

ELEANOR THORPE

DATE: 1990

Beth Sheehan's (BS) interview with Eleanor Thorpe (ET); Unknown (??) could be Everett Sheehan (The conversation starts a ways into the first sentence. They are talking about flowers and naming them.)

BSshe pressed flowers and collected flowers and pressed them?

ET ah ah and I think she botanized everything and she came from Ontario to the west because everything was so different, so she had the common name and you know the botanical name of most of the flowers, some trees and everything.

BS Well that was one question I asked if you knew what happened to all that and she didn't know.

ET No

BS That would be a shame if that wasn't saved somewhere.

ET I know but you see the way things happened that many years ago. You know my dad was an invalid all of his life. He had a stroke when my brother was a year and a half old. And that would make me two or three, and we never knew him as a healthy man. He was always suffering from these strokes and my mother said it changed his personality entirely.

BS Well!

ET She said, my only regret is that you never knew your father as I knew him. Because he was so miserable with us over the years and I can remember we were little kids running around the house after it had rained and the hired man was bringing *[indistinguishable]* and he swore at them. My dad went over and shook him and said you never swear in front of my children, and after he was sick he didn't care what he called him. You see we never knew him as she said she knew him, which was too bad.

BS I never heard anybody say very much about him, it was always your mother that they talked about.

ET Well, it was because he was always sick. And when we went first she went back teaching, see there was no school, you knew that, and my dad built the first infirmary for Dr. Forbes when he came and Miss Baird, you know, the nurse. He built that so they had a little nursing station, and he also, (oh dear, I just can't remember it all) and when the first school was going to open I can remember we were raised with the Indians, you might as well say. And if anybody came we were off to play someplace as we didn't want much to do with people. And then along came this lumber wagon with these men, and so they went in to talk to my parents, to my mother of course as he wasn't much good at that time. So we were away and they asked her to take the Bear Creek School and that's when she first went. Well, I can hear him, no wife of mine is going to work. But she just held to her guns and we went to stay with Frank Johnson while she taught

school there at Bear Creek. Well then, of course, when the Grande Prairie school opened she got the job there. So then we bought a house.

BS Now when you say the Bear Creek School, where was that?

ET Did you know where Frank Johnson lived?

BS I didn't.

ET Did you know where the Talbots lived? That was the Johnson girl married to Norman Talbot.

BS and Frank Johnson, that was Mrs. Patrick, not Patrick, yeah old Mrs. Patrick, wasn't she a Johnson?

ET I don't think so, . . . No, it was . . .

?? Wasn't it by the creek?

ET We had to go from their place, two and a half miles to go to school.

BS You weren't in the village, you were up . . .

ET There was no village, there was nothing.

BS You were on Flying Shot

?? Flying Shot

ET Yes, when we lived at Flying Shot

?? and you had to walk two and a half miles

ET no, no – we were at Bear Creek with the Johnsons, we stayed in their house. She had the house divided in half and she gave half to us. George was the only one home with his mother and dad so you see we lived in half of their house and had to walk to school every day. Now you can imagine that in the winter time when I see these kids having to get picked up when they only have to go a couple of blocks. And we were walking in that snow and ice cold.

?? Well we walked two miles to school all the time, and had to get a horse.

BS Yeah

ET We didn't get to that stage because we moved into town and Dr. Forbes he came there and they settled that, then we were at Flying Shot Lake. He took his homestead right on the site of Grande Prairie and we were that far out. I said everything that my mother and dad did seemed to be the wrong thing. So, Dr. Forbes gave my sister and my mother each a lot so we moved our house unto that, those two lots, and the school was just kitty-corner across there so that was where we went to school.

BS Did he give you title to them?

ET Oh, yes.

BS Well, I never heard that before.

ET Well now you do, yes he did.

BS Well, bless his heart.

ET I went to visit Dr. Forbes and his wife. See I moved to Ontario in 1933. When the dirty thirties the store business was so bad and that's when they passed that thing that you couldn't collect from the farmers. Well you see there was a hundred thousand dollars . . .

?? Everybody went broke

ET owing to the store, that they couldn't collect anything on them. They had the oil distribution and the machinery and the general store in Sexsmith and they couldn't collect that. So we came to Ontario. Well I don't know how I heard that Mrs. Forbes was wonderful to me as a C.G.I.T. girl and you know she was really a marvelous person. Because we didn't know anything about -- the way my dad being an invalid and my mother teaching school every day, teaching music all day Saturday, and after school lots of times during the week, we didn't have time for any social time. We didn't know anything. Well, Mrs. Forbes took all of us girls and taught us how to set the table properly and learned where to put your glass and your tea cups . . .

BS This was the second Mrs. Forbes?

ET Yes, the second Mrs. Forbes. Oh yes, the first Mrs. Forbes I think had died.

BS Oh yes, she died in 1917.

ET Yes, it was early. I wasn't too old at that time. And over the years, now I was at my grandson's in Calgary, two or three years ago, a little boy, three years ago, and Allan said, now grandma, you sit down right now I want to know all about our family tree and he had it drawn out and I filled in all the spaces. Well, I said, I could tell you everything on my mother's side but I know nothing about my dad's side. We had no telephones and no post and no nothin', so we didn't get acquainted with our relatives. But I said, I know my mother's side because she came down to visit me in Ontario and took me to see the relatives. But as far as I know my dad was an engineer, but I said he was born either in Boston or hatched from a stump, I didn't know which. Did my sister ever get cross with me. You are daft, she said, did you say a thing like that to your grandson? I said, I certainly did that's what keeps me healthy and alive. (all laughing) She said, I'll just have you know that your dad was born in Boston, his parents were shoe manufacturers and he graduated from Harvard University.

BS How did she find out?

ET Well my mother, they both taught in the same school and I married you see and went away back to Sexsmith and then to Ontario and I was out of it. But they were, you know, over the years, and I suppose you know my sister at that time would quiz her about her background. Where I had kids, my sister never had any children. And I had four boys which you know keeps you on the trot so I never heard that until . . .

BS Well, that would be interesting for you.

ET Yes, that was interesting to me. And I have my mother's album which I shouldn't have because it belonged to my sister, well my sister put it together, see they were as I say were together and

she had no kids and no family, and I have all these ones that were interested from whence they sprung. And I would like them to have that. I gave that to my grandson when he was up here from Halifax, and he was living in Calgary at the time and I said, now Rick, that's your story of your grandparents. He said grandma that is marvelous, and I would like to have that to show to my grandchildren. Well, she hasn't got any, so she gave me this album, and I said, but Rhonda, they wanted to keep it. I was talking to a good friend of mine and I said I would love to have that album but my sister has disowned me so many times I'm afraid I will be out in the cold for good if I ask for that album. Well, she said, I'll tell you about it, you sit down and write nicely to her and say how much you appreciate the album but that your grandchildren would love to have it to show to their grandchildren. (laughing) So, I know what it was. So when I married Slim, you didn't know him did you?

BS No I didn't. What was his proper name?

ET Walker

BS Walker?

ET and everybody called him Frank.

BS Did you ever?

ET He was a cattle buyer. He did everything. And the last venture he had he bought Universal Industries in Lloydminster and built it up to a . . .

?? Was he a cattle buyer in *[indistinguishable]*?

ET No, he was up in Lloydminster, so you wouldn't know him. Well that was what he did first, well not first, he did everything. Then he was in real estate and had a second hand store and finally from the real estate he went and bought the Universal Industries.

BS What did they make?

ET Oh, all the big tents for the oil companies, real good business. So when I married Slim I was living in Ontario and he was in Lloydminster. Well she wanted to know how I got to know him. Well my son had the Chrysler Agency in Lloydminster and when we were out there he had Slim over introducing him to my husband and I, and then eventually Slim went into business with Don when his partner left. They went into the Chrysler Agency together. So he was coming down east, well every time that they needed a car or anything from the factory they would either phone father or I to bring one out you see from Windsor. Well then Mac died and I was in the travel business by this time. I had my own business and I took people all over Europe and every place you know. So I had stopped home and the phone rang and it was my son, he said, mom we need this car really badly, would you bring it out? I said I was awful tired but give me a week to recuperate. So I drove the car out and when I got out there Slim kept coming over and taking me for diner, and talking about this and that, and he said you know something we are too old to waste our time any longer. Well I was so tired of the travelling, and after you take so many people, there is always one witch on every trip making it miserable, so when I got home, I said alright, I will, but I will have to give up all my bridge-playing friends and everything, and I

married him and went out west, and that is how I got out west again. Otherwise, I was in Ontario for forty years.

BS What year did your father die?

ET When did my father die? He died in 1924.

BS And he's buried up there?

ET Yes. My mother is buried in Victoria. She was living and retired and was in Victoria when she died.

BS I am going to stop this for a minute.

ET Three years beyond pension, because there was no pension for teachers in the province of Alberta.

BS There weren't pensions for anybody then, were there?

ET I don't know, I don't think so. I was so busy minding kids

ET When did you leave Grande Prairie, or when did you leave Clairmont?

BS We still live there.

ET Oh you still live there.

?? Oh yes, we're just out of town.

ET Well how long have you guys been married?

BS We were married in 1943 – 47 years.

ET That's pretty good.

?? Not many people stay married that long anymore.

ET Bill Donahue had *[indistinguishable]* were married sixty years. He said he couldn't believe it, so one of the women spoke up and she said, well, one of these that had been married fifty years and she said, "I don't give wedding presents anymore, I tell them I give first anniversaries for those that stay together, that's all." I thought that was kind of good. Now I'm trying to think of that Moore girl that lived right there on the corner.

BS Margaret...

?? No, the one that lived on the corner, that would be Mamie. *[indistinguishable]*

ET No, Margaret is the name.

?? Oh, Margaret lives right in Clairmont.

ET Is she still there?

BS No she's still there living in a seniors home.

ET Did she marry?

BS Oh, yes.

ET Who did she marry?

BS Clem Walker. He came later, didn't he? They didn't marry until later in life. They both joined up and they got married after the war. They were well on, you know, they weren't kids any more. And Clem was English I don't know where he came from. I don't know anything much about him.

?? He had an uncle over there, lived on the north side of Clairmont,

ET When did she marry Clem, you don't have any idea?

BS It would think it might have been 1945 at least.

ET No because I was gone. But I went back to my high school reunion in Grande Prairie. My daughter-in-law went with me, the one that is married to my oldest son, he used to broadcast sports on the radio in Grande Prairie.

BS What was his name?

ET Don McNaughton. And Pat used to be a hairdresser. And he got off of that thing that was working in the oilfields and he was in a bad accident and got his spleen crushed or something and this was before they were to be married. Anyway, we drove out from Carnduff to Lloydminster to their wedding, Pat and Don's wedding, one afternoon. I thought you might have been in Sexsmith now. Who was the elevator man back there in those years, back in the 30s? The early 30s. Was there a Fish, or a Trout? Was there a Trout?

?? Well, Trout, yeah. Well, he worked in the bank, when they had a bank in Clairmont.

ES Well maybe that's where I met him . . .

?? He went into real estate . . .

ET We used to meet him at the dances, would that be the one?

?? *[indistingutishable]*

ET Now who was Eva Murray married to? She was living there. I think her husband was an elevator man.

?? I don't know

ET Way back in those days I used to be . . .

?? Oh, oh Murray, Murray and Jack McNeil, he was the elevator man in Clairmont.

ET That's the one.

?? Well is Jack still living?

ET Oh no he's dead.

?? He must have led a pretty fast life?

ET Well she did too you see. And she married again.

CD quit at this point

Transcribed by Grace Wallace

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