

[Judith Windle interviewing Sylvia McKay in 1978]

[00:00] Sylvia McKay: And to think of the goals that we had at that time, and what the students are undergoing now, why, it's entirely different. I've had a lot to do with student teachers the last few years now, ever since I've been teaching in Victoria and... I sometimes criticize the system because... they have the students have so many facets today... that to teach is secondary. To get through courses in university is primary. And then I think back to what we did all in one year's time. We were high school students, the majority wouldn't go through what we call first year... [inaudible] first year... We didn't call it grade thirteen... we didn't call it first year university... what did we call it...? But anyhow, most of the small schools in the interior, of course, would have this extra class. Which might mean four, five, ten, twelve students who had graduated from high school and would take this extra. And the high school teachers, of course, would cope with, with that. If you got through, that meant that you had already gotten what they call... a first class standing, if you went through normal school. Whereas... no, that is wrong too, it wasn't a first class. That wasn't the the name they gave it. But anyway, the students who were in Victoria would naturally go to college because it was there, and then they would go to normal school. And of course they would have what you call your second year. Now I, of course, didn't do that. I went to normal school immediately from high school.

JW: Did you come from the interior?

SM: Oh yes. Victoria at that time was the receiving area for the interior, from what I can make out... past the Fraser Valley, all of B.C., and upper island. If you lived in the area of so-called Vancouver, then you went to the Vancouver Normal School. So the majority of the students that came to Victoria were from out of town, which made it quite different, quite difficult. Most of them had never been away from home, we were all homesick, we had scraped money together in order to go, we had gotten our wardrobes which we used from the day we arrived to the day we went... back home, same clothes. Because I can remember at Christmas time, well we all managed to get home. I think. I don't think there were any that were left behind. And when we came back, one of the girls had gotten some new clothes for Christmas. And we all oooooh'd and ahhhhhhh'd, and we thought it was the most wonderful thing that she was able to have some new clothes. There was no stigma attached, because there were so many of us in the same boat. And there was... It was a need to get... get our education and we were all looking forward to the first check when we would be able to buy some clothes, this was the important thing. Which brings me back to Mrs. [Fisker?]. I say she was in the Home Ec, and her, her main purpose was to gear everything for us to be ready to cope... with the situation when we got into the, into the [wilds?]. Because you see that at that time, no beginning teacher was allowed to apply to a graded school. You had to have experience in the ungraded school before you could apply to any place where it was graded. Some places were fortunate enough to have two teachers in the district, which was still classed as ungraded.

JW: Some would take [inaudible crosstalk]...

SM: Or they would call it semigraded...

JW: ...some would take the lower primary numbers [inaudible].

SM: That's right, that's right. And of course, there was another little thing too that was different in those days. No girl could be married and teach. And... if she married during the time when she was teaching why she had to quit, right there. Just like that. So there were a few romances, you know, where they would get married but everything was kept quiet until the summer holidays and then [inaudible] retire, because that was a stigma at that time. A man could, but not a girl.

JW: Were jobs hard to come by then?

[04:54] SM: Oh, when I graduated, I wrote 200 applications. Mind you there were hundreds and hundreds of rural schools, they were dotted everywhere. Everywhere. You can't believe how many of the schools there were, and they were any- in every shape, way, or form you can think of. You'd find that they'd be in an old, converted house, or were in log cabins. I can show you pictures of the ones that I had, and they were anything but schools.

JW: And the pay rate was different in each area wasn't it?

SM: Yes, at, at one time. When I first began to teach... I'm trying to think what my basic pay was. But at that time... each school offered a salary. Helped out by the Department of Education, I'm not too sure of my facts

here. And then as an inducement to stay in the rural schools, they would increase your salary for a hundred dollars a year. In other words, if you stayed on, you would get an increase of a hundred dollars. Well this happened to me, that I stayed the three years. The fourth year, I think it was the fourth year over- I stayed in one, one area for five years. Not too sure it was the first- the second, last, or the last year. The whole salary system was changed. All rural schools were given a basic pay of \$780 a year, because depression had really hit. And it was taken over by the Department of Education, in other words, the locality didn't have to pay. Now, I'm thinking of rural schools now. I don't know about the towns. I imagine there'd be a bit of a different set up there. But in any case, all the people who were living in the community and, of course, would have to pay what they called school taxes, because now it was under the Department of Education, couldn't pay money. So they all worked their stint on the roads, Department of Highways we'd call it today. And in my little area I can remember distinctly, it was earmarked for... paying off the taxes on their farms. There was a winding road along the plateau, and then it came out to a big ravine and... they went along the edge of the ravine like so, like a great big horseshoe. Eventually, they'd cut that horseshoe off. In order to cut that off they would dump wheelbarrow loads of stuff down in the ravine until finally it was beginning to build up. Well it took years, but that was the project where the farmers paid off their taxes.

JW: What- what little town was it that you taught in?

SM: A little place called Dorr, D-O-R-R, and it was on the Great Northern, running between Fernie and... [Inaudible], Montana. I think it was [inaudible]. Oh yes, those, those were really the days.

JW: You had mentioned Mrs. [Espis?], in Home Ec, did she also teach you how to sew? Did you have time for sewing?

SM: I haven't the faintest recollection of sewing. Mind you, maybe in her regular year, she might have done so. She might have taught us how to sew a seam to mend our clothes, because you see, we all came from the interior in what we call... rather small schools. Some of them were larger than others, mind you, like in the town of Nelson, the town of...

Unidentified Speaker: Would you like some coffee [inaudible]?

SM: Oh yes, that, would you like-

[Audio skips forward]

SM: I really don't know whether she would teach sewing in her regular classes or not. I don't remember her doing that excepting... whenever we went to her, it was always things that we would have to cope with when we went out. So, she was interested in our dress, in our... department, on our... how to cope with money. How to, manage... when situations arose. Today, I think you'd call her a counselor.

[10:00] SM: What I'm trying to say. I don't even remember... writing an examination that would pass us in a subject that she would teach. I don't remember that part. We had gotten so accustomed to being without her that when she came, she was just sort of an added... added thing to, to, cope with, you know, because we were... when I look back on us, we were so naive.

JW: You boarded when you came down here didn't you?

SM: We all did!

JW: How did you find the boarding?

SM: Where I boarded? Oh, it was a wonderful spot. It really was. I haven't been to that house since... I really should have gone, but of course has changed hands so... it was by Ms. McRae... who are related to the McRae's of the early, early days that married into the Jameson family, Jameson Tea and Coffee. And it was over on... Cedar Hill Road. At the top end. And all that land was owned by the McRae's. And I can remember her, the old house, in fact I think it's still there if I could only find my way around the new streets set about in there. And though- the entrance was all... birdseye maple, [inaudible] the whole bit. And she had had a difficult time because her father had passed away and now she was trying to make a living. So she had advertised to take in students, normal students. And so this friend of mine and myself, we each had a room and we all paid, I don't

remember how much money we paid now, and I imagine it was around \$30 a month.

JW: Were you expected to do anything in return or was it just straight?

SM: Oh, no, no. \$30 a month. That's what I paid for board when I boarded out in the interior, when I was teaching was \$30. Well, don't forget that the salaries were comparable, you know. But of course the boarding situations in the interi- in the outlying areas were something to be desired sometimes.

JW: When you were, knew that you were going to come to normal school... did you have this place to board ahead of time, or did you wait [inaudible crosstalk]?

SM: Oh, yes.

JW: Did you get it through the normal school?

SM: No, no. Just advertising in newspapers. There are some in the, other arrangements made. I remember one woman coming down from Nanaimo, and she rented a big house, and I think there were six of them... that stayed with her. From Nanaimo. And one girl couldn't get in, there wasn't enough room so she boarded next door but she was more or less included in the [inaudible]. I know this now because I've been gathering the information about all these different people, you know, that are going to be coming to the reunion.

JW: Did you know any of the other students from the interior that came down to normal school your year? Or were you the only one from your area?

SM: I was the only one from my hometown. I don't think I knew anyone else, no, no.

JW: You got very friendly within your class, did you?

SM: Yes and no. No, the... classes didn't always stick together, no. No, for the simple reason I think was that.... Initially we would. But there were inter... games, basketball and grass hockey in particular. Volleyball, of course didn't exist as far as I could remember. Baseball yes, but the girls, of course, were shown the rudiments so that they could teach it, but we didn't have a baseball team. I was on the grass hockey team. By the way, we played grass hockey, you know where... Richmond and Landsdowne, at the corner [inaudible]. It was a lower section into there, that was where we came. But we used to go across... where Landsdowne Junior High is... for some of the games as well.

JW: Who did you play against?

SM: I can remember playing grass hockey against Saint Margaret School. That was considered an English game. I can't remember who else we played against. Maybe Vic High had a team. I don't remember that part [SM laughs].

[15:00] SM: And I was supposed to be on the basketball team and we were practicing. When this was after school. When I don't know exactly what I did, but I think I jumped for the ball and I went through the floor.

JW: The gymnasium floor?

SM: Pardon?

JW: The gymnasium at the Normal School?

SM: Yes, mhm, and I sprained my ankle very badly. And of course, normally I walked home, well I wasn't able to walk. And I can remember the janitor... being called in, and he took me home in his car. I wish I could remember the name of the janitor because he was really a father to us all, us kids who came from the interior. So he wasn't an instructor. There was no... need to be very careful what we said of what we did because he would never squeal on any of us, you know, whatever we said and did. Whereas we all felt that the staff had eyes everywhere, even on street cars and downtown on a Saturday. Our department was watched not only at the school, but wherever we went. That was the usual impression in any case, I don't know how well they screened us or not.

JW: Did you often see the janitor, did he, you know, he make a point of [inaudible crosstalk].

SM: Oh yes, yes, we had we had two of them. But I remember he was the one who took me home. And... goodness, I think Ms. McRae, our landlady, fixed my leg up and it just went black all the way up to the top and I had to get crutches. And... of course I was out as far as the basketball was concerned, I stayed home for several days. But the floor just gave away, I went right through. And very close to the gymnasium was a little swimming pool.

JW: Oh yes, were you able to use that?

SM: Oh yes, yes we used that, in fact one time I jumped in I still had my watch on. And of course I didn't have any money to repair it so it just sat there in the drawer until I was able to... earn money when I was teaching, and by this time well it was all rusted [SM laughs] and weathered. But I got it fixed! That was, that was bad.

JW: Were the pools used very often? Would you use them after gym class, or just any time you wanted?

SM: I really don't know. I can't remember that part. I don't know whether it was part of our curriculum, or if it was just there for us to use. We also used to all gather down at Crystal, on a Friday night. This was where as many as who could afford it would go down on a Friday night... to go swimming... get slicked up and then go up on top and dance afterwards.

JW: You didn't have too much of a social life at the school then did you? This was considered your social life to get out Friday?

SM: No, there wasn't too much although I think we had more than some of the other years. From what I've heard. We had several dances, but you mustn't forget though that we were- had a disadvantage, because there were three classes of girls and only one class of boys, which meant that whenever we had a dance we would have to...

Unidentified Speaker: Careful what you say...

SM: ...we would have to get our own boyfriends if we didn't... become very friendly with one that was of the 39 or so, you see? So they would have sort of a... I guess perhaps the staff did this, they would have what they call standees that would come. And they were nearly all school teachers who were not married who would act as an escort for the girls, for these dances. Which brings to mind one dance that we were having... and I, I've forgotten what dance it was now. We'll say it was Christmas, I don't know when it was. But, we were very friendly with them, and that I should say... The McRae's had relatives just down the road that were McRae's... and there were cousins in Vancouver, and they had a boy about our age that was going to university school. So on the weekends, why, he would come over and we would all have a really good time. Because there were two girls in the other McRae household, and there were us two girls, and the McRae's also had several brothers, and then this one that came from the University School to spend the weekends. And there was a little bit of a house there, I think it was the first house before the big one was built... that they had converted into sort of a... a ping pong table room, you know. So we used to play a lot of ping pong in there.

[20:11] SM: This dance was coming up, and I wanted to ask this boy from the university school to be my partner and I can remember I agonized for the longest time because it wasn't done in those days that a girl would ask. Finally, why I did, you know, and well of course he was pleased as punch, he was glad to come of course, that was fine. It was all settled weeks ahead. I'm not too sure whether it was the day of the dance, or the day before the dance, I can't remember. Special word was sent over from the University School, for me. I can't even remember the boy's name now [SM laughs], Rod or something like this? He had come down with the measles, and he wasn't able to go. Oh was that ever a big blow. It must have been the day before because I had time enough to put my name into the bank. And they would have to draw on someone to be my escort, and the arrangements were made that he would come around and pick me up.

SM: He came by taxi. Which was really something at that time. And I can still remember... that he was a school teacher. He seemed to know the whole staff. And, I had never more or less been on a common basis with any of the staff. I was a student, but he was calling them by their first name. And, I'd be in with the conversation with the staff, and I remember I felt quite mixed. I really didn't enjoy myself, because I wasn't ready. I wasn't an adult yet,

even though I was going to go out and teach next September, I still wasn't grown up enough. I think most of us were like that. We... when we went out to teach, we grew up overnight. I'll put it that way. But I can remember this chap was very nice, we had a card, we'd go around and people would fill in names. To... see that we all... had what you called "reserved dances", and your partner would reserve the first and the last, and of course usually one that was in the middle somewhere. I'm not too sure whether we had- yes, we did have something to eat... that time. But that was the reason why we didn't have as many socials, because there wasn't the balance and it took quite a lot of preparation. But I think overall we were really naive, so naive. I don't think we knew what we were heading in for, unless we had come from the country. Now, there were quite a number of kids who had lived in the country, been brought up in a rural school, and then had to travel into town to go to high school. Or taken it by correspondence. And then had come to normal school. I think they're able to cope better, but my hometown had... a fair sized school, as considering those days. We used what we call readers, not grades. And I think that there were... I was going to say they were two readers to a classroom... and that was what it was. And the high school was in the same building... and there were only two, two classes of high school students. But we became very friendly with our staff in the high schools, because they were all young.

JW: Do you think you were prepared... very well at normal school to go out to these country schools...

SM: Yes, as far, as far...

JW: ... with children the same age as you?

SM: ... Oh, as far as curriculum was concerned yes. We knew the curriculum inside out. We knew how to teach grade one, we knew how to teach grade nine, because we'd be getting students by correspondence in grade nine. We weren't forced to teach it, but grade eight, yes. In those days, of course, grade eights would have to write a government examination in order to get through. And if you knew that, why then of course you taught in order to get them through.

[24:57] JW: How did you fare it in your practice teaching? You started early [inaudible crosstalk].

SM: We did a great deal more practice teaching than what they do now. We didn't have what we call blocks, excepting at the end of the year. I was looking back on some of this practice teaching one day and I, you know that... It was all very vague.

JW: You weren't scared stiff then, [JW laughs] otherwise you would've remembered.

SM: Well, I could remember teaching in George J. under Ms. Noble. I had- I went to her at different times, now we didn't go the same school, we went to different schools and we came back. We had partners, which we always... shared our time with, two of them. I mean, there were two of us. When I did my practice teaching as a block I went out to Sidney. But, you see, it was a phony situation. Victoria was big enough to have graded schools, we all practice taught in graded schools, one, one subject... for length of time. When you got to the ungraded schools, you had eight grades. And the same length of time. But the curriculum was to cover it all, for all eight grades.

JW: Did you ever get a chance to teach in the normal school- the model schools that were at the normal school, or did you observe down there?

SM: We always observed, I don't remember anyone teaching. If they did I don't remember it, they might have.

JW: That would be the closest you'd get to... three or four grades in one room wouldn't it?

SM: Yes, but we didn't observe long enough... to... know how to cope, but mind you we had made out timetables of all kinds. Timetables that would take eight grades, timetables that would take six grades, timetables that would take the nine grades. You know, we, we pretended. We more or less made up these situations. And we learned to correlate, in other words overlap. See, the last few years that I've taught while I was in a school here where we were trying individualization. And my experience in the country schools held me in good stead because I had done that. Sometimes I only had one youngster in a grade, but I might have seven in another one. The minimum number of students to open a school was 10.

JW: So you could have one in each grade, pretty nearly.

SM: Well, absolutely. That brings to mind of when I first began to teach. I told you I had written... 200 application forms. And... in the meantime I had started to work in a... I guess you'd call it an office... that was run by a family and the in-laws, and they... had a combined... business of... transfer, taxi, coal, furniture... the mortuaries in the back... freight... and I was the, the only one in there. Oh, yes, and we had a, a franchise for florists in Nelson. But I was the only one in there. I did it all, for the family, and kept the books separate, you know. I mean to say if there was an order for coal, why it would go in one book, and if it was a taxi why that would be in another, and so on. But anyway, I did so well there that they said that I could carry on if I didn't get a job teaching, so I wasn't too worried, although I did really want to go and teach. And my father at that time was up north around Burns Lake area. And he knew that I was going to be a teacher, and so of course he had... spoken to... two different lots of trustees and they both sent... a letter, asking me to come to them. Now, I hadn't applied there. In the meantime, there was a school opening up at Lardeau, which was of course not too far from my home. And I had been accepted up there. So, I refused these two. Now, Monday would be Labor Day. School would start on a Tuesday. I think this was... Friday, before.

[29:59] SM: I got word that one family had moved out of that area. So that meant the school could not open. So there I was, I had closed all the doors, you know, and their school was going to start. So I went down to my usual place of work, and I met a girlfriend who had gone to a normal school the year before, and I was telling her what had happened and she had just come from the post office. And here was a letter accepting her application, she taught one year... I've forgotten where it was she taught, but she had- didn't like it, so she had accepted another position. And here now, another application form had been answered and they had accepted her. She says, "why don't you wire an acceptance, and explain it?" I said "yes, I'll do that." So I send a wire. Accepting the letter of Edith Allen, under my name. And she sent a wire saying she had to refuse, and I said, "wire in return". Which they did. This was Saturday night. I had to get ready in order to go back into East Kootenay to be ready for school on Tuesday morning. And that was how I got my first school, after all those application forms. And of course, this little place in Dorr became my school for five years. [SM laughs]

[Audio pauses]

SM: There weren't, they weren't too many.

JW: No, there was a very small staff at that time, wasn't there?

SM: Mr. MacLaurin was our principal, of course. He was a wonderful, kind man. Really and truly he was. He was ideal for that situation

JW: Did you become very close, to him or any of the instructors, or were they are always... higher?

SM: No, they were always higher up. I think the boys became quite friendly with C.B. Wood. He was a very shy man, now that I'm looking at him as an adult he was extremely shy. Therefore he was very brass when he was around girls, and he was surrounded by girls because there were three classes of us. And he was not married, and... a very good looking, strong man. So, we girls would more or less look at him with idolized eyes, but we were never friendly with him but, he used to fraternize with the boys, he became very friendly. I don't know whether Ben ever did, but if you talk to Tom Little why he... he has very fond memories of C.B. Wood. In fact, I think it was Tom who located him, and he was going to come to our reunion. He's very frail by now but... he had never married.

JW: What did he teach?

SM: English and math... is about the best we exper- we didn't call it English. We divided up into... reading, grammar... composition... literature... phonics was part of reading. I think that was the [general facets?]. Oh, and we had drama. We used to put on plays.

JW: Who was responsible for the Drama?

SM: I think C.B. Wood was the one who would back that. We were in different plays, we had different concerts. I remember one especially, why, it was a court scene and we had it out on... in the rose arbour outside, I remember that.

JW: Did you ever put these plays on for the public, or was it always within the... the Normal School?

SM: I can't answer that, truthfully. I don't know. I don't remember. I don't remember. And of course, Denton.

JW: He was quite a colorful man, wasn't he?

SM: Yes, he was a very colorful man, he was a man that... if we had been adults... we would have seen in a different light.

JW: Were you scared of him?

SM: Yes, we were. Because he was so... variable... depend upon his mood.

[34:53] SM: Whenever we would go out to practice teach, we would have to go back to the school, and go and have an interview with whoever was teaching a particular subject that we had undertaken. And when I look back on that, and look at the way I taught my student teachers, it was very different. I would treat the student teachers as an equal, who was going to become a teacher and give all that I could. All the help that I could, and if they felt they'd done badly, why, I would be there to... let them cry on my shoulders, so to speak. But I don't remember any part of that with our staff.

JW: They just told you how to do it, and expected you to follow, is that it?

SM: I guess so. I don't know. I really don't know. I think it was because we were so young. Mind you, there was an age limit before you could teach.

JW: How old did you have to be?

SM: You had to be 18. Yes, you had to be 18 before you could teach. So if you were very bright in school, in high school, and then went to normal school, why you still couldn't teach until you were 18. And then Mr. Dunnell, who taught- oh and, and, and Denton of course taught geography and history. Those were his strong suits. He's written quite a few books, in fact. And Dunnell, he was a kindly old man. I think of all the... of all the teachers that we had to cope with, Dunnell... was like a father to us. He taught art. And of course art in those days was... not creativity. It was to do according to... set rules, we had drawing books for each grade level. And you were supposed to go through that book. You could grade them, you could mark them. In fact, I have the drawing book upstairs, one of them. Funny thing that you should be asking me about this because... one time I, my daughter in the mainland asked me to come to her sorority and talk about education. Well, education per se is such a big subject I didn't know what to do. So I decided I would talk about... the education of old, as compared to now, but just stress the old so I brought all these old things. I brought my own strap for instance, which I had to buy. The school board didn't supply it, and you were expected to use that strap. There was no recording in those days of when you strapped the youngster. Like it is today, of course, you know how that came about it was more as protection for the teacher really. And... I brought the old drawing book, that was a guide and all these books that... we were supposed to follow. In other words, pretty well cut and dried. Geometry. Geometric drawings was very much invoked, with a compass and so on and so forth. And then we had... Mr. Freeman, he was another kindly... gentleman, a little bit younger than Mr. Dunnell. And he taught us nature study.

JW: Is this when you went on your nature walks?

SM: Oh yes, yes. Nature study was, of course, a big subject. Today I guess you might call it the elementary science, not talking about the physics end of it, but the best way to explain it. We used to have to... make a collection of all the weeds and plants that we could find around Victoria, and we'd all go out gathering specimens, and then we'd start... blotting them into great big books, and so on and so forth, and then when they were dry we would have to mount them under, under a parchment paper and have to put the botanical name, and the common name and where it was found and so on. Goodness, I think I had a brown paper scrapbook, must have been about that full. I've got to tell you one story, though. I decided I was going to squash some skunk cabbage in order to put it in. Which I did, and this house where I lived of course was a two-story house, but there was also an attic up above. And so I went out there and I got a whole bunch of old books and I laid them on top of this, because this was very thick and juicy [SM laughs].

[40:10] SM: And... I guess it was months afterwards, Ms. McRae came to us at dinner time, says "Girls. Do you have something up in your rooms that smell?" And we can't think of anything. She says "there's definitely an odor coming from upstairs, and I can't figure out where it's coming from and it's getting worse". So we went up and sniffed in our rooms like you know, and in the hallways. Yes, we could, we could, we could smell it. Time went by and the smell got worse. And I guess in desperation she went up into the attic thinking something had died up there. This is what she found, was the skunk. [SM laughs] But it was squashed enough that I [SM laughing] put it in that book. But Freeman was the one who made me unafraid of snakes. I can remember this one walk, went up on Mount Tolmie. He got a garter snake and showed us how to capture one. This was all not the idea of teaching us about snakes, but how we were to teach children. You see, everything was geared to how you would teach children, not to... benefit you. So, he said that "now, which one of you will try it out?" And I can remember us girls were all strung around him. And everybody looking at one another, you know, and finally someone said "come on Sylvie, come on Sylvie". And I really wasn't afraid of snakes, but I had never really... attempted to pick one up like he said, I'd pick it up by the tail, you see. So I was egged on and so I went out and I... caught him back here, you know, like they were supposed to do, and then of course it would wiggle but then he couldn't move away. And from that time on, why, I wasn't afraid of snakes at all. And I can remember that so plainly that... he encouraged us to do these things. And of course some of the other girls would... come forward and they'd... pick up this poor little snake [SM laughing] who was trying to get away. Yes, when I think of the Mount Tolmie now, with all those houses, we used to go up there for lunch. There was no cafeteria in those days, we would all pack a lunch. There may have been some that lived close to the Normal School. I don't remember anyone on them, but most of us had to come a great distance. Many came by streetcar number 10. But we would pack our, take our lunch, and go up and sit on the rocks, all over Mount Tolmie in different spots. It was a nice spot. In fact... we're thinking of taking the people for our reunion up there, by bus, so that they could... have a look at the city, and try and get their bearings of when they used to go out there. I imagine every year would be the same, you know, going to normal school because it was so close, you know.

JW: It was all undeveloped at the time.

SM: Oh yes.

JW: Did you have a music teacher... in your year?

SM: Yes, we had Ms. Riddell. She always wore a very... flimsy, georgette chiffon dresses. And she had a certain number of them, and she wore them alternately. We always used to try and guess the pattern. Of what she would wear next, she- and of course, this... was right in the line with the times because we had no extra clothes either. So the, when she just wore those same dresses from September until June, but she would alternate. Well, then of course this was right in line. But I always remember they were, they always fluttered about, there was always something flouncy about them all. [SM laughs] It was never severe. Now Ms. Corsier, on the other hand, was a very severe dresser. She was an athlete. She was an expert in skiing. In fact, if I remember rightly well I think she had won... some meets. I don't remember much about that, she was from Revelstoke. Revelstoke was a skiing area then.

[45:00] SM: But she always dressed very severely. She had a boy's haircut, which of course was very fashionable. She was young. Somehow, I take it that she was much younger than all the rest on the staff. Looking back, maybe she really didn't feel at home. Somehow, I think it was her first year. I'm not too sure. I'm not too sure.

JW: Did you find you were closer to her? You were active in sports.

SM: Yes, yes, we... I think that we were closer to her because of her age, and because of what she had to teach. There was more body contact, there was more... fun entailed. I think, yes.

JW: Was there a choir, I'm going back to Ms. Riddell now, was there a choir? Where you, were you all expected to sing?

SM: Oh, yes, definitely. Going back to the music, music was by rote. You taught music by rote. In other words, you memorized songs, you had certain songs that you were to sing. There was a certain number of songs that were required. And... if you knew anything in the line of music, why then of course you could teach children how to read music, but that wasn't necessary. It was distinct. There's not much theory attached to it. Because ten- and, of course, we were taught to sing without an instrument. Because ten chances to one, there were no

instruments in the schools they were gonna go to. This is what I'm trying to say, we were geared to teach in the areas that we were going to be going to. It wasn't a false situation, is- if they could possibly make it. Everything was geared to what we would be expected to be doing. So naturally, we'd have a tuning fork... see, in order to get the pitch. And... then we'd be able to sing these songs.

JW: Were there any other instructors that year?

SM: C.B. Wood, I told you about. Math and... All Eng- all English, I suppose you might say. Now the two... Sergeant Frost and Sergeant Bane, they were teaching PE, or physical education. They were ex-army. And... in those days why you had... exercises. Today I think you call them physical jerks. And... we were given a book... or maybe we bought it, I don't know. I have it somewhere. Exercise 1, Exercise 2, Exercise 3, all laid out for you. And you taught the youngsters all the different... exercises, that entailed bending and stretching and all this sort of thing. That was, could easily have been put to music because we'd do "one, two, three, four", you know, this sort of thing. If I remember rightly we had a trophy to work for. I don't even remember the name of the trophy. But... in order to pass it, you would have all the... the fellow students in your class... as your pupils and then you would do the instructing. And in this way, while you were competing. And then they had winners. But I don't know even who won. I have a faint recollection of... a girl by the name of Walcott as getting the, the trophy. I was a runner-up, I can remember that, but I... I don't even know the name of it. I don't even know what it entailed, whether it was money, a diploma or what it was. Now, we had diplomas in handwriting... that we worked for as well, that was the MacLean's handwriting. And, of course, when you went into the rural schools you were expected to teach the MacLean's handwriting, and there were diplomas issued for that too. You would send the pupil's samples into Vancouver, and then they would be chosen, and diplomas will be handed out.

[49:50] SM: And I remember I got my diploma at normal school, and of course I was... very eager to get the youngsters to learn how to write so they could send in theirs as well. I can remember that. Old MacLean, he certainly had a big influence on people's handwriting. This was the system where you had to... just run your, run your...

JW: Muscular movement, I think some people called it.

SM: ... and this had to be on, on the desk.

JW: Do you remember seeing Mr. MacLean? At one point he had come over to the...

SM: Yes...

JW: [inaudible crosstalk] assemblies and [inaudible crosstalk].

SM: ...yes, I think he came to us, to normal school... twice that I can remember. Once to give the... diplomas? I think? Yes, I remember seeing him several times, I don't know exactly for what reason. Mustn't I forget Ms. Piercey... who... was our secretary. She was the one who kept all the messages straight, and got all the complaints, and made all the arrangements for us to see the staff. There was none of this business of just going up and knocking on the door, you know, you always went through Ms. Piercey. She was the one who sent word if you were asked to be called in. And you would always quake your boots wondering... who had reported something, or rather on you, you know, when you were not at the, at the school. I can remember some of the students... apparently doing their homework on the number 10 streetcar as they were heading up to school. And this was reported by someone who had seen this. And on another streetcar, why, there were one of the boys had been writing out his lesson plans... on, on the streetcar on his way. But we had loads of homework, we were just loaded down to bare. Something just struck me. Mrs. [Visty?] to used to teach health. And we used to make these enormous posters... all by hand. I remember that now. Health, nutrition, this was her line [inaudible], and that was a big subject as far as teaching was concerned, was health. It just struck me now, but...

JW: Did you see Ms. Piercy often?

SM: You mean since?

JW: No, while at the school.

SM: Oh yes, yes. We'd pass by quite frequently. Now, she became... a Mrs... [Olm?]. Her children went to school

with my children. Mrs. May. And they divorced, and she became... Mrs... Sherwood. And she only died October the 28th, '76.

JW: She'd be one of the people who wasn't... quite as... standoffish as your instructor, she would be... kind of an in between?

SM: Oh she would, no, she was, she was very austere. I don't think any of us, us kids thought that the staff was very human. [SM laughs] You know what I'm trying to say? We were in awe, as I say we were so naive. I was sorry to hear that she passed away because it was only so recently.

JW: Did Dr. MacLaurin, use Mr. MacLaurin then still?

SM: No, he was Dr. MacLaurin then.

JW: Oh, he had his doctorate then.

SM: I'm sure he was.

JW: Did he instruct you in anything?

SM: This is what I was wondering... [inaudible]. No, he was Mr. MacLaurin then. You know, I don't remember him teaching any subjects. He must have done though, because that staff is small.

[55:00] JW: Did you have the literary society when you were there? Some years that was a very big. [Inaudible crosstalk]

SM: I don't know, I don't remember.

JW: They put on different... plays and projects and [inaudible crosstalk].

SM: Well we must have had, but I don't think was called as a society.

JW: Later on it did form a society.

SM: I don't, I don't think it was a society, because we put on plays. We were expected to do that when we went out to teach.

JM: This was a training ground then.

SM: Of course. Everything was geared to teach, no matter what we did. It wasn't, it wasn't to enlarge your experiences and to make you a better person, to learn anything. Everything was geared to what you were going to teach.

JM: Did you have morning assemblies then, do you remember?

SM: Oh yes. Yes, we did. Something crossed my mind just when you said something about... It was literary societies, no, we didn't have that. We just were expected to... to perform and... we put on plays of all kinds. We put on debates, and the assembly. You see, when I went out to teach in this place called Dorr, the criteria all through that valley was how good a Christmas program you could put on. And we all put on the program so that it would be on a different night to all the rest. When I went down to Dorr, I found out that there were three other normal students, from my year, that were in the other schools. So we formed a basketball team and we got one of the local women to be the fifth. And we would play down close to the border, and we would invite anyone to play against us, and then everybody would come and they would enjoy the game and then we'd have a dance afterwards. This is the what we used to do in the country. This is during the hungry thirties, you know, when things were were really tough. When you had to have your own way of entertainment. But the Christmas concerts were expected to last from two to three hours. And if you had 10 pupils, why then you had to coach them to be able to carry on that length of time. If you had twenty pupils you were a little more fortunate. But everybody had to be in it. You had to perform... had to raise money if the parents couldn't afford it in order to get gifts... from Santa Claus, you had to pick a Santa Claus. In other words, when you got to teaching in a rural

school you grew up overnight because they looked up to you as the leader of the community. And the odd thing is too that the schools were the center of the community. They became a community hall. And this is what I- when we came to Victoria after years when they, the schools were so cloistered. Nobody was allowed to get into them, excepting on school business. Now, you see them begin to open up, they're beginning to rent the auditoriums out, and they're having... different do's and expecting the parents to come and so on. But in the rural areas, the school was the church... for whatever traveling minister came through, or priests. It was the... clinic, if a doctor happened to come into town. It was the women's institute, the men's institute, if the place had such a thing that was where they met. You had to have dances in order to raise money, so you danced in the, in the classroom. So things were movable. It really became the center, and if there were feuds in the community, why, the teacher was expected to not take part. But to be... the mediator.

JW: You really had a big job.

SM: We did have! As I say, we grew up overnight. We really truly did. So when we look back on the normal school days where everything was geared for us to teach, it was well done. It really was. Because everything had one objective: for us to cope when we got into the rural schools.

[59:50] SM: We had a debate going on in the auditorium. The old normal school now, I think that's where their library is. And the stage was at one end. And we wore short skirts in those days. And most short skirts was just a piece of material that had a... elastic around the top, and there was no shape to it. And this, [inaudible] was going to be on... the debating team, and she was extremely nervous, and she... was going like this, you know, and when she got up on stage, well, it was up to here.

JW: [JW laughing] She just folded her skirt up too high.

SM: And of course, we all gasped because looking up it was still shorter. Anyhow that was over. But as soon as she got off stage, why, someone told her about it and down it came, you see? She was given word to come to Mrs. Vister. We knew what it was about, and so did she. But, there we all stood outside. And of course, when Vera came back out again, she said Mrs. Bister's face... literally fell. Because here she had seen Vera with a skirt up to here, and now it was down to there, you know? [SM laughs]

[1:01:15] [END OF AUDIO]

[1:01:21] [END OF RECORDING]