

## Nancy Constable Interview #2 – June 11, 2008

HR – Helen Raptis (interviewer)

NC – Nancy Constable (interviewee)

HR: Nancy Constable follow up interview. [pause] And—well one of the, the first thing that we left off—the last thing we left off with in the last interview was you commented that you didn't think that today's teaching methodologies bring out the best in kids. And I was wondering if you wanted to talk a little bit more about that?

NC: Well, no, because I—well it wouldn't really matter I don't suppose because people would just point a finger at me and say, "Well, your age is showing."

HR: [laughter]

NC: But I do believe that—I think what, what prompted me to say that too is that there's a private school started up in one of our districts here and it is taking some of the enrolment from the public school. However, the, the—what that school is trying to stress is that a child has to be in the mood to learn before effective learning can take place. Well, some kids are never in the mood to learn, for one thing, and I would to hate to go to a doctor who was going to operate on me but he had to be in the mood to do it. So I think that the stress there is really misplaced and I think that, perhaps, the self-discipline is what needs to be re-established with the young people. And I—that's making a generalized statement, I know, but a lot of the young people are fine young people. But so much of it is, is you do what you want.

HR: Mm-hmm. Did, did you find when you were teaching that you had to help kids become disciplined or was?

NC: Well, well I'll tell you that I sort of put the onus on their own shoulders. I thought well that you know how it is to behave, you know what your parents have brought you up to be. You're not going go around destroying everything and usually I put them on a code of honour and, you know, they responded. I could leave them in the classroom and know that they're—that everything is going to be okay. Mind you I had the reputation about being, being strict. I never yelled at the kids but I was fair and the kids sensed this and they knew it and they, they, responded beautifully. But a lot of it is—a lot of the parents too seem to want the discipline. In other words, life isn't a matter of you do what you want to do whenever you want to do it.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: And that's the thing that I felt was, was something we had to train the kids. That I didn't like cleaning the oven, but I felt I had to do it sometimes because nobody else—so you might not like this but you have to do it because it's part of living.

HR: Right. Whereas today, I think you're right that we, we try much harder to fit the school to the child than the other way around.

NC: Exactly. I, I feel that too and I think that some parents feel that way. And one can't educate all the parents. I think one of the things that there is a lot of—now I don't know, I haven't been in the school system since I retired in '86. I did some substitute teaching so that we could buy some materials to go—to take over to Czechoslovakia where we taught English to, my husband and I, to professional people. And I have noticed that there wasn't the same, there wasn't the same attitude of a lot of the parents. I should tell you something that was quite, quite, revealing. I was invited to a 50 year grad, grad reunion. Two or three of them and it's amazing because I'm—that usually most kids think education starts in the high school and I was always the elementary school teacher. But one of the young—one of the men, who is a retired principal, got up and it was a remember when type of thing. He said, "Remember when our parents told us if we ever got scolded at the school yard get another one when you'd get home?" That sort of thing. Now a lot of people think, "Well that's a terrible, terrible thing." But, on the other hand, they grew up very well adjusted and I don't know what else to say about that. I, I don't think there was a threat ever.

HR: And, what—after you taught at Michelle Natal and at when the war ended, where did you go after that?

NC: Oh, I taught first up the Elk Valley. I should tell you about that. It was a rural school about 8 miles out of the Elk, out of Michelle Natal. It's called the Elk Prairie School. And I had 13 students. Eight grades. I had a lovely time. The kids were just a totally different—it, it, it was—mind you I was only about, what, 18 when I started, I guess. And there were no school busses, and a lot of the kids lived 4 miles away, 2 miles away. I myself lived at Natal and usually got a ride out at about 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning with a logging truck. Because at the time nobody had anything and I couldn't even afford a bike. So, this is how it went but I didn't mind. This is the amazing thing. We all didn't expect a lot of, a lot of things coming our way. And—but you couldn't afford to be sick at any time because there were no substitutes during the war. And the kids would walk to school. There no—the telephone system was inadequate and one wouldn't know whether if a kid would go to school and find the door locked because the teacher was home with a cold or something. So, we just never got colds. We never got ill. It was, it—that was the situation. And, of course, there were no workbooks. No, no copying of test papers. I told you about the jelly pad before.

HR: Yeah.

NC: And I didn't use mine very much, because it was a dog gone mess with the hectographing.

HR: [laughter] That is funny because everyone has said the same thing about those jelly pads.

NC: Yes, yes. Well I moved into Natal after. As I say, I—oh when the bus—when the logging trucks didn't go out I walked out. And, you know, believe it or not I enjoyed it. It was 8 miles out and 8 miles back. But the other thing too, those were the days when one didn't wear slacks to school. And it was kinda hard. The weather wasn't always, always kind. There were about four farm houses along the way. But I look back with, with just absolute real affection towards that area. And Michelle Natal I moved in to teach the following year. And again, I can't—there were no substitute teachers. And again, I can't—even when I went to high school, because from '39 on I was finishing my high school there. I can't ever remember my teachers being ill. They were always there. And I don't know whether we were more hardy or whether, whether we reacted to the climate a little bit in a more healthy fashion. I don't know, but you just—there was just no one to take your position if you were away.

HR: That's interesting.

NC: Yeah. As I say, there were no school busses either.

HR: Right. And how did the children usually get to school?

NC: They walked.

HR: They walked?

NC: Absolutely.

HR: Or horseback? Did any of them come on horseback?

NC: At the farms no, they didn't. They, they learned to take shortcuts. The roads—no they walked. One, one kid did bring a horse one time. But that—not often because usually there wasn't—well we did have a place to stable a horse, true enough. But most of the kids just walked. Developed very strong lungs, believe me.

HR: I guess so with all that exercise.

NC: Yeah.

HR: Yeah. And so I guess that my main question then now would be after the war where did you go and what did you do?

NC: In 19—well I stayed in Michelle Natal 'til the spring of 1946 and then came to Creston. And I've been here since.

HR: Oh goodness.

NC: Yeah. I, I love teaching and I spent most of the time, well all the time here, I taught for 36 years. And enjoyed my work very much. I retired only because my husband wanted the two of us, he was in the resource industry, he wanted the two of us to retire at the same time. And I thought, well gee it would really be nice if I could work one year and he retired. You know, [laughter] come home and find everything done. [laughter]

HR: [laughter] That's funny, that's funny because I think that that's the—all women dream of that.

NC: Yes, absolutely. But, now I don't know what else I could tell you about the war years. Just the one thing is that there, there were no school busses and substitutes were unheard of. And well not too many people had cars even.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: And telephones.

HR: Did you always remain at the elementary level?

NC: I stayed with the, with the—I was with the higher elementary here in Creston and then I retired. If one had to quit school, had to retire or resign. Sorry, get the right word eventually. When one expects their baby, when one becomes pregnant. And so I was at home when one of the other teachers apparently had to leave and the school principal came to me and said, "Please come back and fill in." So, I did and it was a Grade 2 class and I loved them. I thought, "Oh my goodness, they are such wonderful little ones." And then later on he asked me, he said, "I want you to go back full time," and I thought, "Yes okay." But he said, "In the Grade 7." That's when they brought the Grade 7s to the, to the elementary.

HR: Elementary.

NC: Yeah. And I said, "Well no but I'd really like the Grade 2s and the 1s." And he said, "No they can get a lot of people to take in those jobs but they need somebody at the higher levels." So—but I, I was very happy about that because I got—they had several Grade 7 classes and they departmentalized and so I had the mathematics and the English, which I love. So, I was very happy with that.

HR: Oh, so you, you talk them math and English, and then you would teach different classes math and English?

NC: Yes, that's right. 'Cause they had about four or five Grade 7 divisions.

HR: Okay. And that—Grade 7 used to be part of the junior high school.

NC: That's right. That was the first year they brought it down into the elementary. Now what year was that? How old were my kids? I usually lose track of time when so many things happen.

HR: Was it around 1960, '59 or '60?

NC: It would be a little bit after that.

HR: After?

NC: Yeah, because I taught fives and sixes when my two—Mr Levers, did you ever know or hear of Frank Levers?

HR: I never met him, but I heard of him.

NC: Oh he was—I knew him well. He was a marvellous person. Just, just one of the best educators I've ever had the privilege of meeting.

HR: Did he teach in Creston?

NC: No, but he was a school inspector. In those days they were inspectors, rather than superintendents. There was—and I had met him. I think he had been in Creston. Well he had been visiting here quite a bit, but he wasn't teaching here when I was here. But he did come along and I met him through his, through his work as an inspector. I—he was, how can I put it? He was a, a down to earth person. There was none of this, "I have to be polite, and I'm not sure I can be." He, he was no frills...

HR: Right.

NC: ...sort of thing. And he was—I remember asking him when he came into see me, well I said, "Don't you want to see my day book?" And he says, "No," he said, "I know what—I can just walk into a room and know what exactly is going on." He said, "People can put anything they want in a day book and not follow any of it." 'Cause it looks good.

HR: Right.

NC: And you know he is so right, but...

HR: So he was a solid teacher? You knew he had teaching background?

NC: Oh yes, oh yes.

HR: And then he went on to the Ministry for a long time.

NC: Yes he did. He was the assis—Deputy Minister of Education in BC for, oh golly I forget—that had to be in the '60s sometime. Or was it.

HR: And into the '70s I think as well.

NC: Yes, yes. Well he came—when he came to Creston and he was retired and he came up to say goodbye to me. And I felt very honoured about that.

HR: That's interesting to know because I've seen his photograph in old annual reports from the Ministry and I, I've seen his name on all sorts of documents but I didn't really know anything about him at all.

NC: Yes. Well I'll tell you, too, another little thing about him. When I was teaching in one of the district schools out here, it was a two room school in Ericson before I came into the town. And this is when he was still a school inspector. He was visiting the primary room and I had the older elementary. And it was the last period of the day and we had singing there, and I teach singing by rote because there was no piano in the school. And the first thing I know, you see a head go walking past the windows in the classroom and the door opened at the back and he sat down in the back of the room and joined us with our singing. And it, it was just marvellous.

HR: Oh that's lovely.

NC: Yes, we sang—well, we sang the old songs too. You know, we—in those days there wasn't any of these cool cat. [laughter]

HR: Is there anything else that you would like to add to what I've asked? We've gone through everything that I had, that I had set out to ask you. So is there anything else you can think of that I haven't asked that you think might be important?

NC: Well no, I don't know. We didn't have the—I, I think what I wanted to stress was that the substitute situation was, was not good but also that the teacher's absenteeism was kept to a minimum and not for any other reason except the teachers themselves seem to—it just seemed to go with the job that you can't, you can't be away.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: Well from the farm schools anyway. Michelle Natal it was different because it was a big school. That and the fact that we didn't have workbooks or copiers. But that didn't seem to bother. Didn't have them in Creston either at the time because it was just after the war. I think phys. ed. and everything else were—yes and my husband just reminded me, slacks, we didn't wear slacks to school in those days. I don't know when we started but they do now. In fact, I

should tell you, in this current time I am a little appalled at the, at the manner of dress that some of the teachers have. And not only those but of the doctors as well and on it goes.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: Again my age is showing ,I guess.

HR: Things are much less formal. How did you keep warm in the snowy weather with wearing dresses?

NC: Well they had what they called lisle stockings, and they were a heavy—I wished I'd kept a pair. You know, now I didn't have leotards either. This is the thing, that the lisle—I wished I had kept a pair to just to show the kids and my grandchildren, "Well now this is what Grandma wore when." But I didn't—and of course heavy coats.

HR: And how do you spell lisle? Is it L-Y-L-E?

NC: L-Y-S, lys.

HR: Oh lys.

NC: Yeah. Spelled lisle. Or is it L-I-S? I can't remember I haven't used it for such a long time—L-I-S-L-E.

HR: Okay.

NC: I think its L-I—although I have seen—no it isn't L-Y, I think its L-I-S-L-E.

HR: L-I-S-L-E, okay. That's the first I've heard of those.

NC: Oh, is it really?

HR: Yeah.

NC: Well they weren't, they weren't cotton. They weren't heavy like a cotton. They had a little bit of a sheen to them.

HR: Mm-hmm.

NC: And they were heavier then, then the nylon. But I might be able to find—one of my mother's friends might a have a—oh no she would have thrown those out by now.

HR: Goodness.

NC: L-I-S-L-E. My husband just looked that up. Yep, that's what I thought it was. But nylons were non-existent at that time because of war years. And skirts automatically weren't as long as they could have been because of the material.

HR: Mm.

NC: And I can't think of anything else. Of course you had mitts and toques and everything else.

HR: Right. And I guess you were walking. And there was a stove at the school? Did you have a stove that you lit?

NC: Yes, there was a stove that they—oh I'll tell you. I don't know whether you—this isn't really interesting for others but I'll tell you what happened when I—out to the farm school. I'd get out there early with a ride with the logging trucks; at about 8 o'clock if I walked. But I would split some cord wood because the kid that came to start the furnace would be a little bit later and I had to go into a classroom and I had to keep warm. But I didn't mind that, I think I enjoyed that, too. The bathroom facilities were something again. They were outdoors and the teachers did not have a—one that was reserved for teaching staff. So one had to be careful when one used them whether you went out when they—I don't know how good the doors were on all of them. So that, that was one thing.

HR: So they were outhouses?

NC: Oh definitely outhouses at the farm but not in Michele Natal and not in Creston.

HR: Okay.

NC: And at the farm it was very difficult. You know, I'll tell you their immune systems had to be really good because when a kid visited the outhouse on the farm and they were playing, nobody went in or took time out to wash their hands. You just didn't hear of it. They just kept playing and they might have had a treat at recess time or at noon hour. And no matter how much you say, "Wash your hands," one couldn't control everything. But, as I say, their immune system was quite good because they very rarely were ill.

HR: So the children weren't absent much either then?

NC: No, they weren't. The absentee level was very, very low. And we—in the, in the gymnasium, in the sports thing—it would be outdoors things. We had—in the one room school there just wasn't anyway you could, you could have anything going. In, in the winter time—outside to play in the snow I suppose and sometimes we would move the—cut their lunch for

half an hour and let them out half an hour later—earlier after school. And what we do is move the desks aside and one very talented musician that didn't—that was a little bit handicapped would come in and play the old pump organ. And we would play—we would dance square dances, which was wonderful. We loved it.

HR: Oh wow. That would certainly make the time go by.

NC: Yes it did and, and it was a, it was well welcomed by the, welcomed by the kids. They liked that.

HR: What, what's interesting to me about the Elk Prairie School and about other teachers' experiences in the one room schools is how much freedom they had to direct what was going on.

NC: Yes.

HR: Did you have that same degree of freedom when you came to Creston? Where there were more divisions and the principal, I guess?

NC: Oh, well when I first came to Creston for the, for the longest time I just had the one room and that. So it was to a reasonable amount, but with the different divisions one had to more or less follow a time table. So that when the auditorium was empty then my class went to gym while I took somebody else's room for the, for the math. I did teach folk dancing but it was—some of it was during free time. And I loved that, too.

HR: Well it's been fascinating speaking to you.

NC: Well I enjoyed speaking to you, too.