

## Nancy Constable Interview #1 – February 13, 2008

HR – Helen Raptis (interviewer)

NC – Nancy Constable (interviewee)

HR: Interview, Nancy Constable. Okay well, if we can begin, Nancy. I'll, I'll ask—maybe if you can sketch out briefly when you began and ended your career and which schools and where. It'll give me a bit of a time line to work with.

NC: Alright. I started teaching in 1943 at the Elk Prairie School which is in a little corner in, in British Columbia not too far from the Alberta border. And 1943—1944 I moved to the Michel Natal or Natal Michel Central School and I was there from 1944—or was it 1945, 1945-1946. Now 1945, the spring of 1945, the war ended so I don't know whether you'd want any more information on the 1945-'46 era.

HR: Okay. Yeah, well that just gives me a sense of where you taught and when. And did you go back to—after, after this era did you take any time out or did you continue to teach?

NC: No, I, I continued to teach. They were—well during the war years you'd probably know that they were very short of teachers because of the, the exodus of the male teachers.

HR: Yes.

NC: And they allowed some of us in that hadn't, hadn't completed their senior matric. In those days we had the Grade 13. And I entered the Provincial Normal School by finishing my Grade 12, my junior matriculation, and in the summer doing my senior matric, mathematics, in 4 weeks. And that gained me entrance into the halls of learning.

HR: Which, which one were you at—in Vancouver or...

NC: No, no Victoria.

HR: The provincial one.

NC: Yeah provincial. And I should tell you that in—when our class went to the provincial one in Victoria we held classes in the choir boys rooms of the Christ Church Cathedral.

HR: The Memorial, the Memorial Hall.

NC: Pardon me?

HR: You were in the Memorial Hall?

NC: Memorial Hall behind the Christ Church Cathedral.

HR: Mm.

NC: And the class ahead of us, that's the '40s. Well '40—I was '42-'43 in normal school and the class of '41-'42 had their classes at the SirOCCO Night Club at that time.

HR: Oh!

NC: Because the building up on the, up on the hill that was the Provincial Normal School had been converted into a—I think it was a hospital.

HR: A hospital—that's the story I heard, that it was a hospital.

NC: That's right.

HR: Interestingly, I, as a child, attended local dances at the SirOCCO Club.

NC: Oh, did you?

HR: So I even know where the SirOCCO was.

NC: Well, I'll be. Yeah.

HR: Goodness, I had no idea. I bet that no—I read that the, the normal school was held in the Memorial Hall, but I didn't realize that the year before that it had been held in the SirOCCO club.

NC: Well the year before—we were the first class in the Memorial Hall and that was with Dr. Denton and Dr. Anderson and Mr. English and—did you ever get a hold of the AnEcho that I suggested that might be interesting?

HR: No, I haven't yet I...

NC: I'll tell you what. I'll phone one of the girls that I went to normal school with, she lives in Metchosin and I'll get her to contact you. She might be able to get you a copy.

HR: I haven't had a chance to check and see if UVic has it.

NC: Yeah.

HR: You said it was in West Black Archives?

NC: It was, it was in wherever they keep their archives.

HR: Okay.

NC: And I'm not sure what—I just left one there with, you know, I can't remember the lady. I didn't really know her anyway.

HR: Okay.

NC: But I'll phone Phyllis and see if she can get one for you.

HR: Okay, alright. So maybe we should go back a little bit here to before the normal school experience and maybe you can just tell me a little bit about where you grew up and went to school yourself.

NC: Uh-huh, sure. Grew up in two places, places in Corbin which—there's quite a very interesting history there, Corbin, in British Columbia near the—in the Flathead Country. That's going south towards Montana. And then that had a very tragic history with the strike and so on. And then we moved to Natal-Michel. If you lived in Natal it was Natal-Michel, if you lived in Michel, it was Michel-Natal, so there you go.

HR: Oh, and where is Michel-Natal and Natal-Michel?

NC: It's about, oh let me see, it's about 9 miles into British Columbia from the Crow's Nest Pass border.

HR: Okay.

NC: And we used to bike, anytime we went on a school picnic or an end of the year trip, we would all borrow our dad's bike, because nobody could afford one then. I should tell you too, at that time nobody had very much and really it didn't seem to bother us very much. We had a wonderful childhood because our—I guess, I left all the worrying about everything to our parents. But it was an extremely good atmosphere for a kid to grow up in because there wasn't any bullying or any, any jealousies about clothes or anything; nobody had anything and it didn't seem to bother us. And I honestly feel that—and here I am letting my age show—that no TV and no computers were great because we went out and did our own games. And I did my high schooling at Natal-Michel and which is now Sparwood. Sparwood is about 3 miles towards Fernie on the road to Cranbrook. How familiar are you with the interior here?

HR: I have never travelled that far but we are planning a trip actually this summer. I'm going to be coming with my husband and my children as far as that area because that whole area there I don't, I don't know at all. I have explored other parts of British Columbia, but not that area.

NC: Well, I think, I think you'll really find—oh do come at time some of our fruit—Creston is in a fruit growing belt and it is just beautiful unless it gets to be so terribly hot like it was last summer.

HR: Oh.

NC: But then, then I went down to—oh and I should tell you at the time and in Natal where I grew up it was a, very definitely, a rural situation where it might be quite different from those boys and girls, the children that grew up in the city. A lot of the places, well in fact, most of the places did not have or had outdoor plumbing, so to speak, and no, no telephones.

HR: Oh.

NC: And many of us speak about that. A lot of us had gone to school without knowing how to use a telephone apart from the fact that you talk through the right end of the doggone instrument. [laughter] But that's, that's another thing. There was no such thing as school buses. You walked which was good for us.

HR: How far would you say you walked?

NC: To school?

HR: Yes.

NC: Probably about a mile.

HR: About a mile?

NC: Yeah. There and back and also for lunch, we didn't take our lunch. But that's when I was growing up. Now when I started teaching—are you ready for that one yet?

HR: Sure. Maybe you can just tell me when you were, when you were born? The year you were born?

NC: Oh yeah, 1925.

HR: Okay.

NC: That makes me 83 this year because my birthdays in May, so I am still 82. I, I'm careful not to put an extra year on. [laughter] Though really I have come to the part where you don't care.

HR: You don't care anymore.

NC: I mean the fact that you up and you're above the ground, so to speak, is wonderful.

HR: Do you remember anything about your own schooling? Are there any teachers that inspired you?

NC: Oh yes, yes. Quite a bit. I have a remarkable memory about a lot of that stuff. Yes, in Corbin there was a—I should send you. You know what, I think you would be absolutely interested to read my little—I did a write-up on the history of my schooling in Corbin and it, it would be, it would be very interesting for you to read. Would you like a copy of it?

HR: I would love that. Would you like me to send you a self-addressed envelope to put it in? Is it, is it large?

NC: It's large because I'm not going to fold it. But I can, I can find one here, not to worry.

HR: Okay. So if you would like to send that to me then we will just skip right ahead to, to normal school.

NC: Corbin, B.C. And Michel-Natal. I haven't got one of Michel-Natal, but it won't matter. You may of met John Freenie. Oh I've got to tell you something about normal school. Did you ever meet a Mr. Johns, Wilf Johns?

HR: No.

NC: Well, he was teaching at the North Ward School and he would come up oh twice a week to teach—give us an art lesson.

HR: Ah.

NC: And my maiden name was not easy to remember. It was Lemeshuk, L-E-M-E-S-H-U-K. And he came up—this was in 1942-'43. Well when my husband went to UVic in 1959 he came up to me and he addressed me by my maiden name and I thought, "Well, that was absolutely remarkable, he must have liked my art work."

HR: Ah.

NC: But anyway, I, I was just very impressed about that.

HR: Well there's a gallery in our building. The gallery in that's in the Art Education wing of the building and it's the Wilfred Johns Gallery.

NC: Oh yeah.

HR: And that's where they, they post all of the art work that the previous teachers are doing.

NC: I don't think anything that I did was, was ever up there. But he watched some of my art classes that I'd taught and seemed to be a bit impressed by that. But I'm not that particularly good. I just think it, it struck him the right way.

HR: Oh that's great.

NC: Yeah. You have to keep me reminding me where on earth did I end up so that keep talking.

HR: Well we're at the Victoria Normal School and I'm wondering why you chose to come to Victoria?

NC: Oh, well, it was the Provincial Normal School and I was not a world traveller. As a matter of fact going to Fernie was about the limit of my out of town of experiences and that was only because sometimes we could ride our bikes, so our dad's bikes that far. Nobody had, you know, any means of travelling very much and they—[pause] I just never thought about Vancouver at all. It didn't enter our head. It was U.B.C. And I thought, "Well, I can't afford U.B.C."

HR: Okay. And, and do you, aside for Mr. Johns, do you remember anyone else that you had as...

NC: At normal school? Oh of course, all of them.

HR: Oh, okay.

NC: Mr. Wickett, he always used to come with a flower in his lapel. Miss Hinton who became Mrs. Smith, Barbara Hinton. And Mr. English who wrote the science book "Mastering Our Environment." Dr. Denton, well known; Dr. Anderson, and oh Dr. Anderson when we had our picnics—by the way, we use to go on a, a picnic and I've got pictures of us there and it would be in the fall, it would be after September sometime. And Dr. Denton would go into the water swimming and most of us put our big toe in and it was cold and we stayed out. But he was just wonderful.

HR: Was this, was this down at Cadboro Bay? Where did you have your picnics?

NC: At Oak Bay.

HR: Oh down by Oak Bay.

NC: Willows Beach I think is where we went and believe you me be it wasn't anything like the concrete jungle that it is now.

HR: Mm.

NC: Of course, and who did I mention now? Who did I leave out? Dr. Denton.

HR: Dr. Anderson, Mr. English.

NC: Oh, Mrs. Reese Burns who used to teach us speech and she always would tell us to breathe through our diaphragm. And she'd have us going around the garage and she would say, "Swing those hips, you know, your hands one way your hips another way, well your suppose to be." I am not sure what that meant. And Mr. Johns and of course I have to mention dear old Mr. Libby, he was the janitor there. And he was a wonderful old soul because most of us had never been away from home for any length, you know, and we were staying with people and of course, you know, when you're a kid, I was only 17 at the time, you were hungry. And so—and the, the landlady, made as good a lunch as she could under the hard times of the war; rations and everything else. And his wife would always put in an extra little piece of cake and I remember Mr. Libby would always share that with us.

HR: Oh.

NC: He was, he was great. I never knew what happened to him, but he was—he supplied all the janitorial services there. Now did I leave anybody out?

HR: And do you remember them as being inspirational or ho hum or...

NC: No, no, no, I—well, you have to, I think, remember too that it was my first year away from family and from all of my old friends and everything else. It was a new situation. Everything was new. No I, I enjoyed it very much. Everything. But I—now you see I am just trying to remember who did I leave out? I mentioned so many of them right now that—now music was Mr. Wichett, yeah I mentioned him. I think I've got them all pretty well. I hope I have and if I haven't, if I found out that I have left any out, then I'll let you know the next time who I managed to miss.

HR: Okay.

NC: No I enjoyed it very much. I, I think one thing that I remember about Dr. Anderson and, and—is that she was a Scotswoman with a sense of humour and she used to tell us how reading was just wonderful when you're kids. But she came from a very strict Scottish family and she said the only way she could get books up to her room is to hide them in her bloomers. You know, when they had these bloomers with the elastic down by the knee.

HR: Oh yes.

NC: And we just thought that was, that was pretty good.

HR: [laughter] Oh that's nice to hear that it was so enjoyable for you.

NC: Well, it was. I think the newness of everything—everything was new and everything was, it was an experience. And a very different experience and I think too—most of us who were there. There were one or two there that came from families that were fairly well to do and you'd be able to—well, some of them are still in Victoria. You'd be able to know—recognize who they are. But the majority of us, I think, came there through a bursary from the government. I think all of \$200 which was certainly a tremendous help in those times because I repeat it was just shortly after—well, '30s, in the early '40s, '42. War years there was just nothing.

HR: How did you apply for and get the bursary?

NC: I think, I think our—my teachers at the Michel-Natal School did.

HR: Okay. So there was an application process through the government that...

NC: I think so and I think most of us came, came in by that way. At least I assume that we did. I'm sure that we did.

HR: So your family was not well to do?

NC: Oh no, heavens no. This is what I say that when I first started teaching I couldn't even afford a bicycle, let alone a car.

HR: Were your—did your family farm? Were, were you...

NC: No, no, no. Part of that came in from the Corbin experience. Corbin was a mining town in the Flathead and they caused—there was a strike there and the cause of the strike was everybody said, or the Liberal Government at the time said, Communist inspired. Like heck it was. There was a fire burning underground and the men were expected to go under to work and, of course, you know, in the some—you know what coal mine—coal gas is?

HR: Yes.

NC: And one had to—well they objected to, to many things and the living conditions were not good. So once, once the Corbin closed down then it was difficult to find work anywhere else so finally we did get to Natal, and my dad was a coal miner. And work was—it was hard for them. But as I say, you know, the kids, none of the kids—Michel-Natal was a coal mining community, and us kids really that wasn't our worry it was the worry of our parents. Maybe that's a good thing for kids anyway they enjoy childhood while it still childhood.

HR: Yes, I think so. I think you're right about that. It's good to keep them from those things.



NC: Yes.

HR: So you are at normal school and you're enjoying yourself and it's your first time away. Did you board with anyone?

NC: Yes, yes. I'll tell you the one thing that happened to me. Now I don't think that this happened to everyone but to me in particular. Normal school people sent—oh Miss Pottinger was the secretary and she sent out lists of places that would take students to board. And there I was with my suitcase and we went out to this address and this lady looked at me and said, "Ah, I forget to tell you I sold my house." Now this is to a kid who had never been into a city, never knew anything, never could contact—my parents couldn't help anyway so what does one do? And I was all of 17 at the time. So you take the list and you go from one place—address on there to another.

HR: Oh goodness!

NC: Finally the fourth address was right on Burdett Avenue and this lady already had three of them but she felt sorry for me and she squeezed in another one.

HR: Oh goodness.

NC: Yes, and meanwhile I should tell you too the taxi meter was running.

HR: Oh.

NC: And that made a horrible hole in my—well, not nowadays, I mean, most kids get that for their allowance for one day or what have you. But it was a shock. But anyway, I did, I did get to stay there and made very good friends with the four girls that I was with—the three girls that I was with.

HR: Oh that's lovely, do you still keep in touch?

NC: Oh yes, oh yes. As a matter of fact here I am from way over here in the interior happen to organize a 50 year reunion with the class of '43 and most of the girls went and this is what the AnEcho is, is all about.

HR: Oh I see.

NC: And this is why I think you would be very, very interested in reading it.

HR: Okay.

NC: I did most of the work, I'm afraid I couldn't type out everybody's—I had them do a resume of what they had done in the 50 years. And I was just strapped for help. I guess I did most of it myself and nobody lived around here that could help me although the girls down at the coast did—and Wes Black who was the provincial secretary at that time was, he was—I worked with him here at Crescent and he did—he helped me an awful lot.

HR: Was Wes Black a teacher?

NC: Oh yes!

HR: Ah, I didn't realize that?

NC: He and Helen were good friends after a bit. And, as I say, I'm not, I'm not a political party person but I did vote for my good friend Wes and it wouldn't have mattered what party he ran for.

HR: Yes, I, I've read quite a bit about him in his role as Provincial Secretary.

NC: Uh-huh. Well, I don't know much about his work there but I do know about up here and working with him and he was, he was good.

HR: Okay. So you, you boarded with some other women. Were they from other parts of the province?

NC: Oh yes. Well lets see, one, two—they were from Nelson.

HR: Oh okay. And...

NC: Which was luck. It wasn't by planning, but it was just sheer luck.

HR: That the three of them ended up together.

NC: Yep, mm-hmm.

HR: And from that time do you recall anything in terms of the curriculum at the normal school? What you did? What you learned?

NC: Oh yes, I do. Quite a bit as a matter of fact. This, this Dr. Anderson told us, you know—that was the time where you had to bring in experiences into each one of their subjects and so on. And here she said, "Don't over do it. Here you have found the crocus so the crocus is in reading, the crocus is in this and it's in art and it's everything." She said, "Don't bring it to the damn the crocus stage." She said, "You know, ease up a little bit." And Dr.—we liked Dr. Denton very

much. And he taught us, I guess, social studies if you could call it that. And Mr. English of course was science. But only how it would affect the young kids. Mr. Wickett, dear soul, was just—and he had white hair and in this dark suit and he'd come and teach us music. And we enjoyed those.

HR: So, so from your story about what Mrs. Anderson said about the crocus, can I...

NC: Dr. Anderson.

HR: Sorry, Dr. Anderson. Can I assume that you were taking a thematic approach to your teaching? That there would be a theme that would sort of run through all of the courses?

NC: Well...

HR: Is that what you called it? Today we...

NC: I'm not sure. They just asked us to, to try integrate some of their common experiences into some of the lessons so that they're not quite that, that foreign to them. I, I'm not sure what name we would have given it.

HR: Yeah, today we call it either "thematic" or "integrated".

NC: Oh yes, well I suppose integrated would be partly. Yes, but not too much of it.

HR: And were you able to do that once you began teaching?

NC: Oh you, you sort of depending on where you were, to a point. But I think the greatest thing was to keep it interesting for the students. Now not all of them—for instance my first school I had students that—this was a farming community. And we just did everything that we could with regards to—brought in the school work to how it could apply to their own life and it wasn't that terribly integrated, I suppose. They didn't expect it to be somehow. I only had about 13 kids but all of the Grades up to 7 or 8.

HR: That was at Elk Prairie?

NC: Elk Prairie, yes.

HR: So you had Grades 1 to 8?

NC: Yep. [pause]

HR: And just, just before we get into Elk Prairie I was wondering if you remember any of the other things that you took at the normal school?

NC: At the normal school?

HR: Was there anything that stood out as being particularly helpful for your teaching?

NC: You know I—it was all a terrific experience but I would say that—you know, I should say that my teaching experience came from the examples set for me from my from very early teachers in Corbin. Sara Gertrude Timeis and Miss Wilson. And Miss Wilson was just absolutely wonderful. I was about, what, 5 or 6 at the time and we would go down and visit her on a Saturday, if you please, and that dear soul would be so happy to see us she'd take us out for a walk. Now I know she had all kinds of work to do, but she took the time out and that made a tremendous impression.

HR: Mm.

NC: It really did. And while we are talking about Corbin there was a Miss Louise Reynolds that taught there just before just before Miss Wilson got there. She lived in Victoria and we visited her, but I think she died. This was, oh, when was I 5 or 6 ever? You look back, you know, you think, "My goodness was I ever that young?" But I think Louise Reynolds died.

HR: Okay. So they set the example for you really on how to...

NC: Oh really they did, really they did. And to me they were, they were tremendous teachers, very much so.

HR: So when you went to Elk Prairie did you, you think about those teachers often as you worked with your own students?

NC: No, I tell you they, they sort of—it was in my subconscious but they never came to mind, really. Just how they taught would have. But you more or less got your habit forming teaching skills from them from when you were a kid. But, you know, I should tell you too about the Elk Prairie School. It was only about 8 miles out of Natal, my home and I couldn't—I chose not to board with any family that had students at school. I felt that that would not be a good idea. So sometime—so I chose to stay at home in Natal. Alright, now there came a problem. Does this go in with it at all?

HR: Yes, yep that's fine.

NC: There came a problem with transportation. I borrowed my dad's bike for the first time because not many people had cars then and rode out there, 8 miles out, 8 miles back. And I liked

it, it was fine, it did me a world of good. And when the logging trucks—they were wonderful to me, the loggers. They would say, “We’ll give you a ride out. Just be ready at this time and we’ll take you out and drop you off by your school.” And that would be about 4:30-5 o’clock in the morning. And I’d walk the half mile, well a quarter of a mile down to the school and maybe that was a little too bit early for the—by the way this isn’t, this isn’t what everybody did it just happened in this particular situation.

HR: Yes.

NC: It would be too early for the young boy to go in and start a fire so I’d been known to split a little bit of wood and start one. But at the time when the logging trucks couldn’t go out, when the weather was inclement, I walked out. And I timed it I’d leave at 6:00 and I’d get there at 8:00. It took 2 hours. Which was pretty good, 15 minutes a mile.

HR: Wow.

NC: And then walked back. But I, fortunately, liked walking; I liked the physically exercise and I think it stood me in good stead in my later years.

HR: Wow. That’s quite a story with—for someone who has grown up with a lot of transportation it’s...

NC: Yeah, well the thing is too that a lot of us in Victoria—now this isn’t, this isn’t common with everyone, it was in my case.

HR: Right.

NC: The transportation in Victoria was only 10 cents for one of those Toonerville trolley streetcars and so on. But one couldn’t afford them all the time because one had to spend money on goodness knows what else. Your books, your toothpaste, and you—when you’re given \$5 which in my case was probably usual for about half of the kids that where there, you walked. And boy did you ever learn the streets, where they were and where everything was located. But again I say it was good for us; it really was. Oh and the other thing, too, at that time no matter how you felt you went to work because there were no substitutes. Not every kid in the farming community had a phone and some of them had to walk 2 miles to school. There were no school buses, no transportation because parents didn’t all own a car. And so if they walked to school they’d want to have the door open so you just didn’t miss school.

HR: Hm. That’s, that’s wonderful.

NC: Yes, but it was hard too. That was, that was hard because sometimes, you know, when you felt, oh, not quite up to it you still went. But maybe the bracing walk or what have you kept you going. I don't know.

HR: Well, when you were at normal school in Victoria do you remember the impact of the war? Because by that time it was, it was mid flight, you were midway through the war?

NC: Oh yes.

HR: In what way had the war impacted life in Victoria?

NC: Well, I will tell you—I could tell you this. It was '42-'43 and the fall of '42 the war had already been going on—going into it's third year. The place—Victoria was full of servicemen. And the—what's her name at the school, Miss Hinton at that time, had organized some of the girls from the normal school because we were—there were only two boys in our—there were 27 of us, 25 of us. She would organize whoever wanted to go out to entertain the troops either at Esquimalt or Gordon Head or Work Point, wherever, just for a dance. The bus, the school bus, would take us out and bring us back. And one—during the war years too I never felt the least bit nervous about walking out if one happened to be late at something and then you had to walk home and it was dark. You weren't the least bit nervous because it was a time, the war years, where it was time of trust. I mean it was—It wasn't anything to be concerned about to walk home. I had one, one lady say to me when I mentioned to her that in my first school I walked. She said, "Oh well," I said, "It was good for me," and she said, "Oh well, but you didn't have any muggers or anything to worry about." I said, "Heavens, no. Not in those years," I said, "only cougars." [laughter] And there were, there were some of those, they'd be a little more frightening.

HR: Well that's the thing is when you told me you walked and the loggers gave you a ride I thought, "Oh my gosh. There's no way that I would get into a truck today."

NC: Now you wouldn't but these were all gentlemen. And Michel-Natal was a small, small town. The two towns together were very small and it was like—well, now if one person—when we have a reunion at Sparwood of the old Michel-Natal people it's like one family reunion. Everybody knew everyone and it was just something special about growing up there.

HR: Definitely a different kind of...

NC: Oh, absolutely different. And I often think I am so sorry that my children and grandchildren couldn't grow up in, in, in those circumstances.

HR: Yes. Well do, do you remember feeling hardship? Think back to when you were at the normal school, was, was it a time of hardship, the war, or did you feel that way?

NC: Well, having growing up in, in Corbin, and the strike, enduring the strike and the hard times in Natal one—no, hardship was something that, that was part of life. We didn't know—it didn't, it didn't bother me at all.

HR: So were there black outs, or rations, or anything?

NC: Oh yes, oh yes. I wish I had kept my ration books, sugar rationing and so on. And the one time there that was a black out, and it makes me unhappy to have to relate it but nevertheless, an American plane flew over Canada. And as usual they didn't bother to notify the Canadians that they were flying over our territory and so we had no idea knowing whether it is a German, Japanese, or what. So there was a blackout in Victoria and I was caught with a friend somewhere far from home and we had to walk home in the dark. And I wasn't afraid of anybody bothering me except am I going to trip over this or bump into this, you know. The blackout didn't last that long but, but it did last long enough so we couldn't study for a test that we had the next day. [laughter]

HR: [laughter] So when you were with the, the children up in Elk Prairie did you, did you practice any drills or black out the windows or anything like that?

NC: Oh no, no, no. We were, we were far enough away from that and they didn't at Michel-Natal either even though Natal was—Natal-Michel was a coal mining. A good supplier of coke for Trail too and we were near Trail. No there weren't any of those. But the rations did hit people quite hard. And of course travel—one didn't travel. The gas shortage and what have you. Well not—that didn't bother most people because not many had cars again it just...

HR: And the drills, did you do drills with the children?

NC: No.

HR: No?

HC: No.

HR: Is, is that because it wasn't a big centre or large city?

NC: No, well I don't even remember having drills when we were at normal school.

HR: Okay.

NC: In Victoria. And when we did practice—I did my practice teaching at a Kingston Street school and the other one at North Ward. There were no drills there either at that time.

HR: Okay.

NC: There might have been at a time apart from the—when I was—apart from the time that I was scheduled to be there, I don't know.

HR: Right.

NC: But Phyllis Jas but might be able to. I've got to phone her today and ask her to get in, in touch with you with the AnEcho. And she was there at the time.

HR: Okay. And do you remember the children collecting things like newspapers or metal, scrap metal, to help with the war effort?

NC: At Natal there weren't many. And the papers, the newspapers, as I told you before we had outdoor plumbing. Enough said. [laughter]

HR: Okay. [laughter]

NC: But we had—you'd be surprised at how many people and how many people who come from top notch homes now remember the times when we all saved all the paper that we could.

HR: [laughter] Okay.

NC: It's like my daughter was at a band trip and, and (inaudible) and said, "Mom, you know what? They had outdoor plumbing," and I said, "Good, how wonderful that you had the experience."

HR: [laughter] So did you—when you were at each of these schools were they one room schools? Were you the only teacher, or did...

NC: I was the only teacher at the Elk Prairie school and they had another small—the Outbridge School there, it was smaller. But that didn't last, that closed down after a year. And then because of my walking out that, you know, that distance I had a wonderful time. I just loved the kids there and it, it was really great. But because of the distance that I lived from the Elk Prairie school I transferred to the Natal-Michel Central School.

HR: Okay.

NC: And that made it a lot easier.

HR: How many rooms was that one?



NC: That one was right from Grade 1 up to Grade 12. It's a—it was a most beautiful, big three storey stone building you could imagine and then our delightful government had it demolished. And it was stone and cement, it couldn't possibly have burnt. They should have kept it for a heritage site.

HR: Oh that's a shame.

NC: Oh you bet it is. But then again I can't get started on that either.

HR: [laughter] Well what about the curriculum and the resources? Did you feel that you had enough support in terms of what to do? You knew what to do?

NC: Oh there—well you took the program of studies, and they had the books out there. But there was no—I am talking about the Elk Prairie School now.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: There wasn't a copier and I made my own jelly pad where you used hectographing. But I found that was a doggone nuisance so I gave up with that and we just used the blackboard and the kids learned how to write in their books. There were no work books, nothing. I just did all my own work from the board and we marked it and so on.

HR: The—from the program of studies, so you...

NC: From the program of studies and from the textbooks that were there. One had to use textbooks that were there.

HR: That were there, okay. And the jelly pad, a lot of people of mentioned this I had never heard of it before.

NC: You hadn't?

HR: No.

NC: It was just gelatin. You know, the cookie sheet like for a jelly roll.

HR: Yes.

NC: Well, you made your—I have forgotten quite what I did. You made your, your gel and spread it out on that and let it harden and it became very rubbery. And then you used the hectograph ink and you made your, made you copy on that. Then you moisten the jelly pad and then you put your copy on the jelly pad and impregnated the writing into the jelly, and then you

ran your copies out. The only trouble with that was that to get another copy on it you couldn't quite erase the work that was there before and so it sort of smudged so you gave up after a bit.

HR: And did they show you how to do that at normal school? Is that...

NC: No, no, no. Now where did I learn that? I think maybe one of the teachers from the Natal-Michel school did.

HR: Ah, okay.

NC: But it, it was—really it was pointless and I didn't make any use of that apart from the first try when I tried to write—get a test off.

HR: Oh I see, yeah. So financially would you say—I mean, probably there was—you were making about a \$1000 year I am going to guess at that time.

NC: They—at the time when I went into normal school the minimum wage for teachers was \$780, went up to \$840.

HR: Oh, okay.

NC: A year. Now at that time you were expected to save for summer school and do everything. But that was gross, that wasn't net.

HR: Right then you had deductions.

NC: Yep, yep, yep.

HR: Were you able to make ends meet with that?

NC: Well, you—when you're not used to having a great deal of things, there are a lot of extras you couldn't buy. I couldn't save up for a bike yet because you paid your room and board. And your—well your, whatever clothes that was—oh yes, and here's another thing. At that time in those days one didn't wear slacks to school.

HR: Mm.

NC: Now can you imagine what it was like walking at—and the weather there was very cold in the winter time. The sun—the valley was very narrow and about 2:30 in December the sun would be setting behind the mountain and it would be starting to get cold and dark.

HR: At 2:30? Oh my gosh.

NC: 2:30, 3 o'clock, yes.

HR: Wow. And, and the kids would walk home on their own?

NC: Oh yes. I mean, just—they were, they were extremely capable and extremely—responsible is the word. As a matter of fact, I should tell you too that I thought well—because I used to play a lot of basketball when I was going to high school. One of the boys brought a team of horses into part of our school yard and levelled out part of it and I had my ex basketball coach from Michel-Natal in his workshop doing me a hoop. My dad made the back board and we put up poles and we had outdoor basketball and it was wonderful.

HR: Oh goodness.

NC: Yes. But I mean this didn't cost us anything.

HR: Right, so you really...

NC: Except time.

HR: Do you, do you remember then having much to do with the school district or the board or...

NC: There were school trustees at that time there wasn't a school board.

HR: But you wouldn't have asked for the money from the board—I mean the trustees?

NC: Oh I couldn't. They didn't have any money.

HR: Okay.

NC: They didn't have any money. I didn't ask them for anything.

HR: Okay.

NC: I felt that they're having a hard enough time as it is and that we can do the best we can with what we have; it wouldn't hurt us. Mind you, as I say, this is, is not common this is just me my own little corner there.

HR: Right. There are commonalities though, I am finding, with your story and others. Even though you are in your own corner there are few commonalities with others.

NC: Are there?

HR: Yeah, which makes it very interesting for me.

NC: Yes. Have you talked to anybody from Nelson?

HR: No, no. I haven't anyone.

NC: Well I'll get—Oh my, one of my friends has died but the other is, is beyond speaking about that. But there are two that are left that I am going ask them to phone you.

HR: Okay, that would be lovely because...

NC: Yes. One of them, one of them is—had been released a little early to teach in a Doukhobour area by Dr. Denton because they lived near there and they could stay at home, you see.

HR: Oh yeah.

NC: So I'll get—I'll phone them today and I ask them to give—one of them lives in Langley and the other one lives in New Denver.

HR: I am trying to get as, as much geographic coverage as I possibly can, so that would be wonderful.

NC: Well, is Langley—well, she used to live in Nelson. And that's where her experience was at that time and New Denver.

HR: Yes, that would be wonderful.

NC: Okay.

HR: One last question: When you said that you—you mentioned that you couldn't wear pants at the time. Did you feel that there were constraints on you as a woman, as a woman teacher?

NC: Well, it just, it was just wasn't done in those days. And I imagine nobody would have said anything if I had. Mind you, we just wore them to go fishing and hiking. Sort of thing. It wasn't, it wasn't a mode of dress.

HR: Mm. So it had to be more formal at the school?

NC: Well, a dress, yeah, or a skirt but it didn't have to be. Again I just felt that that's what it should be. Now why did I? Because everybody did that's why. You never saw a teacher there with slacks or...

HR: But it was never made explicit to you that there was a certain ways a woman should dress?

NC: No, no, no.

HR: So in that regard you felt you were equal. Sort of treated equally to men?

NC: Oh, yeah. I never even thought about that. Of course.

HR: Okay.

NC: Of course. I, I, never ever did think there was any distinction from one—between one and the other.

HR: Okay.

NC: Which is probably a good thing.

HR: Yes.

NC: You worked with people and not for them and you didn't, you know.

HR: Right. Do you have anything that I might not have thought of in these questions? Do you have anything else that you think is important from that era that future teachers would—should know about?

NC: I don't know. Right now I am not sure exactly what we have covered—my mind. I know what we covered but I don't know if I've left anything out or—let me think.

HR: Do you have—oh, go ahead.

NC: I was just going to say I could jot down some of the things. I don't know just how detailed you want me to go.

HR: Oh, as you like. We have almost been speaking for an hour and I don't know if you're feeling tired or not. So I was thinking that we might wrap up here and I could just—I could call you back again as a follow up.

NC: Sure.

HR: You might have thought about some other things, some advice for future teachers.

NC: Yes and the other thing I wanted to ask you: are you including any photographs?

HR: Yes, I have had many people send me down photographs. Both of their experiences at normal school and at the schools where they were teaching.

NC: Well I won't include Normal School because you probably have enough of those and there will be some in the AnEcho. I'm gotten some snaps that we have taken, however, I have a picture of the Elk Prairie School so that you'd be able to see what kind of—its been torn down. And you know the beautiful thing is I retired after 36 years of teaching and one of my students—by the way that one of the girls that came to that school was only 2 years younger than I. I had a wonderful time.

HR: Oh goodness.

NC: And he went to the attic of this school and brought down one of the old, most read in books that we used. You know I found that very touching. It was really, really wonderful.

HR: Where, where did you end up teaching afterwards?

NC: Well I moved to, to Creston. Oh, and that in itself too, that was just '46. That was the year after World War 2 ended and I had 49 kids in the room with two grades and had the most wonderful time because I'll tell you parents were different, kids were different. It was a different—totally different situation as it is—then it is now.

HR: In, in what way would you say?

NC: Well the kids were made responsible for their actions by the parents. A lot of the parents, and this was—I'm often invited to 50 year class reunions of some of my ex-students and they'll say, "Remember the days when," and this would come out, "when our parents told us if you get a licking at school come home and you'll get another one." You know, that, that didn't happen though, they, they were—it was good.

NC: Anyway I'll—and I'll send, send you a class picture of, of the—of my Michel-Natal school, too. You didn't here from anybody from near there did you?

HR: No, no. Did you, did you teach at Creston for the remainder of your career?

NC: Yeah.

HR: Oh that's wonderful.

NC: Yes. Did you ever know Frank Levers?

HR: No, I never met him but I know of him because of his role in the government.

NC: That's right. He was a marvellous person and he became a good friend of mine. He came up to see me in my classroom when he retired just to say good-bye. But he was a gem. And they don't make them like him anymore.

HR: Oh goodness.

NC: He—there—sometimes the philosophies of modern education aren't—I don't think they bring out the best in, in children. And I should explain that later when I can be diplomatic about it.

HR: Okay. I would love to hear your insights. Okay, well why don't I arrange to phone you back again Nancy. Would that be alright for you?

NC: That would be alright.