

Bernice Lambert Interview – January 28, 2015

HR – Helen Raptis (interviewer)
AF – Ashley Forseille (interviewer)
BL – Bernice Lambert (interviewee)
J – Joanne (Care aid to BL)

HR: Okay, you, you've done a really nice job of laying out everywhere that you taught. And so you began your career in, it looks like, in 1942 after your...

BL: I, I was in normal school in 1942-43 in Vancouver.

HR: Okay

BL: And in those days the men teachers were getting pretty scarce because the younger ones were enlisting, and so Lytton had—I was in Lytton, that was my first school. And they had had a male teacher, Mr. Philips, but he, he had enlisted and I was the ripe old age of 19 when I was a principal of a two room school. And I was the teacher for Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 so that was a rather, a heavy project.

HR: So, can we back up...

BL: Yes.

HR: ...to your experience at normal school. You went to Vancouver Normal School.

BL: Vancouver Normal in 1942-'43.

HR: Can you tell us a little bit about that and how well you felt it prepared you for that experience in Lytton?

BL: Well both of my parents were teachers so it was sort of simple for me to decide what I was going to do. And at that time, because this is—I'm in my 91st year so...

HR: Oh!

BL: ...you know, it was quite a while ago. Women mostly had the choice of being a secretary or a nurse or a teacher. And so I chose a teaching career. I had been born in Saskatchewan. My father was always my school principal, which was kind of a hideous experience. [laughter] And so I finished Grade 11 with him when he re-enlisted, because he had been in the First World War, and so he enlisted in the second. And my mother and I, I was an only child, my mother and I then came to British Columbia where her parents were, just out of Kamloops at Heffley Creek. And so

we had the summer there with my grandparents and then I had to decided what to do, having just finished Grade 11. So it was by then a month late, so in October Mother and I went to the high school and interviewed by or to the school principal, Mr. Gurney. And he listened to my experience and decided to put me in Grade 13, senior matric, first year university. And they were just opening it up that year and I think they just wanted a few more bodies in there, anyway. So I had to skip a year, Grade 12, and so I had to make up, you know, quite a number of—I had no biology and one or two things like that. My history wasn't up to date. I had missed a year of history. And anyway, I managed to pass my senior matric year. And thanks to my parents I guess they gave me a few brains in between here and here. And so that was my experience with high school and moving to British Columbia from Saskatchewan. We lived in about 13 little towns in Saskatchewan so we really covered it—north and south and east and west.

HR: For your father's jobs?

BL: Yes. He was a teacher and normally he taught about 4 years but sometimes it was just 1 year. He actually completed 50 years of teaching.

HR: Oh my goodness.

BL: He got a gold watch for that.

HR: Wow.

BL: He kept retiring. He had retired from teaching in Saskatchewan at the end of the war, he was given credit for his war years. He taught at the University of Saskatchewan at the end of that time. And then he and mother retired and came to British Columbia. And he was still too young to retire. I found the same difficulty. I kept on going until last year. But...

HR: Oh!

BL: So dad then took another position in Copper Mountain and I visited them there. And it closed, that school closed because the mine closed and mining was the whole occupation in Copper Mountain out of Princeton.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: And so then he retired again. But on the street in Vancouver when he was walking along with Mother he met the superintendent again and he said, "Oh, Mr. Elliot, I have a nice position for you for a year," and so dad looked at Mother and, and the superintendent went on to say it was a little Finnish fishing village at the northern tip of Vancouver Island. And that was Sointula.

HR: Mm.

BL: And so Mother said, “Well if you feel like going I’m willing.” And so they went up to Sointula for 1 year but they liked it so well that they stayed for 30 years and they died in Sointula, are buried there. And when they built the new school they named it for my father, A.J. Elliot Elementary School.

HR: Oh really? What an honour.

BL: So when I go up there the school principal says, “Well just go around and talk to everybody in the classes,” and I can tell them things about their grandparents. That there grandparents would probably wish I didn’t tell.

HR: [Laughter] So how, how did you end up at the Vancouver Normal School?

BL: Well Mother and I had come after Dad left. We closed our home in Drinkwater, sold our possessions, and came to stay just out of Kamloops. It’s now part of Kamloops, it’s Heffley Creek. And that’s where her parents were living. So Kamloops was the closest of the high schools that I could attend and so Mother and I took a room and I proceeded with my year at at Kamloops High School for senior matric.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: So that’s how I happened to be in Kamloops.

HR: And then to—my understanding is that if you were from outside of the Vancouver area that you would take your normal school experience in Victoria. But you came from Kamloops and went to Vancouver.

BL: Well I had relatives living in, in Vancouver.

HR: I see.

BL: So it was an advantage for me to be there because I would either stay with them all the time or at least part of the time.

HR: I see.

BL: So I ended up only staying with them for a month and then I got my own accommodation.

HR: I see.

BL: So it—I guess they they made an exception or, you know, I didn't know that part of it. But in any event I was able to go to Vancouver Normal School. And I ended up living just a block away from, from the school, which was just across the road from, from the City Hall.

HR: Oh yeah, yeah.

BL: So I could just walk. It was very close.

HR: Do you remember anything about those—that year, or any of the instructors?

BL: Well it was wartime then. And that was in 1940 and '41. And consequently the young men of my age were mostly in the army. Consequently there were about 126 ladies and I think about 6 men attending. [laughter] So they were very popular. They didn't have any trouble finding partners for dancing or whatever. Of course the girls didn't have any trouble finding army, navy, and air Force men either.

HR: And were there dances at the time, and...

BL: Well they were, they were very caring for the girls. They, you know, they didn't want any problems. And so we were encouraged to entertain under supervision so we were—those of us that wished to attend a certain dance and they were—they gave us the names and where they were. We were given a bus and there was supervision, one of the professors from the university would go with us. And we would go to one of the dance halls where, where they had invited either the army men or air force or navy and so we would—we were just guests and we were dance partners and we were to entertain and, you know, just visit with the young men who were in the service. Because they were—they came from all over the place; Britain and Australia and all over. And so that was fun, you know, we enjoyed it. And we were under supervision and at the end of the dance we got in bus and went back home again so there wasn't any hanky panky.

HR: [laughter] Do you remember any of your instructors or any of the classes you took? Can you recall?

BL: Yes. Mr. Lord was our principal. And by that time I was, I was just 17 and I was very lonely and I missed my home in Saskatchewan and my friends. I didn't know anybody in Kamloops and I had to work very hard in order to catch up with the subjects that I had missed. And Mother was very helpful, she looked after me. We had a little suite and so she did the meals and looked after me while I did my homework. Writing out big tomes about Adolf Hitler and one or two things like that. And so Mr. Lord was interviewing each of the students and he interviewed me. And I ended up bursting into tears and I think he had a daughter so he was sympathetic of girls who got emotional. And I just said that I was very homesick and so he, he talked to me in a fatherly fashion and made me feel more comfortable.

HR: Oh, isn't that lovely.

BL: And I had very good teachers. Mr. MacLean who invented the MacLean system of writing and printing. I do a lot of work, I've got 90 booklets full of, of writing that I do. But Mr. MacLean was our instructor in writing. So the man that, that set out that program was our instructor. And our art instructor was Mr. Weston.

HR: H.P. Weston.

BL: And I have a picture here which is by one of the Group of Seven. It's not an actual picture it's a, it's a print. But it's by Comfort. And he was one of the Group of Seven. They had, you know, friends from outside of the 7 like Jackson and so on, A.Y. Jackson. And I'm quite interested in art. I'm not an artist but my granddaughter is. She has been an artist since, since she could pick up a pencil and we used to help her parents out a lot because my daughter was teaching and my son was air craft, air, air, air controller, traffic Controller. And so we looked after our granddaughter Alyssa quite a bit of the time. Actually, from the time she was born until she was about 18. Then we turned her over to this nice young man. This is their wedding picture.

HR: Oh, oh that's lovely.

BL: And he was also from England so I approved because I married an Englishman. [laughter]

HR: So you ended up going to Lytton afterwards.

BL: You know I found that all my jobs were because it was people that I knew. So one of my girlfriends at normal school was Joy MacArthur. And her uncle, she was living with her aunt and uncle, and her uncle was the superintendent of schools. And so he was looking for a principal in Lytton because their principal had enlisted. And they were short of teachers so he said to Joy, who was living with him, my friend, he said, "Well invite one of your friends and I'll interview her at at supper." And so Joy said, "well Bernice you might as well come and meet my uncle." And so I met Uncle Harry and he interviewed me during the meal and decided that at age 19 I would make a good principal of a two-room school. I think it was very optimistic. However, I did get through the school year. But I did at the end of it inform Mother that I was through with teaching. That was it. But she was a very wise person. She was teaching herself at the time. And she said, "Well, instead of being in a rather larger town school why don't you go to the country?" And so I took a little country school north of Kamloops about 40 miles. And it was at Barriere. And we were 10 miles from the town of Barriere, out in the country at—the school was called The Forks and so I took that little school. And it had a total of seven students. From Grade 2 to 7 and they all had to go, all the time. They were there sick or well. Fortunately, they stayed well. Otherwise they would close the school. Because it had to have a minimum every month of six and so the little children walked up to 4 miles or 5 miles to school. I walked 1 1/10 mile from my boarding place. So that was a change for me because I was a town girl.

HR: At Lytton, did you also board?

BL: I boarded, yes. It was also the post office and a boarding place. In fact, it was just a rooming house.

HR: Okay.

BL: And as well as teaching, I had to eat all my meals in the café. Because I was just in a rooming house. I just had room, no board.

HR: Oh wow.

BL: And so that meant that I had to hurry to the café. And I got to know them so well that I used to get up and do a little waitressing when, when the lady had a huge crowd of truckers come in or something. So I was a teacher and a waitress and whatever. Whatever happened, I did it.

HR: That must have been expensive. Was it expensive to eat at the café?

BL: Well, in those days, see my first—I got \$1150, that was my annual income. My kids teaching get that in a week or less. So I say don't complain to me about money. I had to get along on \$1150 for a whole year. [laughter] But then, you know, everything was cheap at the time because it was—we were just coming out of the Depression. It was just toward the end of the war and so everything was cheap. Including payment for teachers.

HR: Wow.

BL: There wasn't a whole lot of money for the school principal.

AF: So you said this was a challenging year, when you were in Lytton. Can you tell us a bit about some of the challenges, when you were there?

BL: Well, preparing for five grades each day, all subjects, I would find myself working at 11 o'clock and 12 o'clock at night. And nearby there lived a lady who had been teaching previously. She would come over to the school and say, "Miss Elliot, you really have to go home and have some rest." And so it was tough, it was really, really difficult. And the days weren't long enough. And I had four senior boys who were only 2 years younger than I was. They were 17 and I was 19. And they weren't about to do everything that a young girl was telling them. But in those days we could use the strap, it was legal. So I strapped them. You know, I had been living with a school principal all my life so that was not an unusual deal. Later on I wondered why they had taken the strap from a young girl but they didn't complain. The only thing was that I didn't know how to strap them and I hit them on their wrists and their wrists swelled so when they went home, even if they didn't tell their parents, their parents saw that what had happened. And so I

got lectures from the parents. So that was another difficulty. And so the kids didn't complain. We got along very fine. They would come and get me on the weekend and we would go sleigh riding or skating or, you know, we would have a good time together on the weekends. But in the classroom it was a little different.

AF: Mm-hmm. Was there one other teacher at that...

BL: Yes, she also went to normal school, Olive Smith. And her home happened to be in Lytton, her parents lived there so when I had been there close to a month Olive said, "My mother would like you to come have dinner with us." So I welcomed that after eating in the café a whole month and I was—I knew that Olive had lived in Vancouver most of her life and so when I went to visit her parents I was totally surprised that her mother was a full blooded Indian lady. She was a lovely lady and I grew to, to like her very, very well. And she did sewing for me and things like that but I was really quite startled when she introduced me to this Indian lady as her mother. And her father was English and I presume he came from England and met this lovely Indian girl and married her. And he had enough money to buy a ranch and so on the weekend we would often go out to the ranch and ride horseback. And that was not new to me because I had stayed with my grandparents a lot when I was growing up and they lived on a farm in the Peace River. And I attended school for a year at the time and I rode horseback 4 miles to school, so riding horse was easy for me. It was a pleasure. And so, you know, I had good times in Lytton and I had very difficult times. Fortunately, the policeman lived next door to the school and he was dealing with these boys. One of them was an Indian boy and I had, you know, I had Italians and, and Russians and whoever. And so he was dealing with them out on the street and he knew that I was going to be having trouble with them. So he met me at one point and he said, "Miss Elliott would you mind if I came in a spoke to your class?" And so I said, "That that was fine and I would be pleased with that." So he came in and, and they all knew him. And he said, "You know, there's a garden out here along the, the windows," and he said, "Miss Elliott is going to leave the windows open and I'm going to do a lot of gardening so you understand what I mean. I don't want any interruption in her teaching. I want to hear a respectful—" he said, "when I went to school I got the cane. Miss Elliott has a strap if she needs it, but if you just behave yourselves, knowing that I'm out there listening quite a bit of the time, then we won't have any problem." So you see I had support from the community.

HR: Oh, lovely. That must have felt good to be supported, to know that somebody was behind you.

BL: Yes, yeah all the adults were very good. And I worked hard—it was expected that the principal would put on a Christmas concert and so, you know, here am I was doing plays and musicals. Fortunately I had quite a bit of music, I played the piano. And so along with my regular teaching I was doing concerts and, and programs for Halloween and things like that. So we had good times and I really didn't have any—my discipline was quite good. I was a tough teacher, they didn't appreciate that. But, what, you know—I was the boss and they were going to do

what I said and that's—there was no difference in that. And so they didn't always, the boys, didn't always appreciate that. They didn't want to read so many paragraphs out of the reader and so on. But I said, "Do it!" And that's all there was to that.

HR: Do you remember any aspects of the war impacting life in Lytton? Either at the school or outside of the school?

BL: Well more so in Vancouver because in 1942-43, of course, the war was still going on. And so it was a blackout city because it was a port city. And the Japanese warships were coming in very close to the city. And so at night all—we had dark curtains that covered the windows and there was supposed to be no light coming out from your building at all. And there were no street lights so Vancouver was a very dark city. And I had relatives living out towards Burnaby and I used to walk because I didn't have a vehicle, so I walked every place in the city. Even today, although the city has changed dramatically over 70 years, I still have an idea of exactly where I'm going having walked everywhere. So it was a dark city and you were—you had to make sure that, that there was no light getting out from your windows at all. So people got along with much less light then we have now.

HR: And that wasn't the case in Lytton? In Lytton you don't recall any...

BL: There were—the Japanese did send, they sent parachutes over and there were made of silk, as a matter of fact, my grandfather found one. The parachutes were equipped with little bombs that should have gone off and set trees afire because they were, they were close enough, you see, to the shore that they could just send them out into the forest. But being the rain forest they just fizzled out and so they didn't set fires. But these parachutes were, they were made of pure Japanese silk and when my grandfather found one he brought it home to my grandmother and she mend—she sewed beautiful clothing, under clothes, out of this lovely silk. Because, you know, we were short of money for things like that and so it was a good find.

HR: Wow. Where were your grandparents?

BL: They lived in the Kamloops area at Heffley Creek. That was where I had come from Saskatchewan to visit them in Kamloops.

HR: Oh, I see. Can, can you take us through a day in class in Lytton? What would your average day look like?

BL: Well, I got up quite early at 7 o'clock. I was permitted to prepare my breakfast and make a lunch down in the lady's kitchen. And she had been a teacher and so she also knew my difficulties. So anyway, I would go down to the kitchen between 7:00 and 8:00 and prepare my breakfast and a little lunch to take to school and then I was off to school about 8 o'clock. And the principal has all sorts of interesting little jobs to do. You have to supervise the washrooms and so

there was the boys room and the girl's washroom and it was a bit of surprise. The boys were used to having the male principal there but it was my duty to go down there, you see. So I was tripping around in the washrooms and—to see that everything was going fine and there were—nobody was picking on somebody else. And so I did that in both—all of them now, the other teachers, we would take turns doing that. We also exchanged classes. She took an art class because, as I say, I am not an artist. I draw stick figures very well but outside of that my art is not very great. And so she took art and she didn't have music so I took the music in Grade 1 to 4 in her class. So, I think it was Friday afternoon that we would exchange classes for those things. So that made a nice change. I really loved dealing with the little children. In due course of time I specialized in Grade 3. So you, you know, you had to make a decision where you were going to be. Either in primary school, elem—you know, or middle school or high school. And so at the beginning of the career I specialized in Grade 3 but over time I taught everything from preschool through adult.

HR: Wow.

BL: Last year I was teaching an adult class in the seniors. So I didn't give up until quite late in life.

HR: My goodness. That's wonderful.

BL: Well I always enjoyed teaching and I wasn't short of words and, you know, the teacher you're always up in front so it didn't matter, it didn't bother me to stand in front of a group. And with the senior group it was a nice subject. I, I contacted a university in the States and it was a class on how to make a speech or, or to pick a topic and speak in front of a group and so that's what I did. I put up a little note in the Seniors. My husband had been the president of the Seniors in Brentwood for 5 years so I knew everybody there. And so I had a small group of—I think there was just one man and the rest were ladies. And they knew me and I knew them so it was an easy way to teach. And so what I did was I said, "I do a lot of writing and I think you should do some writing." And everybody said, "Oh no, I couldn't possibly write a story." So I said, "Okay, well let's just start with a little conversation." And so I said, "I want you to think back to when you were very young and tell me some of your experiences when you were young." So we did that in the first one and when the lesson—I think we took two hours. I said at the end, "Now I would like you to go home now and write that story out that you just told me." And they did that and just for fun I think they read it to their children or grandchildren and they found it very interesting to have their grandparents read about something that happened to them when they were young and some of them have gone on to write their story. I've written my story many, many a times. And stories from my children and my children get sick and tired of the stories. They've listened to me all their lives. "I've heard that one mother."

HR: You're a natural story teller.

BL: So that was that part of it.

HR: Did, did you have enough resources and materials at your schools that you taught at?

BL: Not in British Columbia. We—my husband and I lived, after we, after we married, met and married, in Rossland and I had been teaching there for 2 years. I taught for 1 year after I married. And that's a little note too that you weren't permitted to teach after you married so they would just hire us year by year. And I wanted to work for the year after I was married so we had to keep our marriage a secret. And only the minister knew and our parents. So I said to Cyril, "Well, lets wait for a week after school starts and that will kind of put them in a spot and they won't be able to fire me because they won't have anybody to take my place." And so that's what we did. The end of the first week of teaching I got married and so from then on I was not very popular with the school trustees, the school board. And the other thing I did was just after school stopped the next year in—I had my daughter 5 weeks after school stopped. And so I did two things that the board didn't want. Number one: I got married and number two: I was pregnant. So I was—I sort of opened the door for the rest of the girls because they proceeded to do that too. But, I was kind of an innovator. I wasn't afraid to try something when it was to my advantage.

HR: Did you have to hide your pregnancy with loose clothing?

BL: Well guess I didn't. You know, I was quite tall and my parents—being the only one, of course they spoiled me a little bit. But when they came to visit dad would always stop in Vancouver and send me beautiful clothes. And so I had beautiful clothes which made it not noticeable with my pregnancy and the doctor was—he laughed with the nurse. I said, "Oh, I'm not able to wear my regular clothes." And he said, "She's a terrible size, isn't she." [laughter] And I really wasn't. Beth was only 4lbs 14.

HR: Oh goodness.

BL: You're going to hear some noise out here they're working on my patio.

HR: Oh okay.

BL: They would chose this day to do it. Anyway, they just climb over the fence so I don't have worry about them.

HR: When—at the school you were at in Lytton, what was the name of it?

BL: Lady Byng. B-Y-N-G.

HR: Oh okay.

BL: Her husband was the Governor General.

HR: Right. Byng, I remember.

BL: So they named the school Lady Byng after his wife.

HR: I remember from the King-Byng Crisis. [laughter]

BL: It was interesting. Our principal there—and I did teach Grade, Grade 4 and I had, I had taught there for 3 years. So I had Grade 3 one year and Grade 4 a couple of years and the principal was deaf. So any of us would go to the principal's room during classes would hear this little murmur. The kids got so that they could talk with moving their lips so he couldn't hear them. And so there was this constant noise going on. So we would always go in and read a lecture to the class so that Mr. Ore had—he had his own way of teaching. He had been there about 20 years and so when the kids went home they would say, "Oh well it's October the 27th, now we'll tell you exactly what he's teaching today." Because each year was exactly the same as the, as the one before. So that wasn't the way the rest of us taught but Mr. Ore did.

AF: Was that the school in Rossland?

BL: No, that was in, in Ashcroft.

AF: Oh Ashcroft, okay.

HR: And what about The Forks at Barriere? What do you remember about that? You taught there during the war as well.

BL: Well it was a—first of all I lived in a little home that belonged to a Scottish lady. She was so broad Scotch that it took me quite a while to understand what she was talking about. And she had two, two sons. Two grown men that were living at home. One ran the farm and the other was a trapper. He spent his, his summers trapping in, in the, I guess it was the Chilcotin areas. But anyway, she was anxious that, that one of them would marry one of the teachers so she was quite helpful with us. But I wasn't interested in that project. So I only taught there a year because I could see how things were. My boyfriend was—he owned a logging camp, but his mother was also Indian. So, you know, I kept running into these families where, where they were Indian people and I wasn't a racist at all, I do have Indian in my background several generations, but I didn't want to marry into that particular family. So I could see how—because this young man, his father was on the school board at Barriere and he offered me a job and a raise in salary if I would go there because he dearly wanted me to marry their son. And their son dearly wanted to marry me but I didn't have the same idea. So I moved away from there.

HR: So the children at school were Grades 2 to 7?

BL: Yes.

HR: Do you, do you remember anything about the war impacting your lessons or did you salute the flag or...

BL: Well in—the background was they were, they were Jehovah's Witnesses in that district. And so the children used to bring me all sorts of material from the Jehovah Witness outfit and I was never critical of the children because that, you know, they were just doing what they were told. So I would just say thank you and put it aside. And there was a wood burning stove there so after they left I just tossed all of that material in the stove and burnt it. And the young men in those homes that didn't want to join the army, because there was conscription, had to uhhh spend time in jail. So some of their older brothers were in jail. So—and it was just because the Jehovah's Witness didn't want their young men in the army. And so they preferred jail to going into the army. So we were effected in that way. And...

HR: Why why...

BL: There was rationing. Everybody had food rationing books. I had mine which I turned over to the lady that I boarded with in the country and she could get sugar and meat and bacon and things like that that were rationed. And so you were only allowed very little sugar and very little bacon and some other products that were—that came from abroad. So there was—we were effected by rationing. You didn't have very many cakes with icing on and you didn't have bacon with your breakfast, unless you lived in the country where they had animals that they could use.

HR: Why did the children bring you materials? Like, I'm not sure, I missed that.

BL: Well they just wanted me to become a Jehovah's Witness.

HR: Oh, I see! Okay.

BL: Their parents did.

HR: I see.

BL: Yeah, the little children. They were darling little children. They used to come on the weekend and they would bring a horse and they would—they taught me skijoring. Which is Norwegian for being pulled by a horse.

HR: Uh-huh. Oh yeah.

BL: And so one of them would, would lead the horse and then I had reigns that, that one held while riding the horse and we would—I would skijor behind the horse, down the road. So the

children were lovely and they were very fond of their teacher. They, they really loved me quite dearly and I responded because they were very sweet. They couldn't help being Jehovah's Witnesses. And so we had nice times skiing or they would bring skates and we would skate on the river. And so, you know, we spent not only the week in school and it was very casual, you know, because I had all these grades. So sometimes we took whole art classes all together or whole music classes all together instead of having seven different ones. So there was all of that going on.

HR: Do you want to share anything with us? Do you have any photographs or any things from when you were teaching that you would like to show us?

BL: Well, this is, this an enlargement of that.

HR: Okay.

BL: And, thanks dear.

J: There we go.

BL: This is Lytton, this is the boarding place. It was the post office and the bank. The lady that ran the post office—you could put your money in, in safe keeping in the bank for—in the post office for a bank. Not that I had much to spare but she insisted that I do that. And well these were when I was older and when I was married. That would just be 4 years ago. And this was when I was teaching. We, my husband and I, spent 8 years in Yellowknife and I taught for 5 years there.

HR: Oh, my goodness.

BL: And so these are some pictures. This is when I was teaching in—well it's taken in Heffley Creek so I was teaching in Lytton at that time. That's my father. He was in the army.

HR: Oh yeah.

BL: And there are a few other pictures with me there.

AF: That's a great photo with your father.

BL: And this was the man I married, Cyril Lambert. And he was—he spent his, well, his 18th birthday in Bristol, England. His birthday card was a call up. So when he got his mail on his, his birthday for number 18 it was a call up to the army. So he was in the Derbyshire Yeomanry. That was the name of his group in the army and they were at Dieppe, the fields, when they entered France in Dieppe. And he was there on the seventh day because that went on and on, you know, it wasn't just one single day. So the seventh day of Dieppe he was, he was there and then he went

into Caen. C-A-E-N, In France. And from France they went to Belgium. So he was, he was in Brussels, in Belgium and he had met an older person who was an older man who was a career soldier. Cyril just went in at 18 but, you know, you have the same thing here. There are people that, that are in army groups, cadets and so on when there is no war on.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: And so this career soldier had, had been one of the first because when war was declared they, they called those trained soldiers up first. And so he had been in the desert where they were fighting against Rommel and he had come through the desert. And then when, when Cyril was 18 it was 1942 and so this older man, he was 10 years older than Cyril, I think, he sort of took him under his wing because Cyril went from a careful loving home where he was the young one with his parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles, you know. So he grew up like I did. You were supposed to be grown up when you were born. And, and so, so for that reason he had a careful upbringing. You know, music in the home and, and so on and he was popped into the army where they shaved their hair mostly off and, and they were in a tough miserable life. Thanks dear.

J: There's your, there's your school.

BL: Yeah that's lovely.

J: When you were the principal. That's all about where you were teaching and stuff like that, yeah.

HR: Oh goodness.

BL: So this was my little class in Lytton. The whole class. Grade 5, 6, 7, and 8. And that was me in my younger years. I thought I knew all the answers then. By the time I finished in Lytton I, I realized I knew nothing.

HR: So it says here that Lytton Residential School was nearby. So did you have Indian students in your class?

BL: Oh yes.

HR: So some went to the residential school and some when to the public school?

BL: Yes. Where I was staying in the boarding house, you have the picture of the boarding house, one of the other girls that had a room taught in the residential school.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: But she was just a normal person like myself. There would, you know, there would have been no problem and I never heard that she had any problem at all in the school there. Although later on—see I have a different view of assaults and so on in, in the residential schools. I know a lot of residential schools and a lot of students that came through that who had loving teachers who worked with them. It was simply a government law that they had to go to school and so they were taken away from the tents and the residences and the reserves and put into schools. And a lot of those schools were very well run and there was no, no assaults or any—no cruelty to the children. So I have a different view—when, when you hear residential school now, there has been so much advertising from the people that felt that, that they were assaulted and badly treated that it has sort of over taken the fact that both the Anglicans and the Catholics, because those were the two main churches that did the teaching, they both ran very good schools in very many places. For instance, I had friends in the Senior Citizens and they had taught north of Churchill on Hudson Bay and they had raised five children there of their own and they had taught for all of those years. And so their children went to the same school as all of these little Indian children did from the reserve. And so they retired eventually and came to Victoria and that was where I met them, in Brentwood at the Senior Citizens. And their children, their own children had decided when they retired that it would be nice for them to go back after, it was about between 10 and 20 years, 15 years, that it would be nice for them to go back to this little district and the school that they had all been raised in. And to visit the people and the two teachers, the man and his wife, thought well nobody would remember them that at time. But their, their own children thought that it would be nice for them to see that. So they paid their way and they went up there and the Indian people had prepared beautiful meals and beautiful celebrations for them and were wonderfully glad to see them. And one old Indian chap took his wallet out of his pocket and he took out a picture from a newspaper which was very worn because it was a picture of these two people when they retired and he carried it with him all these years. So you see, they were very well loved in their community all of that time. None of this cruelty business. So that just happens to be my take on on residential schools.

HR: There was quite a bit of variety, I think.

BL: Yes.

HR: And from what I know of the Lytton Residential School the reports of former students were quite...

BL: Well the other side of that coin was the fact that lawyers got hold of that and they would say to the Indians, “Now you must remember that you were punished and that you had a bad time when you were little.” Well your children and mine would have the same feeling if they were taken away from home, even though they were well treated they would, they would be crying for their parents. But the government said, “You will go to this school.” And so there wasn’t any option there. So the lawyers got a hold of these people after they had grown up for, you know,

many years, 20 years, and got them to tell stories which got enlarged about how, how they were abused. Now I'm not saying that a lot of them weren't. A lot of them were abused.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: I had a lot of Indian friends, as I said, I taught 5 years in Yellowknife and there were a lot of children from the Indian reserves there. And one lady, who made me beautiful clothes, she had, had grown up in Yellowknife before it was a city, or even a town. It was just part of an Indian community with tents. And so she was taken when she was 5 and put into the residential school down south and she did not have a happy time and she was there for 8 years. A lot of the children didn't go back home again for 8 years. So, so she had spoken only Indian when she entered the school and she was punished by the nuns for speaking Indian instead of English.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: So she had then to learn English and speak English for 8 years, in which time she had forgotten the Indian. So then in Grade 8 she was—that was the end of her schooling. Then she went back to her Indian community and now she couldn't remember Indian and so she was punished because she couldn't speak her own language. So she got it at both ends, you know. So it was a hard time for those people. I was much more in sympathy with what the government had done to them, then what the churches had done. You know, for the government to say, "We are going to make you Canadians. You are going to learn our customs. You are going to go to our churches. You are going to forget your language and you are going to speak English or French or both of them." And so you know, the government of the time did a bad thing. And it wasn't the fault of the Indians and it wasn't necessarily the fault of the two churches. The Anglican—if, if the Anglicans arrived in the community then the Catholics went to another area. So they didn't overlap. One town would be a Catholic school and the other would be, next town would be an Anglican school. And they didn't overlap for one or the other and they just did the best job they could. And even today there are a lot of very stern nuns. You know, there are lots of young people that, that go to Catholic schools or Anglican schools and some of those people haven't had children of their own and they're cranky people. [laughter] I had a good experience with them in Yellowknife because I was hired to teach in the Catholic school. That was my first school. A lady was having an operation—knew she would be out for 2 months and so they hired me to do a Grade 5 class in the Catholic school for these 2 months and they gave me such a good report that when I presented it to the Yellowknife school I was hired. Also because I knocked at the door every single day until they got tired of me. You couldn't live in Yellowknife and not work. They winters were too long. Nine months of sitting at home looking at the same walls was unkind so most of the women worked.

HR: I understand that, yeah.

BL: So I taught for 5 years, so that was fun.

HR: Do you have anything else you would like to share with us or Ashley do you have anything?

BL: Well I could go on for several days but you wouldn't want me to do that. [laughter]

HR: About teaching during the war. Is there anything you can remember?

BL: Well I think we have been in, in—I started out in Lytton and then I went to the little country school in The Forks at Barriere. And then I went to Ashcroft. As I said, all of the teaching that I did was because I knew somebody. So one of my friend teachers was from Ashcroft and she happened to be in love with my uncle so she stayed pretty close to me. And so she said, “Well why don't you come and teach where I do in Ashcroft?” And she had another reason for doing that because her brother was in the RCAF, so he was coming out of the war and she had a notion that he would be checking out the new teacher there, which he did and we were engaged for two years. But anyway, so I taught in Ashcroft then for 3 years and I followed him because he was, as well as being in the Air Force, RCAF, he was a druggist, a pharmacist. But his dad was the pharmacist in Lytton—Ashcroft, pardon me. His dad was the pharmacist there and it was too small for two, to support two. And so Frank took a position in Abbotsford. Eventually he owned three pharmacies in Abbotsford. And so I followed him and I went to Matsqui. So I taught in Matsqui and I arrived after the big flood of '48.

HR: Mm-hmm.

BL: The house that I was staying in, that I was boarding in, was a very high one and they had bolted into the second flood because it had turned into a sea. All of the Matsqui, MSA, Matsqui, Sumas, and Abbotsford, there was just a big sea there at that time. All of the farms were covered. So I arrived after—the flood was in, I think, May the 23rd was when the children were all rushed out of the school and then I arrived in September. And I was helping the principal at that time take the books out and trying to get the children sorted out, where they were supposed to be in the classes. Because they were shot out with the flood coming in. And so I taught in Matsqui for a year and—are you all finished, dear?

J: No, I'm waiting for the dryer.

BL: Yeah, okay.

J: I've still got about 20 minutes.

BL: So in Matsqui, the third year, then I decided that he was not the man for me and I broke off my engagement and that was when I went to Rossland. Ended up living 25 years in Rossland. But I taught there 3 years.

AF: And then after that was when you went to Yellowknife?

BL: After that, my husband was transferred to Yellowknife. It was a long story about that, but anyway. So he went and of course all of the family went with him. My older son was at an American coll— university. WSU, Washington State University. It was a nice situation up there. The reason that I went, was that I was willing to go, was that the Northwest Territories paid for all of the university of the students whose parents lived. So Lorne got tuition paid for 2 years, at university at WSU. When Frank, my younger son, who had gone to school for 5 years in Yellowknife, when it came to be his turn his dad sent him north to the most northerly mine in the world at Polaris. My husband Cyril was in mining and he was—his job was manager of personnel and administration for three mines. The one at Yellowknife, and the one at Pine Point, and the one at Polaris, the most northerly mine in the world. So Cyril had been taken at age 18 and jaunted across to Europe, in the war. And Frank was taken at age 18 and jaunted up to the north pole, and he worked up there for 5 years and then they closed the mine, so he, he saved a lot of money. There was no place to spend it. And there weren't a lot of Eskimo girls that were attractive to Cyril or to Frank. So, but that was quite an experience. He was there until he was 24.

HR: A number of teachers that we have spoken to during the war said that the students helped to collect paper or scrap metal or...

BL: Yes. I always had a, I always had a Red Cross class. And then we would all roll little bandages or we would collect what was necessary, whether it was newspapers or, you know, the different things that the Red Cross could make money at and the children could help with. So I always had that particular little club that was going with the Red Cross.

HR: Was that at Lytton or Barriere?

BL: Well that was during the war years from '42 to '47, yeah.

HR: So in...

BL: Those 3 years.

HR: So in both of those schools?

BL: Yeah. But I worked for the Red Cross the other years, too. Before and after the war. Because their work goes on.

HR: Were you expected by the trustees to do these kinds of things or was that your own initiative?

BL: That was your own volunteer business. I did a lot of volunteering. I collected for the Red Cross. A couple of us teachers went from door to door collecting money for them and in our classes we had the clubs and the children helped.

HR: Did you ever do any drills? Like duck and cover or marching or anything like that for the children?

BL: Well, while I was at, while I was in Vancouver at normal school we did drill work, like cadets. So we were in a club for cadets and it was kind of coincidental that my father was in the army. At that time he was a captain and we was in Ontario, Kingston or one of those places. So he was watching a show one night and, and they had some programs of the volunteers and here I was marching across the street. [laughter] So he said, "It was interesting seeing you on your marching. You did quite well."

HR: But you never instilled that in the children in your schools, you didn't have them marching or saluting the flag or...

BL: No, no the only thing we did with that was fire drill.

HR: Fire drill, yeah. Okay well, that's, from our end, all we...

BL: Well, in regard to that army, I wanted to join the army so prior to, to going to normal school I went to the recruiting office. And so they asked what I intended to do and I said, "Well I was starting out to be a teacher," and they said, "You'll be far more useful as a teacher than in the army as a steno or whatever you would be doing." And so I tried to join the army but that didn't work so second choice was teaching.

HR: Well I guess with such a shortage of teachers they were concerned.

BL: Yeah.

HR: Yeah.

BL: But otherwise we didn't have a lot to do in, in training young people at all. We just did it ourselves.

HR: Okay. Well that, from our end, is, is about it. That wraps it up but if you have anything else that you come across or anything else that you want us to know before we finalize your interview, let us know.

BL: These, these were my parents at the time in Vancouver when dad was in his 70s, he was about 70, when they went to Sointula. And they spent 30 years instead of 1.

HR: Can I see that? Wow.

BL: So we was, he was in three wars but he actually was given credit for those times too. And so he taught for 50 years. So, you know, my experience was, I had a lot of, sort of, outside experience with with war time. With uncles that were in the war and in prison. My father in law, Cyril's dad, was a prisoner of war by the Germans in 1914 until the end of the war in the Saar Valley in Germany in the salt mines. Which was a terrible experience. Dreadful. So...

HR: Well it's really nice to see that you have kept so many binders of tracking your life and your thoughts.

BL: Well I, as Joanne knows, I..

J: She's got many many hundreds of binders.

BL: ...when I'm not doing anything else, I'm writing.

HR: Yeah, that's wonderful.

BL: And I have quite a bit published. My work is published in some of the magazines. It will come—Reader's Digest has two other magazines that they put out. One is called Our Canada and the other is More of Our Canada. And I have written different experiences and had them published in those magazines. And I've written a story about my great uncle who was Northwest Mounted Police and was one of the first that Sir John A MacDonald formed when he formed the police force in Canada. So I've written Uncle Johnny's story and donated a lot of his clothing that—because he died when he was very young in the force. And so I—my aunt and I donated to the museum. So, you know, I have a history going in different directions.

HR: Well we really appreciate the time that you've taken with us.

BL: Well you have been very patient listening.

HR: Well it's fascinating.

BL: My children aren't that patient. [laughter]

HR: I'll leave—yeah—I'll hang on to these, do you mind if I also take a photograph of you now?

BL: Well, if you must. [laughter]

HR: You look good! I'll leave these with you and I'll take a photograph. I'll take these of you with your classes and your father at Heffley Creek and we'll make copies of these.

BL: And my mother was teaching at that time. She was teaching at Vinsulla, which is another little town just out of Kamloops.

HR: Oh, Vinsulla!

BL: So she taught all during war time.

HR: We, we have someone in the study who taught at Vinsulla. Do you remember who it is? I can't remember now off the top of my head because we have quite a number of, but...

BL: She had 45 students from Grade 1 to 10.

HR: Oh my goodness! To 10!

BL: And she was, she was artistic, I wasn't. You'd go into her classroom and it was just beautiful with artwork. And because she was such a beautiful writer, I wrote a whole book about her. But because she was such a beautiful writer, the, the children in her classes wrote beautifully. She taught them to write beautifully. Mine were a bit more scribbly.

AF: Did you...

HR: Oh, go ahead, Ashley.

AF: Did your mother return to teaching during the war or had she...

BL: Mother had not taught for 20 years and I was in the same position because once I had my daughter, after, after my experience in in Rossland, it was 20 years before I taught. Now, I was associated with the schools because I was, I was a substitute teacher. After my youngest one was 5, I began substituting again. And at the end the school board that was a little annoyed with me, they hired me every day and I was working mostly in the high school for the, for the home ec. teacher. And there were three home ec. teachers and I remember one day I had prepared all the class and I had all the desks and everything ready for the students to come in and get busy. And these two teachers came in and said, "Mrs. Lambert where did you take your, your course in home economics? You're so organized!" And I said, "In my kitchen!" [laughter] You have to be organized with a family of 5 in your kitchen.

AF: Mm-hmm.

HR: So your mother was teachings at Heffley, you said, and she taught during the war as well.

BL: Yes. She started in Vinsulla, after we came from Saskatchewan. They were so short of teachers and when they heard that my mother had arrived and had been a teacher they came asking her to take the school because they were without a teacher. And then she went—actually

it's Nancy Green's Tod Mountain at the present time. She rode horseback to the school. It was called the Heffley Lake School. So she, she rode horseback for the years and she was in her 50s then.

HR: Oh goodness.

BL: So...

HR: Wow.

BL: We didn't give up teaching easily in my family.

HR: Let me grab my...

BL: She she was quite an outstanding—superintendents used to bring the new teachers in to watch her and her classes of 45, you know?

HR: Wow. And she taught elementary...

BL: Times were a little different then.

HR: ...elementary, as well.

BL: Yes.

HR: My bag is here. Where am I going? I wanted to get my camera and...

AF: Ok, I will stop this...