

NICK POOHKAY

Today is August 14, 2007

This is Mary Nutting (MN), I am interviewing Nick Poohkay (NP) at his home in Grande Prairie

MN Nick, please state your full name, and when and where you were born.

NP My full name is Nicholas Charles Poohkay. I was born in a little farm home, in a homesteader's home, that Dad had taken a homestead in 1912. I was born May 16, 1926, which was a Sunday.

MN And where was this?

NP At Slava, Alberta. That community no longer exists. A lot of people don't want to associate them with Slava. Slava is mainly renowned in Ukraine so when immigrants came they named that place Slava. This is going to be their salvation. And the land around it was very poor, so the village or the hamlet disappeared, maybe.

MN What part of Alberta was it in?

NP This is north of Vermilion or east of Vegreville. That is where most of the Ukrainians settled after they came from, immigrated from Ukraine. So that is my start.

MN So when and why did you come to the Peace River country?

NP Well, it is an involved story. First thing I finished my grade 12 and then I went and be a school supervisor, as it was a shortage of teachers and I applied for the position or job as supervisor of kids. And then, well, it wasn't my cup-of-tea. I started in the middle of November because and then they got a teacher so I said that was a good thing. So after that I stayed around the farm for about a year and then I applied to go north into Yellowknife. I went to become a miner. And from mining I went to millwork so that was my position at the mine when I left.

MN So did you say you were in the Yukon?

NP No, in North West Territories.

MN North West Territories, what community?

NP It was Yellowknife. I worked for the Con Mine. Now I used to say and joked about the "Con Mine." Today people ask, "Why is it called the Con Mine?" I said because it was run by convicts which is a lie. It is run by CM&S, Consolidated Mining and Smelting and every mine wanted to shorten the name so they called it "The Con." There were two other mines that were operating, of which one was Negus and one was Giant at that time, right around the town of Yellowknife. So I went there. I can't remember the date but I can remember the day that I was leaving Edmonton, it was May 4, 1948. I was 22 years old when I went there. The weather was a little different in Yellowknife than it was in Edmonton. But Edmonton had a very late spring that year. When you got on the plane you could see the snow drifts on the north side of the bush, so

...

MN That was in May?

NP Yeah, May the 4th. And the next day we were dropped underground. Three greenhorns, 2300 feet underground, we were supposed to clean out along the track. They were doing exploration work at that mine. They were going to a new ore zone at 2300 feet. So after about 40 days I didn't like the underground so the mill was going to have another addition, they had a *[indistinguishable]* added on to it. It was in the moth balls. So they needed new men in there and I applied. But when you get to the mill you start at the bottom and you work yourself up and up. And after two years I was one of the top personnel in the mill. I knew the whole setup of the mill at that time.

MN What was it like to live in Yellowknife at that time?

NP Oh, I didn't find it uncomfortable. We were isolated, because the only way in and out was by plane. Or some guys went across the lake by canoe on a kicker but not very many. Well, there were hockey games that they had during the wintertime and you could go to shows and things like that. We travelled the lake a little bit in a boat and a kicker. Then you worked six days a week. But the mill ran 24 hours a day so you worked 14 days and then you got 2 days off. The wages at that time were, well Edmonton was getting 63 cents an hour, while our wages were \$1.25. And I lived in camp which most of the people that worked at the mine lived in camp. The camp contained maybe 200 people/miners. And other people they got themselves shacks and everything like that in town that worked at the mine as well because they saved themselves \$2.00 a day for room and board. So I thought that was reasonable for things like that and after that, well . . . before that I had bought some land that was up for sale at the Eaglesham area. I had a little funds and I got some from Dad and it was up for tax-recovery sale. In 1930 some people from Quebec came and homesteaded in Eaglesham, and after they got the title to the land or what they called pruned-up they pulled up stakes and went back to Quebec. And in 1947 the government decided to unload the, sell the land, because they were in arrears in taxes. So I guess they just let it go. So it came up for sale and there were three quarters of land up there and Nick bid on one of them and he was a successful bidder on one.

MN So when did you go back to Eaglesham?

NP In 1950. I was already prepared and I had my brother hire some heavy equipment to clear some land on my place. So then in 1950 I came to break up some land.

MN So was that the reason you went back to Yellowknife to earn money to farm?

NP More or less, more or less. It was enough land but things fall into place that way. So, I have to back up a little bit. The reason we were in Eaglesham was because my brother who was in the air force, he got discharged in 1945 and he went with Alberta Government Soil Survey and he surveyed the land between the Smokey River and the Peace River in the Eaglesham/ Tangent/ Belloy area. So he said, "This is a good location." And my brother had homesteaded, he was a veteran, he homesteaded some land before I came there. When I came in 1947 to his place we were supposed to break some of his land up and that is how the Poohkays got in the land in the Peace River country.

MN Was he Peter Poohkay?

NP Yeah

MN Yeah. I've seen his name on the Land Records.

NP And my other brother, who was on the soil survey he filed on a homestead as well. But he cancelled it. He was a veteran and he had finished his high school in the 30s and he went to university and became not a farmer but a pharmacist.

MN And so you started farming in Eaglesham in 19??

NP 50

MN 1950. What was the village of Eaglesham like at that time?

NP Oh, it had a few stores, a café, and a grain elevator and some machine companies. It was not much but it was a stopping place. It had a post office which was the important part you know. Oh, they were friendly people. Everybody knew each other and that's the way it went.

MN What difficulties when you started homesteading there, what kind of difficulties did you face?

NP Well, for one thing there were no roads of any kind.

MN Trails?

NP Yes, there were trails. That's what we used when we came up to deliver some machinery to my brother. We kinda didn't know where he was living so I went to see the elevator agent and he knew everybody in the country and so he told me how to get there. So we went north of town and we came to where there was a creek and then I chose one trail. There were buildings vacant. I chose the next trail, it was also vacant, and then we chose the third trail and it went and we came to a deep gully with a creek crossing. And Dad said we can't cross this, it's too steep. They used to cross it with horse and wagon. So we followed a trail and we came on to a shack which I presumed was my brother's. It was in a bunch of clearing and we walked further down and we came to a place that a man was living but he wasn't there but he was working out. I knocked on the door and a dog answered my knock. But I could hear the cowbells coming and it was five o'clock and in our case the cows came with a cowbell and I sat there maybe twenty minutes and I said why is it taking this man so long to bring the cows home. I went to see where the cowbell was. The horses were belled, there were no cows there. (laughing) And the mosquitoes were bad and the horses were nodding their heads. So we hadn't met my brother yet. So on the way back we bumped into him. And that's how it came about.

MN So you had brought a truck in there with machinery?

NP No, with a breaking plough that's all he needed it.

MN But, what were you pulling it with?

NP We came with a farm truck.

MN With a farm truck – that's why you couldn't cross the stream?

NP But Dad said it's too steep. So we did cross it later. But Dad wasn't around.

MN So this was in the 1950s and there were still no roads?

NP Oh no. Hardly but the main one, there were trails . . .

MN Trails was it?

NP Well two miles south of my brother's place there was a road, graded road, but it was very, very, poorly done. It was a minimum kind of a thing, you know.

MN So were they old trails, or old Indian trails or were they wagon trails built by the government or what kind of trails were they?

NP I think people used to go to the Peace River. It's just trails. People made those trails. Well for one thing maybe because of the survey of land they might have had the trails and some places where the land, the cutlines were made sometimes they were not as easy passable so that people went around sloughs and went through the timber like. So that is ... well I have a story but I am not going to get on that story.

MN Sure

NP (chuckle)

MN We've got lots of time and we've got lots of tape, tell me the story.

NP (chuckle) You know I just found the information at your place about the nurses coming there. And I never knew when they settled the area. I thought it was in 1923 but the records showed they homesteaded that place in 1922. I think according to some recollections seven nurses from Nova Scotia came to homestead in the Peace River country and there were seven.

MN But four went to Eaglesham, right?

NP No

MN All seven?

NP I think so. Anyhow they left I think Belloy and then they knew about the trails. They wanted to go to the Peace River country. So they went from Eaglesham, there was a trail to go to the Peace River. They got to the Peace River, and I think what they did, I am surmising, because they got off the trail, they went upstream to the meridian and the meridian would be a very good cutline because that is the important thing for surveying the land. And they came back up and they knew they had to go east to get on the trail and one of the nurses got violently sick. So they came to within maybe a quarter of a mile of the trail they were on and they bedded down there. They were staying there to have the nurse recuperate and they were there for maybe four days and they didn't have enough groceries but the horses had enough feed because there was a lot of wild grass and they were at the creek so the water was not a problem and the people of Belloy started to worry about them. So they got a search party to go and find these nurses. So as they left Eaglesham they got across the little creek which we call it Lost Creek today and as they got on top of the other side somebody in the party heard a dog bark and they went and investigated and the nurses were out there and emaciated, they were really, really in

bad shape. And the man said they could barely get on the horse after they were found. So they got back to the civilization. Later on two of them went and filed on a homestead on that place for the nurses.

MN That is exactly the kind of story I am looking for, Nick. I would have missed that if you said I wasn't telling you weren't telling the story.

NP And I know this thing. Well, a man came later on. This was in 1922 they homesteaded and they went turkey ranching and then what happened there was one left, there was one nurse left, and she was going to spend the winter by herself. And what happened is they had a communication between the people of Belloy and Edmonton and they asked for to find a man to come and spend the winter with the nurse and this man had come from Germany, was working for a farmer at Bruderheim and the season was over for work. So they took him to Fort Saskatchewan and they said that you are on your own. Go back to Edmonton. And the man thought to himself what am I going to do. So then things, he thought to himself, I am going to go to the Immigration Hall and maybe I would meet a German fellow and we are going to discuss and see what we are going to do for the winter. In the meantime as he came to the Immigration Hall he was intercepted by an agent for the nurse and he said, "You can work on the farm?" And they guy said "yes" he was a farm boy and he got hired to go and stay at the nurse's place.

MN And that was the turkey ranch?

NP Yes

MN So he looked after the ranch for the winter.

NP Yes, yes

MN Where did the other nurses go?

NP Some, one stayed at Rycroft and the other ones must have went down east. They were from Nova Scotia. But the nurse here, although she was Canadian, she worked in the United States at White Plains, New York.

MN Are we talking about nurse Young? No.

NP No

MN Do you remember any of their names?

NP Yes, one is Helena Margaret Ellis, and the other one, Mary Rachel MacLean. I found that out in the record of their filing. So I did find, well, we used to cross that place. And they had a barn in the middle of the two quarters and they had a cabin close to where they were probably camped waiting to get saved.

MN So, is that place still, like is it called Lost Creek on the map?

NP Yes

MN It is?

NP But we have it wrong. They said they were American but I found out they were Canadian. Nurses from the First Great War.

MN Right, this was from the early 1920s.

NP Yes. From the Canadian Expeditionary Force. It is a story in itself.

MN When you think of seven nurses coming up to this country in the early 1920s . . .

NP Well the thing is they must have had communication with somebody that was on a survey party and he might have been from Nova Scotia. And he said, "Here is a nice place to go and homestead." And because and although there was a lot of bush, there were in that area there were open prairies so that is what would attract people to go homesteading. Because they don't have so much bush to clear and they could start making a living out of nothing.

MN How hard was your homestead to clear in the 50s.

NP (chuckling) It wasn't as hard if you had money because at that time Nick, and my equipment came into play. So after you had it brush-cut and piled and then you would go with your tractor and start breaking the land. And that's what we did in 1950. In 1951 I planted my first crop and there was no return from it until 1952. So Nick was living off the earnings from Yellowknife. If you really scrounged hard you could really save yourself a hundred bucks a month to put away in the bank but in Yellowknife that wasn't the case. The guys were broke from payday to payday. They spent the money faster than they earned it. It was pitiful how those miners abused themselves. I feel sorry, they had no plan I guess and that's the way it went. Maybe ten percent have come to make themselves, better themselves someplace else.

MN So was farming good in the 50s in Eaglesham?

NP (chuckling) Well, I have another fly in the ointment. You see Lassiter had come up into the area to clear and he had cleared some land north of Eaglesham, half a mile from my place, the place I had bought. But in order to homestead that land you could not have any land in your name so Nick went and sold his place to my brother who is a pharmacist. He's not going to go farming and I am going to file on the homestead that is coming up at Lassiter that was done for veterans. But if the veterans didn't homestead that land for ninety days it was thrown open to civilians. And that's what happened to the other land that I had.

MN Was it good land?

NP In between, it wasn't as good as the home place because the land was lighter but we got good crops off of it. And the thing yielded for me and the Indian artifacts that come of that place.

MN So that's where they were from?

NP Yes, I have a spot that they want to go, the archaeology department, if they get around to it from Edmonton. They are planning to do a dig on it.

MN So is that how you got interested in archaeology?

NP No, well I was breaking land on my own place in 1957 and I ploughed up a scraper and right away I realized it was a scraper. And I put it in the toolbox of the tractor. And that kinda tricked

a mechanism on it and then I started really with a passion and then I started with, oh what do you call the next word . . . really intensive looking for stuff and that's where I found the hill with the hell gap points.

MN So it was a cache that had points.

NP No. It just yielded eleven points and that's all there was. Why it was there, it was on a slight hill and there was a depression in it. It would hold water for a while but you could farm through it. So you don't know why it was there. So last year the archaeologists, I took them to the site and we were walking to it and the first thing the archaeologist picked up a piece and that's all we found. Because Nick vacuumed the whole thing. I was really intense in collecting. You could imagine collecting 34 ice cream pails, the two and a half gallon ice cream pails, and that's all . . .

MN Thirty four, that's a lot of points and . . .

NP Yes, that's about thirty four hundred pieces. I figure there is 100 pieces in each ice cream pail. And everything was handled by people that lived there before.

MN So when I hear that, I think the population of native people must have been pretty high in order to have that amount . . .

NP No, they lived there a long time.

MN Okay

NP They lived there, my points go back, and now-a-days they say that they are contemporary to the oldest points in North America.

MN Which is how old?

NP Ten thousand years old.

MN Okay

NP They just figured it out now. The oldest point is the Clovis point, but recently I read a report that the Hell Gap point is contemporary with the Clovis point. And that's what, we have also some Hell Gap points, some Clovis points in the area but I didn't find any. So that's the way it goes.

MN Okay, what were some of the good things that you enjoyed about farming in the Peace River country? What made you stay here for so long?

NP Well, (chuckling) one had to make a living and being single I guess it was not so much pressure as the married people. Times were tough, grain prices were low, and we didn't know how to farm land, the production was poor, so some people went cattle farming as well, but not mixed but strictly grain. So little by little it improved and we got to grow legumes in it to help the fertility of the soil and then things started, and then we got to know how to preserve the moisture and you grow better crops. But frost was a thing that many years ago, more so than it is today.

MN Do you remember any of the other hamlets like Belloy or . . .

NP Well, yes.

MN What was at Belloy when you got there when you left Eaglesham?

NP Well it was about the same community as Eaglesham. They had one thing, they had a water tower there. That is where the train stopped and took water on because it was all steam locomotives and from Watino that would be the next stop for water, so they had a big dugout and people were, oh I don't know, they were the same as Eaglesham. The only thing is they had homesteaded there earlier than Eaglesham. The first homesteaders in Eaglesham were south of Eaglesham and they were, other than the nurses who homesteaded in the 20s, in the 30s some Americans from North Dakota came and they homesteaded there. And some of the families are still there. They selected a little better land. It was fairly good and it was lighter to farm. In Eaglesham there is a lot of heavy gumbo and that is costly to farm.

MN So how many elevators at Belloy, do you remember?

NP Two

MN Two elevators

NP Maybe there were three but I remember two.

MN When I go to Belloy today there is a sign for Belloy and its bush on both sides of the track. Is that where the community was? Is that where the elevators were? Like when you see a sign that says "Belloy Road" and I go down there and there is a railway sign that says "Belloy" but it's just . . .

NP No, it's completely levelled down. There is nothing there. There used to be a community hall, there used to be a curling rink and many, many things, but those communities were too close like Wanham took over, and Eaglesham took over, so Belloy was lost.

MN Where was the big train station?

NP At Rycroft.

MN Okay, so that . . .

NP and Watino

MN So there was a big train station at Watino, one at Rycroft and so there would be just little shed stations at the others?

NP Yes, well Belloy had a station agent and Eaglesham had a station agent. They needed it because of the war. There were so many locomotives going through in the war, that I think that some say up to sixteen trains would pass on that railroad because the Americans were going up, were working on the Alaska highway.

MN Sixteen trains a day?

NP Yes

MN Uhm, and so there would have been station houses for to house the families and the families of the men who were looking after the station, right?

NP Yes

MN They wouldn't live right in the stations?

NP Some did and some didn't. But there were railroad employees that the railway built for them because they needed the men to keep the track in shape so there was a foreman and usually three other people working with the foreman to check to make sure it's in shape for the trains to go by.

MN And there would have been an elevator house for the elevator agent, too, right?

NP They built the elevator and the elevator agent had to look for his own. It came later on when they built the houses for the elevator. Most of the time some lived in the elevator. If you were single then you had a bed and you could make yourself a meal and that's where you stayed.

MN So you were on duty 24 hours a day?

NP Yes

MN What were some of the common places, like, you would have a post office . . .

NP Yeah

MN a store,

NP a church. Usually a catholic church was there.

MN Are there any of those churches left that you know?

NP Some are standing yet, but I don't know if there is service in the Eaglesham Catholic Church. But Tangent was a stronger Catholic community. This man that had his 70th wedding anniversary, they had a ceremony in the Tangent church. And the Bishop was there to perform the ceremony and this man and I built the house on the place. He at one time lived on the land that was next to me that I became owner of. When I was spread out from 3 quarters to 5 quarters, I bought the other 2 places that were homesteaded in the 30s.

MN In the end you owned 5 quarters?

NP Yeah

MN And how much on Lassiter land?

NP How much acres?

MN How many quarters?

NP Two

MN Two quarters and then three . . .

NP Each unit as they called, "Lassiter units" were half a section.

MN Okay

NP And the government requested that they open at least 250 acres on each half and they left a windbreak on each quarter so that's what, but that was a lot of work you know. Two hundred and fifty acres of, what do they call that, roots and logs, because the big clearing out that they were, I don't know if it was carelessness, because the wood that was standing there was fire killed, and you tried to pile this stack and it breaks up and then that's what you have remaining because they wouldn't pick it up. I mean they couldn't pick it up. If they tried to then they put too much dirt into the piles and it would not work, so . . .

MN Were you there when Lassiter was with all his machinery?

NP Yeah. I was raking my land and Lassiter was doing his thing.

MN What did that look like to you or what do you remember about that?

NP Well, they were doing their work, well they did it with disk ploughs. So it was very rough, you know with a Mobark plough. You make it nice and smooth with a disk plough which was very rough, so they had an idea, well they used floats. They made floats out of the track of rails of the cat track and put a log in between and they went and floated all of their land and that's how they made the land ready for the farmers to come and start farming. But there was lots of stuff that you got to remove. The debris on top of the land, roots and broken pieces to trees, that was the big drawback to farming and they expected us to go and put all of this in crop.

MN Oh, that's right because you were supposed to have all of that in crop. The 250 acres that you had.

NP Yes, yes

MN And that was sort of impossible to do it.

NP That's right. Well some guys made it improvising root pickers out of cultivators for horse and tractor and things like that. Another guy did buy a root rake in Edmonton but it was not built correctly. Well I used it and he charged me a dollar an acre and I went and picked roots out with it and so you make windrows and you seed between the windrows. And maybe after five years the windrows you picked through them and you got rid of them.

MN Who worked for Lassiter? Did he bring people with him or did . . .

NP Well usually it was some farmers. Farmers that went and homesteaded in the area took some of that land they were there to work for them. He maybe had at best twenty men. He had eight cats so that would take sixteen men and there was a mechanic keeping the machinery, and a welder so because it took a lot of breakdowns you know, so . . .

MN Was there a Lassiter camp where all these people . . .

NP Yes, they were kitty/corner to my place was Lassiter Camp.

MN Do you remember what your legal description was?

NP What?

MN Do you remember what your legal description of that piece of land was?

NP Theirs or . . .

MN No yours that you were kitty/corner to.

NP Of course, I would never forget it. SW18 79 25W of the 5th meridian. So the other ones I named because you see that was the next west is Range 26.

MN Okay

NP 18 is at the end of . . .

MN What was the Lassiter Camp then? Do you remember what that would have been?

NP It's the NE of 13.

MN In the 27th meridian?

NP No, 26th.

MN 26th

NP I'll give you the full – NE of 13 79 26W of the 5th meridian. You see 13 and 18 are across from one another, so . . .

MN Do you remember any other land marks there? So I guess what I am looking for is say old, where the post office would have been and if it wasn't in Eaglesham or old schools or old churches.

NP There was an old post office there made out of logs and I don't know if it was sitting on the lot by itself but in 1955 they burnt the post office for the 50th anniversary of Alberta.

MN There is a good celebration. (chuckling)

NP Well it was abandoned.

MN What post office would that have been?

NP Eaglesham

MN" Oh, that was the Eaglesham post office, the original.

NP Yes, yes. So he had built it out of logs and then he had built one out of lumber and this was standing there and that was a weiner roast and a celebration for burning the post office.

MN And that was right in the hamlet of Eaglesham.

NP That's right.

MN Ok. Any other – what about schools? Do you remember any schools?

NP Well, yes they had a school a little bit out of town, out of the hamlet. The person that had it was a single person, it was a bachelor but he decided that the kids should get an education. So he

had donated to the school board four acres of land so they could build the school and get some education for the children.

MN And was that Eaglesham school?

NP Yeah

MN What about the hamlet of Codesa? What do you remember about it?

NP (chuckling) Oh well that was a little bit off the side of Eaglesham. It's about seven miles west and well I have an idea that it was a rang-a-tang kind of a community. Because number one the place was called "Rahab."

MN Oh really!

NP Yeah

MN That's the old... Codesa used to be Rahab.

NP And you know Rahab comes from the Bible. That was a lady of ill-repute. And I think why they named it Rahab, because when they were building the railway they were building the bridge at Watino and they were also building the line towards Spirit River so the next community was Rahab and Rahab had a few pluses for it. Number one, it had Lodgepole pine and pine was used for the rails and it was the best thing they had at that time. So they not only had a camp for building the road they had a camp for making railway ties and Codesa had the pines in that area. So then little businesses started and they had a pool room and the post office and this and that in Rahab.

MN And other services. (chuckling)

NP Yes, well I presume.

MN (chuckling)

NP You know how it is with the construction. The ladies of ill-repute soon follow, and I think that's why it's called Rahab. And later on the Catholic Diocese got a quarter of land and they decided to build a church for the people of Rahab but they said we shall not have the name Rahab in there. So they applied to the railway company and you know why Codesa is there. It is the name of three people, at first it was Codesa for Collins, Saunders and Deakin.

Side B

NP So people that lived in there thought they knew but she said well when you are coming to a strange country you know darn well that one day they would come and tell you, you are not coming to Rahab you are going to Codesa now.

MN That was in 1938

NP Yes, yes. Well you can even search that out under names of Alberta and will show.

MN Okay, so they do know that they do have that recorded?

NP Yes

MN What about Prestville? Was that too far out of your area?

NP We just drove by it.

MN Yeah, okay. Because there was a nurse there . . .

NP Yes, Mrs. Young.

MN So was she one of those 1920s nurses?

NP Yes

MN Oh, so she was?

NP Yes

MN Okay

NP And there was one more living in Spirit River according to the Rycroft book.

MN Okay. Do you remember her name?

NP No. She was probably a MacLean as the MacLeans were overcrowded in Nova Scotia.

MN What about Culp that would have been on the other side of the river from you?

NP We just went to dances to Culp. There were some Ukrainian people we would go and associate but not much. You see the river was a barrier for us. So until 1955 when the bridge was built in then you could take off there any time. But in 1947 when we came we crossed on the ferry. And the ferry was probably put in place there in 1938 or '37. I'm not sure.

MN Was it right where the railway bridge crossed?

NP Well just above where the railroad bridge is crossing.

MN So, is that north?

NP No that's south. Upstream from the railway bridge.

MN That's south. And then Prudens Landing, is that what it was called, Prudens Crossing was there for a couple of years while they were building the . . .

NP Well because they had to cross the river. They hadn't completed the bridge so Prudens Crossing was on the east side of the river. And when the bridge was finished they moved some of the buildings to Watino.

MN Do you remember what was at Watino when you arrived?

NP Oh yeah that was a, what do they call that?

MN A coal tipple or something.

NP A coal tower I think and a water tower. Now I don't think I am saying the right word for a coal tipple?

MN I think so.

NP You'd have to hold up a bucket and you would have to take the bucket up to get enough coal for the next train that will go by. So they had a station agent, a water tower man and a coal man. That would be three people needed. Maybe they even had more, I don't know if they had each shift I imagine and during the war they would have to have three men which was continuous.

MN Uhm . . . sorry my . . . There was a problem with the bridge there. The bridge doesn't, isn't open anymore, the railway bridge, right?

NP No, it's gone completely now.

MN Well, they took the whole structure down?

NP I didn't know the piers are down but that's what they tell me and they are building a new traffic bridge to date.

MN Right there?

NP Alongside the old traffic bridge. Because of the fact that the old bridge had girders on top and you want open span and that's why the government decided to make it. They said it's too old, too old, it was built in 1955. So I have some pictures of it, one was of the bridge opening at that time.

MN Oh, yeah. Do you remember where Prudens Crossing was? Was it north of the bridge or south?

NP North

MN North? It was north of the bridge. There is sort of a flat there.

NP Yeah

MN There was sort of a flat there.

NP You were there?

MN Oh yeah, I go and look at these places.

NP You went from the east side, aye?

MN Well we were coming from, well we had been from both sides.

NP You went to Culp and you went down the trail and you got down to a great big flat.

MN No. Didn't find it. (laughing)

NP (laughing) You didn't find it.

MN I'd see it from the west, from the west side of the river you can see this flat.

NP Yeah, it's farmland now.

MN And that's where Prudens Crossing was?

NP Yes. And on top of that the farmer that works that land he will find some billiard balls in there sometimes.

MN Who is that farmer?

NP That's Bolster.

MN OK

NP I don't know which one.

MN Which one.

NP There is Wayne, Wayne is the father but he has passed away. There is Ernest, Don, and, I don't know. Jim maybe, I don't know. I'd have to look in the phone book.

MN Yeah. That's okay.

MN Okay, well I think that's sort of answered my questions. Is there anything that you feel that we've missed that was really important to you when you were living there?

NP I was the umpire for the baseball at that time. Nick was one of the guys while he was in Edmonton he undertook to go to an umpires school run by a semi-pro guy called John Ducey, he was the head king pin in Edmonton. So Nick took his umpiring school and when he came up here he would usually drafted to umpire ball games.

MN Were ball games really common?

NP Oh yes, that was the realist thing for Sunday. Baseball, not softball. Baseball games were in vogue and each community tried to best the neighboring community and then they would go and challenge the guys at Falher and Donnelly. And I don't know Girouxville never and McLennan and that was the thing.

MN So there would have been the Eaglesham team, a Belloy team . . .

NP Yes, a Wanham team and a Tangent team and then years ago they used to have one in Watino. But the populous had dissipated after the steam locomotives so there was very few to continue with baseball up there.

MN So that's when the population in those little hamlets started to dwindle was when steam locomotives were out.

NP At Watino it did. Ours kept on because it had the school and that's when Belloy didn't have a school. Codesa didn't, well it had a school for a while, until about 1955. After that it was . . .

MN Consolidated

NP Yes. And Codesa had a school and it also disappeared. The guy bought it and he used it as a farm home afterwards.

MN So when did the roads start going in? You started by saying there weren't very many roads up there. When did they start putting all the . . .

NP After the war, well there was a kind of a highway 49 when the Alaska Highway came into being so they used that, that is the road they used. They came through Slave Lake, through Watino and up to, to, and they even went through Spirit River to Dawson Creek. Some turned this way south but I think the majority went from Spirit River west to Dawson because that was the closest route to take.

MN And they would have had to take the ferry across the Smoky?

NP That's right. And in the wintertime they crossed on ice. But sometimes they weren't successful because if the ice wasn't strong enough, there were pictures where they shows that the vehicle had broke through the ice and is needing some assistance to get him out of the predicament.

MN So when they built an ice bridge was it just directly on the ice or did they put a platform on the ice?

NP No, directly on the ice.

MN Directly on the ice?

NP Sometimes they, well now we know a little bit more, they pumped water once the ice starts forming then you try to build strength into it by putting water in and then it freezes and it gives it some more strength. But there is another, you see they have an ice bridge at Providence in the Northwest Territories that crosses the McKenzie and you cannot travel too fast because your vehicle is pressing the ice and there's, if you get too fast it will break over that wave and you're gonna be stuck. Your brakes too, they warned you to go slow and then you will. Because the ice is like, like what, what do they, it's flexible and it rides on the water and if you get too ambitious then you'll get over that hump where the water is and you are going to break through, so. While Watino it is a very short crossing for, so I don't think . . . they did have trouble I know that. Maybe the ice wasn't strong enough, maybe he got off the beaten path. But there are pictures with the Americans' trucks breaking through the ice.

MN So do you have a lot of pictures of that area?

NP Not really.

MN No, like of your farming days, or of the hamlets or anything like that?

NP No

MN A picture of Belloy?

NP No, I don't have a picture, but you must find somebody would have a Belloy picture if they researched it.

MN One picture of Belloy in the Wanham book that's taken from the elevator . . .

NP Yeah

MN And that's sort of the picture that started me on this search and I couldn't believe that it was the same place that I had visited.

NP No

MN No

NP There is nothing there, I don't think.

MN A couple of rotting buildings in the bush.

NP Yes, yes. There are farm buildings, there is a farmstead out there. It's not right in Belloy but next to it.

MN Okay, thank you very much. So any more stories?

NP No, because I don't know which ones I am gonna tell.

MN Okay, thank you very much, Nick.

NP Okay

Transcribed by Grace Wallace

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