

**Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project**  
**Transcription of AI Wurfel journalism student recording 2016.mp3**

[http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/a\\_wurfel.htm](http://digiport.athabascau.ca/aasmp/people/a_wurfel.htm)

Narrator: Albert Wurfel  
Interviewer: Kaitlyn Heroux  
June 12, 2016

[Start of Interview]

**Kaitlyn** Can I get you to just restate your name again?

**Albert** Albert Wurfel.

**Kaitlyn** All right. Well I'm Kaitlyn. So you said you were born in Hilda, Alberta?

**Albert** That's correct.

**Kaitlyn** Where's that?

**Albert** That's 60 miles northeast of Medicine Hat, just off the Saskatchewan border.

**Kaitlyn** How was that? How long were you there for?

**Albert** Oh, well, it was actually a farm. I was born on the farm, but that's the nearest town in Alberta where I was born.

**Kaitlyn** So how long were you there for?

**Albert** Well, I lived on that farm probably till I was about five. Okay, and then we moved to Lethbridge, and after the Second World War, at the end of the war, we moved to Medicine Hat, then we moved to Hilda. So I was there from Grade 3 till Grade 11.

**Kaitlyn** Do you have any memories of Hilda?

**Albert** Lots. [Both laugh]

**Kaitlyn** Do you mind sharing any?

**Albert** Well, sure. So I was in Grade 3 and the town had, we had a whole 100 kids in the school and it ran to Grade 9. For a while it grew, it ran to Grade 11 and I enjoyed it. I mean, it was a very small town and kids growing up there just pretty well had the run of the town. You know, we could run across town on our bike quite easy and stuff. So we had friends and we did all kinds of stuff, like we played hide and seek and prisoners' base, and I forget the name of some of the games we played. But, you know, we had a lot of fun growing up and school was fun. And school was always in that town, like three grades to the room. And then in Grade 7, we got to move to the high school, which was a country school, pulled into town and set beside the main school and there was Grades 7 to 11.

**Kaitlyn** And how was that?

**Albert** Well, it was, when I look back on it, the instruction wasn't that great, because the teacher had to teach everything for four different grades. But, you know, there was a library there. Oh, about the size of those two tables in a cupboard that went up to the, you know, a size you could reach. And when the teacher was busy teaching other kids, then you could go back there. I basically read that library and I probably learned a lot from doing that.

**Kaitlyn** That sounds like a lot of fun.

**Albert** Yes, I enjoyed school there. We had a school barn. Well, you know, kids from the country would ride their horses or pull a wagon, you know, to the school and put the horses in there, going to the school. That's how they traveled for a while. And then when I was about halfway through school, they started using school busses. Yeah, they weren't really busses, they were what would be called a van now. You know, they have a bench on each side and maybe eight kids. They'd go, you know, different routes. There was different vans and that's how the kids would get there.

**Kaitlyn** It's pretty neat.

**Albert** Well, I never did get to ride on those busses because I lived half a block from school.

**Kaitlyn** Oh, you would just walk?

**Albert** My dad, you see, I had a younger sister a year younger and a brother five years younger, and my dad was the partner in a garage. They sold International equipment and trucks and Chevy cars and did a lot of repair work. So it was a booming place for a while, like after the Second World War. And then, you know, like all small towns, right now there's nothing there. Not nothing, but there's no school there. Kids from there go to school in Medicine Hat. So they go 50 miles to school.

**Kaitlyn** Well, what brought you to Athabasca?

**Albert** What brought me to Athabasca is, well, I came here as vice principal of the new EPC (Edwin Parr Composite) school. Was supposed to be a big regional high school with all kinds of new programs, vocational education programs and all that. It only partially met that requirement. In the first place, Boyle sort of decided they didn't want to be part of it. But there were 800, I'd say there were 850 kids there shortly after I got here from Grades 7 to 12.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** So it was interesting. And that was in the '60s, I came in '68. And, you know, all the things that were going on in the '60s when, at that time kids knew everything and their parents agreed with them. Kids have always known everything, including me, when I was a kid. But that was the one stretch in history where the parents agreed that kids knew everything and that was not in Athabasca, just, that was basically world wide. You know, like in China they had the Cultural Revolution where the kids basically, you know, tore up the old ways in China there. And, you know, it turned out quite disastrously. It wasn't that bad here, but, you know, the drug culture and the rock and roll and all that stuff, that all was going on there in the late '60s and early '70s. But I enjoyed it, and the one thing I can

say is I wasn't bored a day of my working life because if you got enough kids around, they don't let things get boring.

**Kaitlyn** So what was EPC like when you were the vice principal?

**Albert** Well, I was the vice principal for, what, three or four years, and I became principal and, I thought it was it good school! [Both laugh] And there was a lot of things going in there. We had you know the same, we didn't have football, but we had the same sports you have over there now, like basketball and volleyball and track. And we had a really good band and a pretty big band. You don't have one now, do you?

**Kaitlyn** No.

**Albert** And we had debating tournaments, lots of debating. We had some provincial champions come out of that school.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** And you still have drama and you do quite well in drama, and we did then too. The school has always been very strong in drama.

**Kaitlyn** Do you have any memories about there? Any, kind of, crazy students that did some crazy things, or just, mean teachers?

**Albert** Well, you know, if I'd known what we're doing today, maybe I'd have thought of some more. Of course, there was lots of crazy things kids did. I guess I could tell one that in retrospect, I thought was very funny, but it wasn't funny, it was dangerous. The drama room was over, what is there now, you know, I'm not sure what is there now, but it was next to the shop at the end of the upstairs hallway.

**Kaitlyn** Oh, yeah.

**Albert** What's there now?

**Kaitlyn** What's there is a classroom now.

**Albert** OK, that's where the drama room was. And the kids were doing drama, and I don't know what happened to the teacher, but she was gone for a while. And the kids got the idea that they were going to crawl over the shop, above where the kids were working down in the shop, and this is a long ways down, and they lifted a tile and they were throwing stuff down on kids. And then all of a sudden one kid slipped and he grabbed on to the studs and hung on, but his feet were dangling. And of course, the teacher and the kids below saw this kid there. If he'd have fallen down onto that open mower there, that would have been very serious. But the other kids pulled him up and they got back into the classroom before the teacher came back. But I remember I was walking down the hall and the shop teacher met me in the hallway and he was white as a sheet, that's the first time I'd ever seen him all excited about something. So that was, if I could remember, you know, there was a gazillion things like that happening.

**Kaitlyn** So many it's hard to remember?

**Albert** Yeah, yeah. That's one that just popped into my mind now.

**Kaitlyn** That's definitely an adventure in itself.

**Albert** Yes.

**Kaitlyn** So what made you want to become a principal or vice principal?

**Albert** I don't know. I started teaching in Edmonton and then, I thought maybe I could run the school better than it was being run. So I moved to a small town called Chauvin, as a vice principal, and then I was principal for a while. And I went back to university, got my master's and came out here as a vice principal, you know, and basically, when you are the principal of the school, you've got a lot to say about what goes on there and, organization and, you know, organizing the school, and I enjoyed that. So, that's what happened. So I was there for, I don't know, 20 some years, and then I moved to central office and ended up as superintendent and that's what I was doing when I retired. Principalship was actually more fun, so, yeah.

**Kaitlyn** How so?

**Albert** I don't know.

**Kaitlyn** It just was?

**Albert** Yeah, it just was. Actually, I really enjoyed teaching for the few years, well, I did a lot of teaching when I was a principal in Chauvin because it was a 12-room school, you know, so I really enjoyed that. But I decided I wanted to go into administration. But teaching was a lot of fun too, so . . .

**Kaitlyn** What did you teach?

**Albert** I taught math and chemistry and physics and science and phys ed.

**Kaitlyn** All the fun stuff.

**Albert** I guess one story I could tell about when I first started teaching in Edmonton in St. Joe's High School. And I was the only new guy on the academic side of that staff that year. So, I got some interesting courses that nobody else wanted, like business fundamentals and law. And I was teaching this lesson one day, I forget what the topic even was, but it was a law lesson and when I finished, I said any questions and this student put up his hand. He says, yeah, how old you have to be before your old man can kick you out of the house? [Both laugh] So anyway, I never forgot that. And I mean he was serious because I, you know, long after I left and was out here, I heard over the radio about some dispute between he and his father.

**Kaitlyn** [How] did you meet your wife?

**Albert** I met her in Edmonton. There was a dance in the school she was teaching in. It was actually a nurse's dance. So, and, you know, I was in engineering at that time. I was a young engineer at the time. And, uh, a couple of us were gonna go there and meet some nurses, and, I met a teacher. [Both laugh] Yeah, 'cause she was from northern Saskatchewan.

**Kaitlyn/Albert** Really?/Yeah

**Kaitlyn** That's a ways.

**Albert** Yeah. So, we've been married 53 years now.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, that's a long time.

**Albert** Yeah, it's a while. So, and we have five kids and nine grandchildren and, you know, they went to school here, the whole works of 'em. And I don't know if it's a good idea for, you know, the principal's kids to be going to the same school. It's OK for the ones that were academic, but I had one handicapped kid who was with the nonacademic classes, and I think he got a kind of a rough time. You know, being the principal's kid. But the others, it was fine.

**Kaitlyn** So you raise your kids all in Athabasca?

**Albert** Yup.

**Kaitlyn** How was that?

**Albert** Well, I mean, we've been in Athabasca since 1968, so they had to be, you know, so, like, we didn't move. It was good, actually.

**Kaitlyn** So what was Athabasca like when you were raising your kids? How was it?

**Albert** Well, Athabasca was more of a rural town when I came here and there was about, there were 1,800 people in this town when I came. And that's how many there had been, back in 1912 or so. And so, then the population had gone down and then it went back up. Like 1912 was about when they had a great big fire in town and burnt down all kinds of the businesses and so on. And at that time, they thought Athabasca was going to be maybe the capital of Alberta and the railway was going to come through Athabasca and head north to the Peace River and something happened. So, the railway was rerouted, so it went through Westlock and north from there and the main railway, so Athabasca became sort of a whistle stop. Once the railway got put in, then, this was way before my time, of course, they had all those paddle wheelers and so on that, you know, quit going. So Athabasca went in a big slump. Anyway, we were the same size when I came as back then, and now it's up to 2,990 I see on the population thing. And that's largely due to the fact that Al-Pac moved in here and a bunch of oil patch activities, and the university.

When I came here the first few years that I was here, I thought I knew everybody. Well, now, of course, I'm out of circulation now, so I don't know that many. But I, you know, I sort of knew everybody. But then, you know, when all the oil activity started and Al-Pac and the university, then I still knew a lot of people, but the proportion was much less. But the interesting thing is the population of this school has gone down instead of going up because families are smaller. In fact, when I first came, I joined the Kinsmen and they put me on a committee, the Census Committee. The Kinsmen, the town got a grant from the government for so much population and they paid the Kinsmen so much to take the census. So, I was chairman of the Census Committee and I was doing a certain part of the town, myself and another committee member. And I found over the years that there was less and less people in the area of town that I was taking the census, which was west of Main Street and up to the middle school, which they call the elementary school at that

time, Landing Trail. And the reason was there were less and less people in those houses, like the families that own the houses, had their families there and they had basements rented and stuff like that. And over a 10-year period, that got to be less and less and less, and more and more people were living in acreages around town. And there are now too, see, like all the holes in the bush and stuff around town for 10 miles around, where I used to hunt, all of a sudden there's a house there, you see. So, there's people all around and they're all part of the Athabasca region or the trading area, but they don't live in town. So, the population of the county has gone up like crazy. And the town, in spite of the fact that there's been a big expansion in the region, the town has stayed roughly . . . Well, it's gone up by 1,000, that's not bad.

**Kaitlyn** So when you lived here with your, or since you do live here with your wife, did you guys live in Athabasca, or?

**Albert** No, we always lived in town. We lived in a duplex right across from Landing Trail. You know those trees that, those spruce trees that are between those duplexes right next to Landing Trail? Like if you go straight out in front of Landing Trail, there's this row of spruce trees there, great big trees? My kids used to jump over those on the way to school because they were, had just been planted. Then we moved from there into the house we're in now, which is right beside what was the old police station.

**Kaitlyn** Oh, where was the old police station?

**Albert** Well, you go down here about three blocks and it's on 48th Avenue. It's a brick building, and it looks like all the old police stations. Right now, the people that live there, the lady is running a daycare center.

**Kaitlyn** Oh, daycare center where the police station used to be.

**Albert** Yeah, that's right. They converted it. And I think it's a pretty successful daycare center, so . . . And when they bought it, the first thing they did is rip out the cells.

**Kaitlyn** They could use it to keep the kids in there!

**Albert** Well, I guess they weren't looking at it that way. [Both laugh].

**Kaitlyn** [Illegible] So do you have any specific stories you'd like to talk about or anything?

**Albert** Well, like I said, I didn't realize I was getting into this particular format, so I don't know, like I haven't thought of many stories.

**Kaitlyn** Well, you said you lived back in, during the World War Two, and after that, you moved away. Do you remember anything about . . .

**Albert** During the World War Two? Uh, during the World War, like I started school in Lethbridge and I remember I was only in Grade 1, and I remember we had a balloon, a dirigible over the school, on wire, on a cable, and the word was among us kids that that thing was to catch the Japanese planes when they tried to bomb our school. And I really didn't remember that much. I remember the kids. The story was, you know, this daylight-saving time, I still haven't figured out what that's for anyway. I think it's a dumb idea, but they had daylight saving time in the summer, and the word was that it was so that the Germans didn't know what time it was in Canada. [Both laugh]

And I remember when the war was over, there was big celebrations. I used to walk through Chinatown in Lethbridge on the way home, back and forth from school. And by the way, that's something that, that school would have been, I don't know, two miles or a mile and a half from where I live in the city. I was in Grade 1, and it was just normal that a Grade 1 kid would walk through Chinatown and through the city on the way home, back and forth. Not a problem. That's the way things went in those days, you know. But anyway, Chinatown went, when Japan surrendered, there was such a celebration. Fireworks and burning the Japanese leaders in effigy and all. I can still remember that, my dad and mom took me up there to watch what was going on.

And, what else do I remember from the war? I remember they had war saving stamps that us kids, we would buy for a nickel. We'd buy this and put it in a little book, and that was, anyway, to help Canada win the war. A nickel at a time I guess [Both laugh] and they had coupon books, so you could only get so much of certain stuff, like so much sugar in a month and so much whatever it was. Mom used to send me to the store to buy stuff. So, it's not me, at that time I was six years old, so I didn't really know much about, you know, about these rations. So, I can't tell you really what we were short of, but I remember sugar was a big deal. Being a 6-year-old, sugar would be a big deal.

**Kaitlyn** So you were six and your mom would give you money to go to the store to buy sugar.

**Albert** Well, buy stuff.

**Kaitlyn** Really?

**Albert** Yeah. She'd send me to the store. Dad was at work during the day and we didn't have a car in those days. So, I'd go to the store and buy whatever it is she asked me to buy. In those days I don't think there was a problem. The store man asked you for so much and you'd lay out your money, and he'd take it, and you put the rest in your pocket and go home.

**Kaitlyn** So you said you had siblings, yes?

**Albert** Yes. I have a sister who is a year younger than I am. And a brother that was born when I was in Grade 1. And he's been gone for quite a while now.

**Kaitlyn** Did you guys get along good?

**Albert/Kaitlyn** Well, good enough./Yeah.

**Albert** Yeah, there was, you know, kids fight and we fought, but in my case, the rule was you're the oldest, you're supposed to know better. So, that's how it was. And my sister and my kid brother fought a lot, but . . . But I didn't fight much with my kid brother. He was too small.

**Kaitlyn** Were you in charge of keeping things . . .

**Albert** Well, I used to do a lot of babysitting. Like if mom and dad went places. You know, I was the guy in charge, you know, and I wasn't no 12 years old at the time. And that's the way things were in those days.

**Kaitlyn** So were you in charge of pacifying the fights between your sister and your brother?

**Albert** Yeah, well, they didn't really happen when mom was gone, because I guess, yeah, they just had to listen.

**Kaitlyn/Albert** Listen to their older brother./Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** So what's your sister doing?

**Albert** My sister is retired just like I am. She's still living in Medicine Hat, and, she's married, and so she and her husband are living in Medicine Hat. They're not doing much now. She used to golf, but I mean, she's starting to have a few physical problems, so she doesn't anymore.

**Kaitlyn** Are you guys still close?

**Albert** Yeah. In fact, I think I'll phone her today.

**Kaitlyn** Tell her you did an interview, you were interviewed?

**Albert** Yeah, I guess I'll tell her that.

**Kaitlyn** What did your brother do?

**Albert** He worked for SNC Lavalin, he was a consultant that would go all over the place when they were building gas plants and refineries and stuff. That's what he did. He started out as an instrumentation mechanic and evolved into this job where he was a consultant and would be the main man in charge of quite a few projects around the world, so . . .

**Kaitlyn** That sounds pretty interesting.

**Albert** Yeah, I'd say it was interesting.

**Kaitlyn** He had a few stories too like your principal stories?

**Albert** Yeah, well . . .

**Kaitlyn** So you lived on a farm in Hilda, yeah?

**Albert** No, I lived in town in Hilda. I grew up on a, like, I lived on a farm 'till I was four or five.

**Kaitlyn** So how was that? Did you have to do any of the farm work or anything?

**Albert** Oh, I was just a little kid, I, I don't remember what I did. I used to collect eggs [both laugh] and that's about all I can remember from the farm.

**Kaitlyn** Do you remember anything else, in the other towns growing up?

**Albert** Well, uh, no, I don't have any . . . I remember, when I was a little kid in, going back and forth to school in Lethbridge, I was in Grade 1, and we got in a few situations where a couple of kids would have, you know, start throwing rocks at each other and stuff over the fence, and I remember that. And I had remembered, gee whiz, the fences in the backyards in Lethbridge were really tall, you know, like, over your head. So I went back to that same area quite a few years ago. Mom and dad moved back to Lethbridge when dad retired, and checked out that area, and I saw those fences and yeah, they were this high, you know, but for a 6-year-old, they were tall! So it was all in your perception, there's so many things in life like that.

Yeah. One thing on the way, walking back and forth to school, we would cross the track. There was a warehouse where they would unload train cars. Well, quite often they had German prisoners doing the work. There was a prisoner of war camp there and there would be guards and prisoners doing the work. But one other thing is they'd unload a carload of watermelons, and if there was a cracked melon, they would give it to the kids. So, I got so that I was a real pest, "Got any cracked melons?" Well, the odd time I got one.

**Kaitlyn** That seems pretty nice for you, watermelons.

**Albert** Yeah, yeah, and I was crazy about watermelon in those days. Still am.

**Kaitlyn** So anything else you can think of?

**Albert** No.

**Kaitlyn** It's pretty hard thinking about your childhood, though, yeah?

**Albert** Yeah, I could think of a lot of things, but . . . I can remember visiting my grandpa on the farm, and he had, that was right after the Second World War, so I'd have been about eight at the time or shortly after, and he had bought himself a carriage and two nice black horses. And so he used to cruise around the neighborhood with these nice black horses trotting big time. And grandpa was driving and I was sitting like a big shot beside. I really enjoyed that. When I was growing up in Hilda, we had chickens and eggs, we used to sell eggs to the store and I was in charge of those chickens, two bits a dozen I remember we used to get. But two bits was a lot of money in those days. And actually, I had a real menagerie when I was, you know, 8 or 10 years old, I had rabbits, cats, dog, pigeons, bantam hens, ducks, all that in this yard in town. You don't do that anymore.

**Kaitlyn** The neighbors would love that.

**Albert** Yeah, well, that was normal in those days. Like, one of the neighbors down the street had a cow. And they would take her to the pasture past the edge of town after they milked her every day, and come and get her at night.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** That's how much things have changed. There was no running water, so there was outdoor biffies, and we used have to carry the water from the well, and my mother didn't like the water from the well that was at the end of the block, so Dad had to carry it from across the tracks, which would be about 300 meters. Two pails of water a day, that was the household drinking water. We had a cistern in the house that caught the rainwater so that's where the wash water and all that stuff came from. There was a little pump there.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, no running water.

**Albert** But drinking water and wash water, I mean, drinking water and cooking water was all carried from a well from 300 yards away. And of course, when I got old enough, I guess you got to do it. So I still remember that was a big job.

**Kaitlyn** Yeah. Well, I'd imagine so. So when did you first get running water then?

**Albert** Well, I was gone from Hilda before running water came in there, so I got running water when I was in Grade 12. We lived in Brooks and we had running water. And of course, when I was Grades 1 and 2, we lived in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and of course we had running water there.

**Kaitlyn** Strange to think about not having running water.

**Albert** Well, you see, but I had this cabin. I still got this cottage at Calling Lake, and it's only five years ago that I put in running water there. Like, we'd bring five gallons of water in a container when we went up there, you know. And use the biffy, there was no running water, no toilet in the house. And there's the odd one that still does that up there. But, yeah, we put in the plumbing and it's nicer. [Both laugh].

**Kaitlyn** Yeah.

**Albert** But, you know, part of it was. I spent half my life growing up without running water, so it was not that hard to adjust to for the weekend.

**Kaitlyn** Certain things that I never would have had to think about.

**Albert** Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** That's pretty neat. So, you met Agnes at a dance?

**Albert** Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** How did you woo her?

**Albert** Well, I don't know. I remember, like I was there with another fella and he met a girl, like we went out for coffee after or lunch or something after the dance, and I still remember that her eyes, she had these beautiful eyes. But anyway, you know, we had another date, and it's just that we ended up going out all the time. And, then, actually I went to Houston, Texas, I was working as an engineer then, I went to Houston, Texas for the winter, and we wrote letters back and forth. And, I don't know it didn't take too long before we decided that. Well, I went out for two years before we got married, but, didn't take too long before I decided that's who I wanted to marry. But we needed to nail down the arrangements or come to an agreement for about a year and a half.

**Kaitlyn** So how old were you when you met her?

**Albert** I would have been 22, 23.

**Kaitlyn** So you were married when you were 25? 26?

**Albert** Yeah, I think it was 26. No, I was 24 when I married, yeah.

**Kaitlyn** Oh, wow.

**Albert** Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** So you said you went to Houston, Texas?

**Albert** Mm hmm.

**Kaitlyn** How was that?

**Albert** That was fantastic, you know, for the winter. This was winter. So it was from December to the end of April that, you know, I worked there. I was working for Shell Oil and, you know, they give us various courses and stuff there. So it was, it was different. I stayed in an apartment block, apartments there in the area that we were staying, like, I and these other engineers. They all had a swimming pool in the middle, but nobody except some of us guys from Alberta would use those things in December and January. They thought we were nuts. But actually, I don't think it gets much warmer than that in the summer here. One thing I remember that was a little bit strange in Houston was, at that time, like the Cold War was on, big time, and that was 1960. And they were promoting these bomb shelters. You know, in case of an atom bomb attack, you know, they would they would have practices, drills in schools for what kids are supposed to do in case of an atom bomb attack. And I look back in retrospect, in case of an atom bomb attack, you know, the kids were supposed to crawl under their desks. Yeah, that would save 'em from an atom bomb, all right. But then they were selling these bomb shelters. And I remember there was an area there, between home and work, where there were all those bomb shelters for sale. You know, they were fiberglass, with a little bit of concrete. They had their shells, and then people who bought them would truck them to wherever they lived and dig a big hole and stick 'em in there. And, that's interesting. Like it's interesting that they never got to be good for anything.

**Kaitlyn** Yeah.

**Albert** We're awfully lucky that they never got to be good for anything. So, you know, that never took off here. I never did see any of that kind of stuff around here, around Alberta. But they were taking that pretty seriously in Houston. And when it comes down to it, what was happening with this Cold War at the time, if there'd have been any nuclear war, Edmonton would certainly have gotten it before Houston because, you know, it's on the way to Russia. [Both laugh] But we never got into this business of bomb shelters here, which makes sense. I don't know what these guys ever did with those bomb shelters they bought, but yeah.

**Kaitlyn** So what brought you to Houston, Texas again?

**Albert** Well, I was working for Shell Oil, I was a young engineer. And during the first year, they took all of us down to Houston, Texas, for a few months for certain training things. That was where their facilities were.

**Kaitlyn** Got a trip to Houston, Texas!

**Albert** Yeah, that, and before we came home, I and two buddies went to Mexico City. That was an interesting place. I always meant to take Agnes there, but, it never happened, didn't go back down there.

**Kaitlyn** Into Mexico.

**Albert** Mexico City.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, how was that?

**Albert** Mexico City was, it was an awfully big town with 6,000,000 people. Well now, I don't know how many there are, 20,000,000 or something like that, you know. It's awfully big. It's very interesting.

**Kaitlyn** Do you remember anything from there?

**Albert** Well, yes, we toured the pyramids, you know, the Aztec pyramids. And we toured, I remember three of us rented this, got this guy to take us all over the place for a whole day with a '52 Buick. Drove us to the pyramids and drove us all around the city and guided us all over the place. It cost us \$10.00 each.

**Kaitlyn/Albert** Really?/Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, that's, a really good deal.

**Albert** But now it's, you know, different down there, it's more dangerous and everything else. We never even thought of that, you know, the three of us. So, one thing I remember, in the museums when they tell us about, you know, they showed us the map of Mexico and then the Americans took Texas away and Southern California away. And, you know, and they kept, you know, like I got the idea they wanted this all back someday. Well, it hasn't happened yet.

**Kaitlyn** So did you take any other trips around, besides Houston and Mexico City?

**Albert** Oh, well, we've traveled quite a bit. Like after I retired, or even before I retired, we went to Europe a couple of times, Germany and France. And, of course every time we went, my wife is French, so every time we went to Europe we had to go to Paris. And Hungary, and Italy, and Austria, and Spain. So, yeah, we did a fair amount, and we did take a trip around South America. We started in Argentina and took a cruise around Cape Horn and came back up to Chile and stopped in at lots of sights along the way, both ways. Very interesting.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** So we did enough traveling. I liked it, but, you know, when you get older, you sort of quit really being that keen.

**Kaitlyn** Would you mind telling me a little bit about your trips you took?

**Albert** Well . . .

**Kaitlyn** Since you took so many.

**Albert** Well, one thing, you see, I was born in 1938, so at home we talked German in those days. But the kibosh was put on that during the war because the war was with the Germans.

**Kaitlyn** Yeah.

**Albert** So I learned English pretty fast. [Both laugh] But my grandparents, I always did talk German to my grandparents. So, when we took this first trip to Germany, and it was a tour that was partly sponsored by the German government for North American teachers. And this thing happened. That trip was 'bout two years after the Berlin Wall was knocked down. So, we got to go all around there, but one thing that I learned, I was traveling on a train and talking to this Austrian guy, and he spoke German, and I thought I'd pretty well forgotten it. But, you know, during that trip, uh, I got better and better. I could communicate with these guys, so there was no problem, actually, carrying on a conversation with people in German as long as I kept it to, you know, the basic stuff that a 6-year or 5-year-old kid would know about. And my wife is fluent in French. So, France and Germany, Austria, no problem, we could communicate quite easily.

But one place that was different was Hungary. There's no connection between that language and anything else. And one time we got on this tram, they'd had trams running up and down the streets and then busses. So we took this tram and we went on this tour and went downtown and shopped and did stuff. And when we went to go home, I got on the bus going in the opposite, in the wrong direction, and it crossed the river, the Danube runs right through Budapest, crossed the river, and we start going up the hill there, and more and more people and nobody getting on and people getting off. And I finally, you know, I knew that we were in the wrong and I couldn't talk to the driver, and the bus, like, he came to the place where the bus is parked. So, then he got up and we were the only ones left in the back of the bus, and he goes [gestures]. So I try to let him know I, like, you know, I want to go downtown, finally he went, you know, pointed at this bus stop over there. So, we get off. Went over to that bus stop and when the bus came, we got on it and we end up going back to where I knew my way around. So that was different. And that was shortly after Hungary, you know, and the Iron Curtain fell and all that stuff, and they were just getting into the Western economy and so on. But it was very different.

**Kaitlyn** That sounds like fun, all the trips you guys took.

**Albert** Yeah, that was a lot of fun.

**Kaitlyn** So you probably have a German background then since you . . .

**Albert** Yes, yes.

**Kaitlyn** So did your grandparents come from Germany?

**Albert** My dad was born in Germany and he came over in, when he was . . . He went to school in Germany for two years. And then he came over when he was in Grade 2 or 3. And my mother was born here, in Saskatchewan, so, yeah.

**Kaitlyn** So were you raised to speak English and German then?

**Albert** Well, like I say, as long as my grandparents were alive, especially my dad's parents, so when I go to visit him there like, in the house, it was all German, okay. So I could speak German, but everything out of there, you know, that German was basically discouraged big time after the war started. And so, anything out of my grandparents' house, it was always English, we spoke English in the house at home. So I grew up knowing both languages, yeah.

**Kaitlyn** Did you find that anybody may have treated you differently when you were younger because you were part German?

**Albert** Well, to tell you the truth, like, where I, like Hilda and so on, that was a German town. Most, there was a few British people, people that owned the store and ran the post office and stuff, but the majority was German, so there was no problem there. And, you know, my parents went and I didn't know I was German when I was in Lethbridge in Grade 1. I didn't know. I didn't really know what that was, you know, this whole business of nationality. But I remember this girl wanting to know what nationality we were, and I went up and asked mom and dad, I said, so what nationality are we? And they said, you're Swedish. So, I came back and told this girl we're Swedish, and I still remember that conversation, and she said, "Well, that's okay, it's not as good as English, but it's okay."

**Kaitlyn** Oh my gosh! [Both laugh]

**Albert** So, I remember that.

**Kaitlyn** And you said your wife was, she's fluent in French?

**Albert** Yeah, she's French.

**Kaitlyn** So did she come from . . .

**Albert** No, she came from Saskatchewan, but her dad and mother immigrated from France. So, she grew up speaking French. And again, there was this business with English and French there. You see the difference was the French were pushing their language, but since we had the war with the Germans, they weren't pushing their language so . . .

**Kaitlyn** Did your wife teach you any French?

**Albert** Well, I got so that I could sort of, she didn't teach me any French. I had decided that I wasn't really going to work on French that much. But, you know, we used to go visiting and they were always talking French. So, I got that I can get the drift of what's being discussed. And that's about it. Enough so that I can get the drift.

**Kaitlyn** Does she still speak then? Is she still fluent in it?

**Albert** Yes and she's quite keen on that French business, so she goes up to Whispering Hills and helps the French immersion kids read.

**Kaitlyn** Really?

**Albert** Yeah, she regards that as sort of a, you know, a very important mission. [Both laugh]

**Kaitlyn** Well, I think it's pretty important to keep, it's pretty easy to lose the second language.

**Albert** Yes, well, I basically lost it because I hadn't used it, you know, but I didn't quite lose it because when I was in the German milieu there that summer, it got so that I could communicate again, you know.

**Albert** What else do I remember from the Athabasca stuff?

**Kaitlyn** What was Athabasca like when you were, what kind of stores were there and stuff?

**Albert** When I got here, there was a Super A store, there was a Lucky Dollar store. There were three stores in town, and there was what was called a Tomboy store, which is now Buy-Low. You see Tomboy, due to changing values, Tomboy was no longer an acceptable name, so they had to change the name. So that's why they're, you know, Buy-Low, now. Yeah, there was three stores there and there was four or five garages. There was lots of little businesses in town.

**Kaitlyn** So you got to see all the new stores come and watch as Athabasca got bigger?

**Albert** Yeah. See we came here right after they finished paving the road from Edmonton.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** So Athabasca was not quite as isolated as it had been. And there was, what, I think, five elevators along the railway tracks when I came here, grain elevators, farmers would bring their grain. They're all gone now. And now the farmers haul their stuff to Westlock or to Star, quite a ways away. One story about school that I should bring up, just as an indication how much things change, there used to be a fur buyer that would come to town. I don't know how often, so many times a winter, a year, and kids would bring their furs that they had been trapping on the bus and go down and sell 'em to this guy downtown, you know.

**Kaitlyn** Really?

**Albert** And one day this guy came to see me after school started and he said, you know, you got this kid came down and sold me all these furs and I forgot to take his trapper number and I'm going to be in big trouble if I can't find out who this kid was. And I said, well, you know, I don't know how I can find out what kid was selling you furs. He said, well, here's a list of what he sold. So, I said, "Okay, I'll try." And I got on the intercom and I said would the young man who sold the following furs to a trapper, please come down to the, fur buyer, come down to the office. And you know, I don't know, so many minks, so many lynxes, muskrats, stuff like that.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** Fox. And by golly the kid came down, and the trapper got his name and trapline number or whatever it was, and he was very happy he said he saved him a lot of trouble. So, you know, I don't think anybody, any kids are trapping a bunch of furs for something to do these days. [Both laugh] This particular kid was from Smith, you know, like the bus still

comes from Smith, doesn't it? Yeah, I think so. But there were a fair number of kids that would be selling, like there was enough furs being caught and sold by kids, that it'd be worth this guy's while to come around to Athabasca a couple of times in winter. And so that has changed. You know, there is no such thing anymore.

**Kaitlyn** I know there's people that go hunting a lot.

**Albert** Oh, yeah, there's a lot of hunting. That's part of the reason that I came here was for hunting.

**Kaitlyn** Really?

**Albert** You know, it reminds me, you know, the first while I came, we ate so much moose meat, they shot moose every year, and my youngest son, I don't know how old he was, but he got so that he thought the name, the generic name for meat was moose, because one day Agnes made some chicken for supper and Carl says, so what kind of moose is this? [Both laugh]

**Kaitlyn** That's really cute though.

**Albert** Yeah, I still remember it, so . . .

**Kaitlyn** Were your kids really mischievous or anything? Or are they pretty normal kids?

**Albert** They were normal kids, i.e., mischievous. Yeah, yeah.

**Kaitlyn** They get into any problems or . . .

**Albert** There was always something going on. Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** Do you remember any particular situation or event?

**Albert** Well, I remember, my oldest son didn't have very good sense of direction, so when we lived next to the elementary school, not, in what was the elementary school now, it's called the middle school now. They went with some friends chasing frogs. They, you know they took a tub and they went down by the creek, Muskeg Creek there, and they were chasing frogs and they got lost in that valley there. And we were looking for 'em and so on, and they climbed up to where the nursing home is, you know, that general area, and then somebody phoned us and we went and picked 'em up, but they had actually got lost chasing frogs, so . . .

**Kaitlyn** It's all right if you can think of anything else, there's probably a lot of different things.

**Albert** Yeah, there are many things, but I just, you know, I didn't come prepared, I didn't prepare myself, so I, you know, I just don't know anymore. I remember shortly after we got here, so that would have been in the winter of 1971 or so, it was so cold for a stretch of time. I had this little car with a manual transmission, and I plug it in at night. As I said, I lived in a duplex next to the middle school and I'd drive to the high school. And in the morning, the oil was so stiff that I could barely, you know, like, barely get through. And then the wheels, it was so cold that the wheels, the flat part of the wheels, you had to drive a ways before that flat spot came out. So, you would go clunk clunk clunk when you drove,

so it was very, very cold, like it was 50 below a number of days in this town. And that winter, the Edmonton Journal gave a certificate out to Edmonton residents that survived the winter of, I don't know, it was '71 or '72 whatever. And we averaged 10 degrees colder than Edmonton during that period.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** Yeah, so, and I always did think Athabasca was a pretty cold place in the winter. And I still think it is.

**Kaitlyn** It does, it gets pretty . . .

**Albert** But it's not as bad as it used to be. This was a pretty nice winter.

**Kaitlyn** Yeah, it was pretty nice, melted really quickly too.

**Albert** Mm hmm.

**Kaitlyn** So you said the road to Edmonton was just paved when you moved here?

**Albert** Yes.

**Kaitlyn** And you said there were only around, about three stores here, and I'm guessing none of them were clothing stores or anything . . .

**Albert** Oh, there were clothing stores. So, there was Schinkinger's Clothing and there was Evasiuk's Store. Evasiuk's Store was for kids and women, and Schinkinger's was men. And Schinkinger's Store is a liquor store now. It's across from the Union Hotel? You know that liquor store?

**Kaitlyn** Mm hmm.

**Albert** I think Schinkinger's still own the building, but that was a men's clothing store.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** And, yeah, and Evasiuk's Store was running 'till not that long ago, and then when the son David Evasiuk died that store quit, well, you know, maybe you remember Daisy's Grace?

**Kaitlyn** Yeah.

**Albert** Okay, that's, like she took it over and tried to make a ladies' store out of that. I guess it didn't work out, so, I don't know what's in there now, but . . .

**Kaitlyn** I don't really know either, maybe it'll be something good. Did you guys have to make a lot of trips to Edmonton before you were able to find everything you need in town?

**Albert** Well, we basically did most of our shopping in town, but we would go to Edmonton every so often for various things, yes.

**Kaitlyn** Did you find when you first moved here, was the community welcoming towards you?

**Albert** Well, yes. And the thing is, you see, I came when the new part of EPC opened, so I came as vice principal, but there were all kinds of new teachers in town. So, you know, so we all hung together quite a bit. And yes, the community was fairly welcoming. I joined the Kinsmen shortly after I came, and they were a going concern at that time. We had raft races, you know, we put on raft races. Remember the Edmonton? Well, you might not remember, when Edmonton had the annual big raft races, and they'd come out here and practice to go to the Edmonton raft races. They would start up about 15 miles upriver, you know, with rafts and race into town, and, you know, we had prizes and stuff. It was a really big event. And then Kinsmen, at that time, that was before the law came in that you couldn't have any more than .08 alcohol on your breath so, you know, we put on dances left and right and made all kinds of money on 'em, we had the bar and stuff like that. We raised a lot of money. In fact, the Kinsmen, that old pool, the Kinsmen Club, got that pool going as far as building goes. In fact, a number of us Kinsmen members signed a personal note for \$10,000 each to get the matching funding going to start building that pool. And at that time, \$10,000, the house I was in was for sale for \$16,000!

**Kaitlyn** Oh my gosh!

**Albert** So, yeah, but boy, I tell you, we fundraised. Because I didn't want to be stuck for that \$10,000. But that's how we got that thing going and, well it's still going and they're having trouble figuring out how to build a new one. [Both laugh]

**Kaitlyn** So what were the Kinsmen?

**Albert** The Kinsmen was a service club, like the Lions? The Kinsmen was like the Lions, only younger people. Like at that time when you turned 40, they kicked you out.

**Kaitlyn/Albert** Really?/Yeah

**Kaitlyn** Oh.

**Albert** And you see the big group of us that were in there and doing these things pretty well all turned 40 roughly the same time. So, when we all, you know, were no longer eligible to be Kinsmen, they call them K-40's, that was a special sort of seniors' club, that never went anywhere, but you see, when we all sort of left then that club kind of died and it's no longer around.

**Kaitlyn** That's pretty cool, sounds like you're really involved in the community . . .

**Albert** We were involved in lots of things, yeah. We're the ones that ran the Halloween party and we had these dances and we had, we called it K-Days! We had a K-Days Week, you know where you'd have various gambling activities, you know, like a crown and anchor wheel and bingo and, you know, fish. They called it fish where kids would pay so much to drop a line behind a curtain and then somebody would hook a prize on it and lift it up. And of course there'd be dances tied up with it and so on.

**Kaitlyn** That's pretty cool, I know they have an actual K-Days too in Edmonton, but it's just a whole bunch of rides.

**Albert** Yeah, well, you know that, well, the thing is that the reason they called it K-Days was a lot of, during the Klondike gold rush, a lot of people came up to Athabasca. Somehow, they'd been talked into the idea that the easiest way up to the Klondike was to go to Athabasca and they'd built themselves, boats or scows, and then they coasted down the Athabasca River to somewhere on the Mackenzie and then they were going to go cross-country over the mountains into the Yukon up there somewhere. And I guess a few guys made it. Most of them that went that way didn't make it and, like, didn't ever get in on the gold rush. But quite a few got over there and ended up, you know, running businesses like hardware stores or selling stuff or so on.

**Kaitlyn** Wow.

**Albert** So . . . but that's where the K-Days thing came from for Athabasca, because if you look in the history books, you can see that, how many hundreds of guys came here. There was actually a camp for the winter where these guys were building the boats to go to the Yukon, for the Klondike. Of course, you don't hear anything about that anymore, and K-Days is dead in Edmonton so.

**Kaitlyn** It's not really, it's just a day for rides and festivals.

**Albert** Mm hmm. So, one thing that really struck me when I first moved here, in the fall, you see there's all these guys come out here moose hunting, and they would do their own hunting or hire a guide or whatever, and then, you know, they'd be wearing hunting knives and then they'd go in the bar. What struck me is when I walked by the hotel, there was a sign on the door that said, please remove knives before entry. [Both laugh] And, you know, I don't think they do that anymore, I don't think they need to do that anymore. But I guess it was a practical thing. All these guys were walking around with their hunting knives.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, smoking and [illegible] knives.

**Albert** Well I'm talking about the beer parlor next to the Union Hotel. One thing that used to happen, and lucky for me, I never participated in anything like that but, back in the old days when there was a forest fire, the RCMP, you know, they'd get their firefighting crew from volunteers. One way was the RCMP used to go and round up anybody that was in the bar and you just got to go if you happen to be in there when they came. In fact, the word was they'd park their van at the back door of the bar and send the sergeant in the front. And as the guys tried to run out the back, they ran 'em into the van!

**Kaitlyn** Oh my gosh!

**Albert** Yes, and they got to do firefighting.

**Kaitlyn** Wow, that's one way to get volunteers.

**Albert** Yeah, that's right. But that's actually how it worked, you know, they would round the guys up in the bar. I think some had really good excuses, but if you happened to be doing nothing at the time you were in man. Yeah.

**Kaitlyn** I think that could be [a break] for the interview.

**Albert** Okay, okay.

**Kaitlyn** Do you have anything, first of all, that maybe you don't want included in the interview?

**Albert** No.

**Kaitlyn** No?

**Albert** No.

**Kaitlyn** Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]

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