

Day: Mmhm, I think. Yes, it was the one I taught in. It burned down a few years ago. And those things went with it. And Olga was trying to get it made into an archives or something.

Kowalchuk: Yes, that's right. All right, did you have the enterprise system then?

Day: That came in then, and that was another shocker to me because, too all of us, though, and Kostash was the inspector. He had instructions and sent word around that he could send, at the government's expense, two teachers a year in for summer school to learn how. And so I wrote to him immediately and said, "I haven't the remotest how." But he came out and said, "I don't think anyone has. Why don't you do it a year, just weigh it in, do the best you can with it. Next year I'll send you to summer school, and you'll know what questions you want to ask." And it was a very clever way to do it. And so I weighed it in, and I loved the enterprise system. We made the most exciting enterprises because of the nature of those students. They're artistic, they're full of ideas.

Kowalchuk: Yes, and you could incorporate all the subjects into it.

Day: All the subjects. The boys built barns to scale and farm yards, used a little _____ to cut out Clydesdales and holsteins, the art classes painted them. We made a rug, hooked a rug, and I used a four-penny, four-inch nail, and filed the point, you know, around it and notched it with a little file, and that was our rug hook, and we made up the pattern because we couldn't buy wool. So Mrs. Little's rummage sales used to have lots of things that weren't very good, and she'd leave us no end of any knitted thing, like rayon stockings were the thing, weren't they.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day: We hooked a windmill made of rayon stockings unto our rug. I gave up a perfectly good pair of green pajamas for _____ and things around it. We hooked little flowers in it, and blue skies, and then Mrs. Robin used a pair of George's old corduroys and put a border on it and a back so that it wouldn't snag. We raffled it for about three dollars and bought an encyclopedia.

Kowalchuk: There you are.

Day: One book encyclopedia. The boys made a spinning wheel.

Kowalchuk: Did they?

Day: I had to teach industrial arts, too.

Kowalchuk: There's another subject, yes.

Day: So the boys made a spinning wheel. Honestly, it was an awfully clumsy thing, but it spun wool.

Kowalchuk: It did?

Day: Yes.

Kowalchuk: This is hard to believe.

Day's daughter: Didn't you put some of those in a fair or something in Edmonton, and they got really honourable mentions.

Day: We got a few honourable mentions.

Kowalchuk: Did you? Oh, marvellous. When you talked about lesson plans, what kind of lesson plans would you have made? Did you have objectives? Did you write . . .

Day: Absolutely.

Kowalchuk: You did.

Day: I had the objectives, I knew what I was aiming for with that, and I had a set of questions based on every single unit.

Kowalchuk: You had unit plans as well.

Day: Mmhm.

Kowalchuk: And you had probably a yearly plan.

Day: A whole year.

Kowalchuk: Oh my goodness. Well, you had to be prepared though. You really had to be prepared.

Day: And we couldn't get paper. If the kids didn't have paper, the Conquest again came to my aid. He used to give me damaged bundles of newsprint and I'd take it to the school. And for art work, I remember in Big Coulee, we had two big white poplar boards, full length of the blackboard, didn't we, and did chalk work up there. We did an Eskimo enterprise, and we did all kinds of Eskimo scenes with chalk. And this little Rypien lady, Anne, was good, and she used to just break her little

neck to get her lesson done so she could go and do her art work.

Kowalchuk: I believe she contributes, or gives you the benefit of learning to draw and this art work that she does so well now. You were the one that . . .

Day: She gave me a picture yesterday.

Kowalchuk: Did she give you a picture. Isn't that great? So, you left for Big Coulee. Any particular reason why you left Richmond Park?

Day: Mmhm. Had a fight with somebody. I'm not going to name names, but somebody pinched my knee and I socked him. And I didn't trade at somebody's store, and so then we had a little royal battle there. Five years in one place is enough.

Kowalchuk: You're right, you're right, yes. So you came to Big Coulee, stayed at the teacherage. You had your two children. Patricia was in school, grade one. Who was babysitting Chester?

Day: Elza came with me, and then Olga came and stayed with us in that same little teacherage, and attended school. Took her grade nine here.

Kowalchuk: Okay. Did you notice anything different? Was Big Coulee an improvement then five years down the road from Richmond Park, or not?

Day: The teacher had improved in the five years because I started . . . They used to mark teachers, you know, poor, fair, fairly good, good, very good, excellent.

Kowalchuk: Did they?

Day: And so I got my excellent about the third year, and so I'd improved.

Kowalchuk: But as far as conditions, or the situation . . .

Day: Yes, because we were in the big division, and we had, we didn't get very much more equipment, but I got paid every month.

Kowalchuk: Oh, you got paid every month by then. And did you have a bit more supplies? Maybe a Neilson map, a chocolate bar . . .

Day: A bit more, but not lots.

Kowalchuk: Not lots. Yes.

Day: You see, I did get my money out of Richmond Park's hold only because I filed a homestead up there. And then all the farmers could come and work out their taxes on my homestead.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see.

Day: And so I got 35 acres of land open that I can share profit. But the first year my wheat froze, and I got 14 cents a bushel.

Kowalchuk: Oh dear.

Day: But Mr. ^{Rabin}Robin was my sharecropper, and he told me I was making a mistake to go for wheat anyway. Why don't I put it in alfalfa. Then the alfalfa companies would come and buy the seed on the field and harvest it themselves, and I didn't need anybody. They used to come every summer and pick the weeds out of it so I'd have pure seed.

Kowalchuk: When did you sell your land?

Day: When she was in grade eight, she developed a terrible heart condition, and it was when penicillin was so new they didn't know how to keep it. She was down with my mother in Seattle, and they had to fly it in from California.

Kowalchuk: Oh.

Day: It took a heck of a lot of money to fly it in every third day or something. So I sold it to Krawec for \$1400.

Kowalchuk: Did you?

Day: Just exactly got her heart fixed, too.

Kowalchuk: Oh my goodness. I guess, but then you had your health so it was a big thing. So you stayed at Big Coulee for two years.

Day: Then went to Lac La Biche, to Craig End, south of Lac La Biche. The next year I went to Edmonton and went back to school, and that's when I adopted

Day's daughter: _____ someplace in there.

Day: It isn't there yet. Went to Edmonton and went to school just to improve my certification and took, hadn't enough chemistry, and I hadn't done that in high school enough, and I just went, forgotten the name of the school. It was an industrial school of some kind. Took chemistry and physics. And then I thought maybe I'd go in for aircraft repair. This was during the war, you see.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day: And they were swooping hard to get aircraft repair people, so I took aircraft repair in industrial arts there.

Kowalchuk: Oh my goodness.

Day: And these two were in school. She was grade three, and Chester was grade one, then. And that's when I adopted Mary Soluk because she wanted to go to school and couldn't out here, so I said, "Just come to Edmonton with us, and go to

school.’’ But they wanted \$75 tuition. That was a lot of dough.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day: So she got it around a little bit and found out that for \$15 I could adopt her.

Kowalchuk: But you don’t mean legally.

Day: Yes.

Kowalchuk: Legally?

Day’s daughter: She got legal guardianship.

Kowalchuk: Oh, I see, yes.

Day: And her brother, Paul, was in the Air Force, there, that time, so he found \$10 of it and I found \$5, and we adopted Mary.

Kowalchuk: For goodness sake.

Day: And right now, Mary has reams of children, but her older sister, Anne . . . Did you know them? The Soluks?

Kowalchuk: I know some of the ones that are here.

Day: But her older sister, Anne, had died in a house fire, and Mary promised to take care of her baby. So Mary adopted Shirley. Now then Shirley didn’t have any children, so she’s adopted two. So my adopted daughter’s adopted daughter’s adopted son just graduated from high school.

Kowalchuk: My goodness. Yes, that’s the picture we saw yesterday. So, okay, so you got some more training, and you worked at something other than teaching for awhile.

Day: Not really. Just here and there. Then I came back to _____.

Day's daughter: Well, tell them, because they wouldn't hire you because you had a couple of kids. They wouldn't let you join the service. They wouldn't let you drive a jeep.

Day: Yeah, couldn't get near me because I had to sign my kids over to somebody else permanently.

Kowalchuk: Permanently.

Day: Yes, so that if I got bumped off or something, they wouldn't be responsible.

Kowalchuk: I see, that was the reason.

Day: I'd already got my Sergeant Stripes, too. That's why I quit there.

Kowalchuk: And came back to teaching.

Day: Came back to teaching. So then I talked with _____. Then Whitelaw up in the Peace River country needed a principal that would pay lots more money, and it was a three-room school—grades one to four, grades five to eight, grade nine, ten, eleven—and nine, ten, eleven teacher was the principal. So I took that job.

Kowalchuk: Oh.

Day: And taught there for a couple of years. The war ended there.

Kowalchuk: So that was in '45.

Day: Then I went to school. Went to the States a year.

Kowalchuk: Did you?

Day: Then I went to my mother's. They lived in Seattle. Then I went to Vermillion.

Kowalchuk: Yes, in Alberta here.

Day: Yes, for '47-'48 year. And in the fall of '48, I went to Gibsons, and I've been there ever since.

Kowalchuk: And you taught school there.

Day: All the time.

Kowalchuk: Twenty-two years. Now you must tell us this story that you told at Dave and Nancy's the other day. When you were asked to sub or take over for one teacher, and the kids were not too well behaved.

Day: Oh, this was after I retired. This ridiculous law that I retired in 70, and it was after that.

Kowalchuk: Forty years of teaching, and you decided to go subbing.

Day: And then I didn't decide to. They needed a sub so badly because the teacher of business machines was having an operation, and six students were going to lose their year—not be able to graduate—if they couldn't complete certain assignments. And no one else knew how. So I told them, "I won't come back there because you don't want me in that school. The minute I walk in there, somebody's going to be in trouble." He said, "What makes you think so?" I said, "You let one little Johnny tell me to f-off, and he's laid out like a rug." And he would have been, believe me. And I said, "You'll be in trouble. You'll stick up for me. Ever so many board members will back me or they will be in trouble. The kid was in trouble in the minute he opened his mouth, and I'll be in jail, so I won't be bothered." But then they told me about these six that were going to have to lose a

year, and I put the teacher in a terrible spot. And he assured me that it wouldn't be like that. So I went. And it wasn't like that simply because my reputation was still there. I had laid _____ somebody six foot two.

Kowalchuk: I'm going to talk about that because I know that story. I've heard it. Go ahead, though.

Day: But anyway, he went down then and told, his wife was subbing in that room, and said it'd be all right I'd come. So she told the girls. Oh she said there was so much giggling and snorting around there, and she said, "I suggest you girls straighten up and become ladies. Mrs. Day is coming in to take this class. She knows exactly what you should be doing, and how you should be doing it, and furthermore, she doesn't put up with any nonsense." And she's sitting there yap, yap, yap, . . . "When's Mrs. Day coming?" "Tomorrow." "Good, God, that leaves us overnight to become ladies."

Kowalchuk: (Laughs) I love that story.

Day: But, you know, they never even raised an eyebrow.

Kowalchuk: That's good. But I did hear a story quite a few years ago about Mrs. Day teaching, and she had a bit of trouble with a one big six foot fellow, and she said, "Just a moment here. When we're finished here, I'll meet you in the gym." And you proceeded to put on boxing gloves and you showed him a thing or two.

Day: Ah, that I broke his nose.

Kowalchuk: You did?

Day: I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to. He was just being a . . .

Kowalchuk: A rascal?

Day: Well, I was telling him, "Get your dukes up. Don't stand there like this. Cover up when you're boxing." And then I would just bonged in there, and he didn't have . . . oh, I didn't mean to break his nose.

Kowalchuk: Did it start because of a problem with him in a classroom or were you just teaching him?

Day: That's the wrong story. No, the one in the classroom was when I first went out there, and the those kids were so bad. There'd been a single high school teacher, the principal, and he was a little man. And those great big bruisers worked in logging camps and fish boats all summer. And he'd go and ring the bell, it was a hand bell, he'd ring the bell. They told him once, "No, we've just got one inning left. We want to finish the ball game." He said, "Sir, we come in at school time." And he rang the bell. They hung him up by his collar on the coat pegs and went out and finished the ball game. Now that's the kind of mess that I walked into. And I don't put up with that kind of nonsense.

Kowalchuk: No, no.

Day: So, I told him. I walked in. They said, "Ha, ha, ha. Another woman teacher. Women teachers can't make us do anything. Your predecessors in Essendale, we gave her a nervous breakdown." All this before I'd even said "good morning."

Kowalchuk: Oh my goodness.

Day: So I said, "Look kids. There's going to be a breakdown here, and it won't be my nerves." And so anyway I was teaching ancient history, which is pretty bad, and I was writing something on the board, and turned around to speak to him. And

here was this big fellow, had a wad of paper in his hand, and was just rising up, you know.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day: So I pretended I didn't notice that at all. I made my statement, turned around, and wrote on the board until I heard that paper hit. Just laid down the chalk, and walked back down there, and I went . . . across his face. And he jumped up and said, "What the heck do you think . . .?" And I got him right there. He sat down and held his tummy. But he tried once more. He said, "Look, I wasn't." I meant to hit his mouth and I hit his nose and it bled, and I cut his lip, and I kind of came down like that, and he didn't say anything else. The girls were crying over there. Nobody else in the room said a word. And then when I found out he'd had it, I said, "Look kids, Ted isn't the only guy that has a tummy. There's about nineteen of you here, and if you want it, come and get it now, because I got a lot more where that came from." And nobody wanted it, and . . .

Day's daughter: And you were glad because you were too tired at that point.

Day: I didn't have any more. About once every third year, someone new would come in and wouldn't believe it.

Kowalchuk: Yes, that's right.

Day: Pushed me a little too far.

Kowalchuk: Well, they had to test you. So you don't think too much of our lack of discipline or lack of respect.

Day: No, I certainly don't. I think it's very unjust. I think it's very unjust to students. What you're doing is asking a grade 10 boy to use adult judgement. How can he?

Kowalchuk: How can he, yes indeed.

Day: How can he? It's most unfair to them.

Kowalchuk: They need discipline, they want it.

Day: And those same fellows, and I walloped a few in my time, and they're coming back now and saying, "Mrs. Day, will you please go into that school just for one week. That kid is mine. Nobody can make him do a thing. Just come for one week."

Kowalchuk: Isn't that something.

Day: And those are the same boys that I taught.

Day's daughter: All those boys that she's walloped through . . . the girls had gotten away.

Day: I get a hundred and fifty, oh, closer to two hundred Christmas cards a year from ex-students.

Kowalchuk: All right, our time is drawing close, and you're going to go for lunch. Tell us a little bit about your life today. You do some wonderful things.

Day: Oh, I quit teaching in 1970, and became a carpenter.

Kowalchuk: And you're doing some wonderful stuff.

Day: Well, I'm just loving it. I learned to use a router to carve free-handed. So I carved doors, carve planks and make them into doors. But these same students that I used to abuse so badly bring me ^{burls} ~~burrels~~. There are ever so many of them are loggers. And a ^{burt} ~~burrell~~ is a big growth on a tree, and they slice them up for me. I make beautiful clocks, and that kind of thing.

Kowalchuk: Yes. I saw some loose pictures. Before we leave, Gene had mentioned about the relationships that the friends you have back here, and I want to talk for just a minute or two, but before we leave, and before I ask you that, why did George Ryga come to see you, and what did he have to say?

Day: A friend of ours is into writing, and he found out that I was there, and he knew me—just from the district—so he just came to see me. He just came to see what I'm doing now, and they talked about it.

Kowalchuk: Just for a visit. Did he talk about his days here in Richmond Park?

Day: Yes, I asked him. I said, "I can't remember you. Did I ever wallop you in grade five?" and he said, "No. You'd left before I started school." And his wife was blind.

Kowalchuk: Yes, unfortunately.

Day: I just worry about her now, because he was so good with her. She wanted to see what I was making, and we went to the workshop where I was carving, and all that, and he'd take her by the hand, and she could put her hand around those things, and she threw her fingers, you see.

Kowalchuk: Yes. Her daughter was here at the University. I think they gave George some sort of an award, and she came to accept it. You've made a lot of friends, here, in Athabasca, particularly at Richmond Park because you were there the longest. And you still keep in touch, and in fact, you're going to go and have lunch with one of your students. Right? So you keep in touch with the Rabins and the Kluzzes and the Shap¹kas, Shalapays, Dupilkas. Those were good times, weren't they?

Day: And Mrs. Donahue, well, as long as she was there.

Kowalchuk: Yes, you did keep in touch with her. Those were good times, weren't they, Mrs. Day?

Day: Oh, very good. Honestly, we had some dreadfully difficult times. I can't say really hungry, but we certainly went without lots of food products that we wished we had. And we certainly went without clothing of the kind we needed. But weren't they good times? Everything we did, it seems to me we did together. We made our own music. We made our own parties. We made our own dancing. We made our own concerts.

Kowalchuk: We had our own box socials. I remember. Yes, you talked about the fire at Big Coulee. You know, I remember, the one thing, a lot of things stick out in my mind at Big Coulee, but the one thing I remember is when you broke that window when we had the fire, the teacherage fire, one of the boys had gone out to the bathroom and came running in, and said, "Mrs. Day, the teacherage is on fire." And you don't have a scar there. Do you know, Mrs. Day, the picture of your cut will never leave my mind. I don't know why. It wasn't that bad, but I was little, and I remember when you broke that window, and we were all out there and we're all . . .

Day: Can't remember how that thing started, but it was so good because those kids just lined up. We had two big boys at the well, didn't we? And then it seemed to me, pots and pans, and everything imaginable. There was just about a steady stream of water.

Kowalchuk: That was a break in those days lessons.

Day's daughter: Her experiences in the north sort of always carried through in that community together, you know, has always followed her.

Day: It's very important, I think.

Kowalchuk: Yes. Oh, I'm writing a story of my own here because and I'm not nearly as old as you are, but I just think our kids just will never know this kind of thing.

Day: We wanted, the school pulled together to make ours the best school that ever was.

Kowalchuk: Yes.

Day's daughter: She always fought for the kids. It didn't matter what. We were talking about it recently, and they said we remember the time that Ches and I had to go to our grandparents on a bus or a train or something because there were students in her class in her school that had never been any place, and so she decided they needed that experience. And so she filled the car with all of these students. And there wasn't room for us. We had to do something.

Day: But really and truly, though, teachers now seem to feel the classroom and their particular course, and that's it. Nancy says the thing that she remembered most was we took them all to a funeral once. They'd never seen a dead body. So I took them all to a funeral. And I think education is much much broader then. Now don't say I've got anything against reading, writing, and arithmetic. I think they're very important. But you've got to have a total experience as far as I'm concerned. And it's all a teacher's business.

Kowalchuk: You think so.

Day: It is.

Kowalchuk: Good, and on that note, we'll say thank you ever so much Mrs. Day. We really appreciate this. I think we could go on for another couple of hours. I know you have an awful lot of good stories and things Gene had talked about your forty years, you had mentioned the pension. It's not nearly the pension that people get today, but you're happy.

Day: I think old people in Canada are spoiled rotten.

Kowalchuk: Yes, yes. We have it too good.

Day's daughter: But then I think that old people deserve it.

Kowalchuk: And you certainly do. We'll let you go to lunch. Thanks again, Mrs. Day.

Kowalchuk: This interview was conducted by Vi Kowalchuk in Athabasca.

(Tape Four ends here.)