

Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project
Transcription of Jack & Shirley Nixon-001.mp3
<http://digiport.athabascau.ca/anamp/people/nixon.php>

Narrators: Shirley Nixon
 Jack Nixon
Interviewer: Carmen Pysyk
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[Start of Interview]

Carmen Hi, this is Carmen Pysyk, and I'm visiting with Jack and Shirley Nixon at their residence. Shirley's mother's maiden name was Iris Beattie and her father's name was Albert Leadham Chick. Jack's mother's maiden name was Mary Isabel Campbell and his father's name was William Glenn Nixon. So, Shirley, tell me about your earliest memories as a child.

Shirley My earliest memories, I don't know. I was always an outside kid. I was told many times about climbing the windmill and sitting on the little perch at the top when I was two years old. I scared my mother half to death. I worked outside with my dad on the farm and so I spent a lot of time with animals and whatnot. I went to school in Gadsby, which is a little town about 20 miles east of Stettler. I rode the bus from the time I started school. I never went to a little local school. I don't know how many kids there would have been in my school, Grades 1 to 9, but not huge big classes. So maybe a couple hundred or something, I don't know. I liked doing outside things. I played a lot of baseball.

Carmen/Shirley And you were on a baseball team? / Yes

Carmen What were you called?

Shirley I don't know. Gadsby Ladies, I guess. My first baseball team was from a little hall not far from our place. It was Shooting Lake and we used to play baseball there, or softball, not baseball, I guess. And it was after that when we went and played in Gadsby, when I was a little older. We played ball at school, and there was a curling rink in Gadsby. We used to curl, not on artificial ice, on real ice. So sometimes it was quite a challenge, when it was warm, to even try and get a rock down.

Shirley I was in 4-H for many years and it was during that time in 4-H that I met Jack. I can tell you I went out with him on a dare from one of my friends, the first time I went out on a date with him. So consequently, three years later, we got married. We always laugh about that.

Carmen Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Shirley Yes, my oldest sister was Beatrice, and then there was Phyllis, and then myself, then Rosalind, and then George. Beatrice has passed away, but Phyllis lives in Red Deer, George lives in Red Deer too, and Rosalind lives in the Stettler area.

My mom and dad have both been gone for quite a few years. That's kind of my memories, I guess.

Carmen Do you remember how many kids were in your class when you were going to school, and what grades it was?

Shirley Well, we had Grades 1 to 9 in the Gadsby school. Not one class, but in one school. Sometimes there would be two grades combined, depending on how many kids there were. Most of the time through high school my class had 12 or 13, I think. There was never a huge big amount. I graduated from Grade 12 in Stettler. After Grade 9 we were bussed to Stettler and I took Grades 10 to 12 there. Stettler is about 20 miles from Gadsby.

Carmen How long was the bus ride?

Shirley Oh, I don't know. We were one of the first to get on ... maybe an hour. At one point it got a little longer because they added some kids on and that changed the bus route. So, I think it was about an hour and 20 minutes or something, the longest it ever was.

Carmen And what did your mom and dad do for their occupation?

Shirley Farmed. Mom never worked out or anything, she was just on the farm.

Carmen/Shirley Did you raise animals? / Yeah, we had cattle, and pigs, and chickens, and a goose that used to chase my mother. We always had cats and dogs and stuff like that.

Carmen/Shirley When you got home from school did you have to help do the chores? / Yep, milk the cows, and feed the pigs and chickens. I used to like to ride a steer once in a while and I rode horses.

Carmen Okay. Jack, tell me about your earliest childhood memories.

Jack Can I lie just like Shirley? [laughter]

Carmen No!

Jack When I started school there were four in my class. And of course, I was the top of the class! [laughter]. And from that little school, I went to school in Botha which was 10 times as big. After Botha, I went to Stettler. I played a lot of baseball and softball. I played a lot of football. I played fullback, running back, and defensive end.

Carmen Did you guys have a pretty good team?

Jack I couldn't believe when I came up here that there was no football. A town this size should have a football team. Well, I guess they did for a while. After I got out of school, I helped Dad for a while. Then I went to Fort Saskatchewan and worked in a garage at the Fort. Then I worked at Conoil Equipment in Edmonton. After that, I got

married and I worked on a farm for a while. Then I went back to the garage and apprenticed as a mechanic and got my license.

Carmen How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Jack There were seven of us, five girls. I was the picked-on one. I had a baby brother, but I was in the middle of the family.

Carmen/Jack And what grade did you go to? / Grade 5. [chuckles] I finished part of my Grade 12. And then I decided working was the life for me.

Carmen/Jack And what did your parents do? / Farmed.

Carmen Just cows and chickens, the normal animals?

Jack Yeah, yeah, we'd run quite a few cows. Dad always had to have a small herd of horses, but I never got to pick a horse for very long because as soon as a horse was broke, he sold it. So, I spent my life on many different horses. He was quite a horse trader. And when I met Shirley, I felt like I was five but I think I was 16 or 17. We married two years later.

Shirley Okay. So when Jack and I met, like I said earlier, it was our 4-H Achievement Day and we were showing our calves and then had our sale. He had asked me out, and I laughed at him and said no, and then my friend dared me to go out with him. And so, I went back and said I will go out with you. And we went out for three years before we were married, and I was still in high school. He was at the time also.

Carmen What did you guys do for fun when you were dating?

Shirley There were still a lot of country dances. And so we went to a lot of dances, and there was still a drive-in movie theater and stuff. We would go to the drive-in in the summer. There was always a theater in Stettler too. Yeah. Or else we'd just get together with friends or whatever. But we went to a lot of dances. Jack played football when we were in high school, but I didn't do a lot of sports. I curled in the winter, and I still played ball in the summertime. That was about it. We got married in the United Church in Stettler by Reverend Jerry deVries. Our reception was at the hall in Botha, which is just a little town seven miles east of Stettler. The reception and dance were held there. There were a lot of people, probably 200 or more. This was 1969.

Shirley We went to Edmonton after we were married. We were only there for a short time. Jack worked there for a little bit and then we went back to Stettler and lived with my folks for a little while. Jack was working for one of the neighbors there, and then we got a job at Sandan Charolais Farms west of Stettler. We moved out there and we lived right there. So he worked a lot with the cattle, and showing cattle at the Calgary Stampede and in Red Deer at the Westerner Days. Yeah, and then Jacki was born, and then Glenn, and then Jocelyn. They were born in 1969, 1972, and 1976. Glenn and Jacki were born at the Stettler hospital, and Jocelyn was born at the Bashaw Hospital.

Carmen When did you decide to move to Athabasca and why?

Shirley We moved up here in 1992, and I came up here as assistant manager at the United Farmers, or UFA as it's better known. I should go back to my first job. My first job was at the Stettler auction mart in the office there. And I worked there for I think probably three years. And after that, I went to work at UFA in Stettler, and so when we moved up here, it was because I was transferred. After we left the Charolais farm, Jack went to work in Stettler at a service station. He got his mechanic's license, but, because of his asthma, the fumes didn't do him any good. So the doctor told him he had to quit. That's when he went into doing flooring and that's what he worked at until he just retired this year. And I continued to work with UFA until I retired.

Carmen So how many grandkids do you guys have?

Shirley We have quite a few. Jacki had two girls whose names are Caitland and Kristen. Then she divorced from her first husband, and with Neil, her second husband, had five boys—Shawn, Eric, Scott, Brett, and Dave. The oldest one was the same age as Caitland and the youngest one is now 18.

Carmen And did Glenn have any kids?

Shirley Yes, Glenn has a son—his name is Jayden. He was born here. Then he and Lori split up and he married Jennifer who had two girls, who are now 17 and 15, grown up already, and then they divorced. And Jocelyn had one son, and he is going to be 20 this year. That's all the grandkids, it's quite a few. And now we have some great grandchildren. Our granddaughter Kristen and Stockton have Layla, who's four, and Theodore, who is one, and they're expecting their third baby. Caitland is not married. She doesn't have any children. Shawn has a boy and a girl. Carter is going to be 10 and Zoe is four. Scott just had a baby here about a month ago. The rest don't have any kids yet.

Carmen/Jack So that's four great-grandkids you have? / Five.

Carmen So, Jack, tell me about your different jobs you used to do.

Jack Well, when I first started out, I worked at a little garage in Fort Saskatchewan as a mechanic for Emil Baron, the best guy I ever worked for. He was a one-armed mechanic. That's what I liked. And then from there I went to Conoil Equipment and I quit that. Then I worked for a farmer for a little while and then I worked for Sandan Charolais Farms. Then I went to work as a mechanic and got my ticket. Then I got fed up with that, basically. Oh, and I worked at CCIL too. That's where I quit and started as a floor layer, for like 40 years.

Carmen So how long did you work for Prymaks?

Jack About 16 or 17 years, and then I went on my own. I think I was with Jimmy for about 16 years anyway.

Carmen/Jack And how long were you on your own for? / Right 'til now.

Carmen And so now what are your plans?

Jack I think we're going to sell everything, get a divorce, split it up, and move along [chuckles]. I don't know. I'm having trouble with the way I am because I can't do a lot. But I cut grass and I can do a few things. Every once in a while, if Aubrey gets a plywood job or something where I can work on my knees, then I can help him, but I can't do the flooring thing anymore.

Carmen So who's Aubrey?

Jack Aubrey was actually Jocelyn's boyfriend, and that's Chase's dad. And when they split, Aubrey kept working with me. I liked him better. But no, actually, we always kept in touch and he's worked with me off and on now for just about 20 years. You know, he's on his own and has been for a long time.

Carmen So Shirley, are you still golfing? What do you like to do to keep busy nowadays?

Shirley Yeah, I golf. Usually twice a week. I would go more often, but my body sometimes objects. And I go swimming, sometimes lane swim, or exercise class, the deep-water exercise. And I like to walk. Our life has changed a bit in the last year, with Jack not being able to get around this year as well. So, it's been a little different, but we adjust. And, yeah, we will have been married for 50 years next April. So that's a little bit of a milestone nowadays.

Jack You know, I get an award for it.

Carmen Do you have any plans for your 50th?

Shirley Not yet. I don't know. It'll probably just be a family thing. I don't know. It's hard to say, depends what the kids decide. I don't think any of our kids will ever see 50 years.

Carmen So tell me some of your tips for keeping a marriage together.

Shirley [laughter] Are you really going to ask Jack a question like that?

Jack I told everybody else, you gotta beat 'em quite a bit.

Shirley He's joking, of course, because he has never done that.

Jack But I've wanted to.

Shirley Our kids say, "You guys argue." And Jack will say, "Look, I've been married almost 20 years. I'm entitled to argue." [laughter]

Jack I tell my kids, "You know, we've been married just about 50 years. How many partners have you had in the last few years? In 20 years? How many partners has each of you had? Because each of you has had different partners. When you can do

what we've done, then you can tell us about arguing. I've got a right to argue."
[laughter]

Carmen Well, Jack and Shirley, thank you for visiting with me today and taking part of the Senior's Memory Project.

Shirley It was fun to do this. Wasn't it, Jack?

Jack I suppose so, if you say so. See, that's how you get along in your marriage—yes ma'am, no ma'am.

Carmen You compromise!

Shirley That's right. That is so right. There's always compromise.

[End of Interview]

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