

[Part 2 of Judith Windle interviewing Mr. Percy Wilkinson in 1978]

[00:00] Percy Wilkinson: Yes classes were large in- in- in- in city schools. It was, it was normally expected a class- no one would complain until the class got, got more than 30. 30 would be a normal class. And it'd be quite a experience for an 18 year old to teach a lesson, never having tried to teach anything like that to a group at all. So we were, we were all instructed that you had to plan your lesson. And there were five steps in the lesson, I forget the exact steps now. I shouldn't.

PW: Well, then before you went off to teach your first lesson you were given a topic, you knew the grade, and the school, and the principal's name, and the teacher's name, and where it would be, and the topic. And then, so then you had to prepare your lesson plan; your aim, and your way you'd do it, and the main part, and your review. And having done that you'd go to the school and you'd do your best... And I must say that the regular classroom teachers were most helpful, and that the classes were most, were most generous. They, they were very kind to us. But afterwards of course, or no during that time, a member of the Normal School class would drop in... For... An indefinite period of time... either the whole lesson or part of the time. Sometimes the principal would drop in, so sometimes you might have three people: the classroom teachers, the principal, and the Normal School instructor there, and you were doing your best struggling through, trying to remember your aim, and various things that you would be cautioned to do during the course of your lesson. Afterwards, the day afterwards, you would be- there'd be list on the board, and your name would be on the list, and you would be requested to appear at a certain time, to a certain instructor's office, where he or she would review your lesson.

PW: And there are many many occasions when after much trepidation many poor people came out feeling very dejected and despondent. Although by and large I must say the staff were where most encouraging and helpful but inevitably there would be times when there'd be [PW laughs] periods feeling impossible, [the worst of it all?] I think that's all on the, on the teacher [inaudible]. Those, those, those periods. No, you asked about the auditorium and the, and the bus, and the frieze at the back. I remember, I remember them being there. And I suppose at one time I probably knew... Not perhaps where they came from, but certainly who was represented. I don't know... It'd be quite appropriate for them to be in a Normal School, and perhaps they were standard equipment in Normal Schools across Canada. I, I, right now I forget the, the origin of the, of the word "Normal" - why "Normal" became attached to teacher training institutions. It's, It's in many ways, it's a very inappropriate word. The frieze at the back is... is if I remember rightly, it's... it's a replica of a... a Greek- a well known Greek frieze. And I suppose it was there... Oh I suppose to... encourage us. In this annual report of 100 Years of Education, there's a picture of a Victoria Normal School art room, which has various... various... various artistic embellishments on the back there. I... no doubt they were, they were in our room too. Very probably the same [art in them?] but I don't recall them now. It was... it was a room on the northwest corner of me, having a north light... It's, in fact, maybe even the room that the were media in last year I don't know if they- were the windows blacked out there or blocked out?

[04:54] Judith Windle: [inaudible response]

[04:55] PW: Yep.

[05:01] PW: The ordinary examination, the high school course in those days, was entirely an academic course. I, I had... an odd career. I didn't really go to high school and got my matric at Sprott Shaw night school and wrote McGill [to train?]. To carry over from the days of Victoria College being part of McGill, and the only external way of writing in- external articulating it was to do it through to McGill. But the course was similar to UBC, which would be the BC course and it was English, French... Latin... Mathematics... Now you can have... Oh, and history... And you can have a choice of a- I'm sorry, English and French, and History and Math. You can have a choice of a third language, or a science. Science was, was not a common... subject in most schools because of lab facilities, and really until about that time there'd been, there was practically no General Science of any type in the schools at all.

PW: So I wrote, I wrote English, French, Latin... History, and Math. And later on, when I took my first year again, I didn't go to Victoria High, I did it by correspondence with Queens- that was the only way you could do anything. They didn't give you much help, but I did English, French, Latin... Mathematics... and they wouldn't allow History as... as a subject, then you had to do a Science. So I labored long, long, hours, having never done any Science, to do my Physics and of course I didn't go down to Kingston to do the lab work. And... after normal school when I went across [EBC?] for their summer session, they wouldn't give me credit for Queens' Physics because I hadn't... hadn't done it there. So I took the whole course and did the lab work there and my French too. But it

was, that was... most people did French and Latin in those days... and Math, and in some cases History. And it wasn't until a few years later, perhaps with the introduction of this Junior High School that Science came in at all.

[07:35] JW: When you were at the Normal School then did you not have a Science class?

[07:39] PW: No, Mr. Freeman got Nature Study. Now, on the other timetables- another thing we had to work out was timetables, and give the proper amount of time to the various schools of thought. Nature Study, believe it or not, was the only [linear?] thing to Science we had. There was perhaps a very little bit of smatterings of General Science that probably would now be down in Grade 2 ,or 3, years for us. There was art. We were all expected to do some artwork. There was, there was language which included English and grammar, syntax... Oh, composition... Arithmetic... Spelling oh yes, spelling well spelling... Singing... PT. Geography and history [inaudible]. And... Was that it...? Basically a general, general [inaudible] of the elementary school.

[08:37] JW: Did you have the writing class?

[08:39] PW: And the writing... Mr. MacLean who was at the Vancouver Normal School had... perfected [inaudible] he had... He made the best of, the most of the opportunity. He developed the MacLean muscular movement of writing and... I worked hard at normal school. I had, I believe, half decent writing at the beginning of the year, and I tried hard on this muscular movement. And I'm sorry to say that my writing has [never?] been the same since and the only thing that I did not manage to achieve at Normal School was my MacLean Muscular Movement Writing certificate. All my friends did, but I was never able to bring it up to that. I felt it had certain, certain advantages but then... again there's been much criticism of that also. But no, there was no science at all, this is elementary school and.. and I would think that those who took teacher training at... at the secondary school level probably didn't get very much either.

[09:58] PW: Notice at that time, for a little while, people with an acceptable degree, Art or Science, would go to a Normal School after Christmas and then go on to the very new Department of Education at... UBC. And Mr. Wood, after being at Victoria for three or four years, went over... mainly to the Department of Education at UBC. He did... And there was a good deal of interchange or borrowing from other departments. Various people... Somebody gave from the psychology and philosophy section gave Education Psychology in the department. Somebody... Various people gave lectures in [Government?]. It was very very small indeed. Dean Coleman, I think was the head of it, and Dean McCannon though was [inaudible]. But Mr. Wood, for a time, was one of the main members of it, until he became Assistant Registrar and then moved over to become Registrar and continue for many years and... When he... retired a few years ago as Registrar Emeritus of UBC. But... I joined the depression year, I remember up in Duncan... coming to the Duncan High School. Laurie Wallace came a year or two later, which was a small high school, but the principal was... A former UBC engineering grad... but he wasn't [inaudible] doing any engineering, [any money in] engineering at that time, he'd taken his training course at UBC... Which was a shorter course than the normal course but... There may have been some... some science... training given to teaching the science, but he would have some basic science in his course and... This is what often happened... that somebody who was on the staff would have had some academic university level science training, but as far as the teaching of science it didn't appear until the high school level.

[12:06] JW: When you were at the Normal School, did you have the morning assembly?

[12:09] PW: Oh! Yes, I missed that. I think the classes were an hour, but I'm not sure they may have been 45 minutes. It seems to me that when I went to UBC summer sessions and they were 55 minutes, I found them long. As far as I know we began at nine... Or maybe a bit before, but I think was nine... It all depended on that number ten [inaudible], but I think it was nine to twelve and one to three, and I think we had three periods in the morning and three in the afternoon. But we always began with an assembly in the auditorium and the auditorium was quite large enough to take probably 175, certainly easy... The staff would be on the stage, and that's not the big stage they have now, that's a little tiny stage if you look at it sometime it would take... At most perhaps a dozen people if you're very careful. But they, the staff was there and they're quite high up and... but we always began, as all schools did in those days, with the Lord's Prayer. And it was just... It was unthinkable to start any, any school anywhere without the Lord's Prayer. And then there'd be announcements by the principal, or anybody else that had any announcements to make... And they were frequent, there were all sorts of things there. And as far as I can remember Ms. Ridell, who taught primary work and singing, would then took over for whatever the remaining time there might be between the announcements and the first class. And we had a group, the school... would be singing. There were always plenty of girls [inaudible] there. And we would learn... every now and again a new song. There were five "Coney and Wickett's" brown-covered song books for schools. Music Words, one,

two, three, four, five or six... and we would learn these... these, these songs because, probably we were going to use them in our schools because these books were prescribed to the schools. So we would learn to sing them, and we'd have a little exercise on thoughts of... you know, do re mi and all that... And we would learn a song or two... [every now and again?] and we'd sing one or two songs that we knew... before we went off to work. Reminds me of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. But this was daily, every day. And... It wasn't a bad way to begin a day. We all learned together, began with the Lord's Prayer. We'd have announcements for the days routine or the next day too, and we'd have a song which sort of...

[14:59] PW: A sense of sort of togetherness about a song, and then we went off to our classes. There were only three classes so that you didn't have a travel very far, and I don't know how much time was given... certainly not more than five minutes. There was a, perhaps you were given another minute or two. I think perhaps that PT was perhaps the last one in the morning. At least it seemed to be that way for us because we always need to change into... I don't think we changed down completely, I forget, but we always had to put on different shoes and... strip down... Of course, in those days we all a shirt and a tie... And a suit, I think. I don't think I ever wore a jacket and trousers, a two-piece outfit, until after the Second World War. I always wore suit at school, and I always wore a shirt and tie. I think I was just getting out of the hard colour period... Just before, I may even have gone to Normal School, the first day or two, with a hard colour on. Certainly all the staff would wear hard colours. [PW laughs]

PW: The final day our diplomas were mailed to us. And the results were announced in the paper sometime later. But even so, there was, there was the last morning, there was a gathering and there was... everybody expressively, the staff expressed their best wishes and... But it was a... [inaudible] it began same way, but it was a very nostalgic moment. And we had our annual, got our autographs... So we ended up with... I don't know if we sang "The Maple Leaf Forever" or "O Canada". In those days it was touch and go, you could choose whichever you liked, very well, but the national anthem was the normal way of ending any... any anything. In fact, you're probably too young to remember the fact that at the end of every moving picture show in town, or anywhere else in BC, it always ended with the national anthem, and... In those days no one would have thought of moving, or getting a coat, until after the end of that.

[Long pause]

PW: Oh... Yes, Mr. Ainslie Helmcken, the city archivist... would be able to give you some information about the beguiling [sic], the beginning of the of the building of that Normal School because he lived... Somewhere nearby... I know that when he attended the university school he passed... through the Normal School frequently... and can tell you something about the beginnings of the Normal School. As you realize, it's on a... a, an excellent site... but there were... there was a great deal of bedrock right in front of the the entrance, which was removed... much to the... disappointment of the Reverend Robert Connell, who was well known in Victoria. He was... judging an [inaudible], a naturalist, a writer... one of the... Certainly if not one of the founders of the CCF party with Woodsworth, and the Steve's... Certainly one of the founders in, in, in BC, and I think perhaps one time a member of the Provincial Legislature, but... And he wrote for, I think the Times, a naturalist column. Much after the fashion that Freeman King wrote in more recent times but... I knew Mr. Connell very well because during my [PW laughs] attempts to get my senior [inaudible], my English through Queens... I had to get some assistance from Mr. Connell. I went to Mr. [McConnell?], and I remember him telling me how... saddened he was at the... by the fact that the rocks in front of the Normal School had been blown up.

[20:00] PW: But they were apparently excellent examples of the... glacial erosion, back in the very early early days. I believe that there are some examples of it still... across Richmond Road to the west of the Normal School. But Mr. Connell felt that they somehow should have been maintained as examples of what the Ice Age had done to us. The grounds had been laid out, I think, fairly early on... but possibly during the First World War, and for little time afterwards when there was a minor depression throughout Canada in 1921 to 23... Not a great deal had been done, but certainly by 1926... They were in much the same form as they are now as far as the lawns. Rock walls on the, on the Richmond side, the gates... certainly there were, there were plenty of rose gardens [inaudible] there. But not the trees on either side of the main driveway. I'm told by one or two of my friends who attended normal school that time... that Mr. Gibson- Dr. Gibson planted those, or had them planted... and since he was in charge of Agricultural Education with the Province it seemed quite likely. Certainly, they were not there when we attended in '26, and they may have been planted towards the end '27, so they are 50, 51, years old and... I suppose they, yes, they do add... they add to the appearance. There's certainly different appearance from driving... going up there without anything. We had, during the year, we all had, we had a school garden. We all had to... we had a little plot, every one of us had a little plot and... Again, this would be Dr.

Gibson's... interests, I suppose, but I think... as far as I can recall, it was to the North, where the Army huts are now... There must have been enough good ground in there. I know... I had forgotten about those until some of my friends at the reunion mentioned that... that I was the bane of the lives of most of them because I have very large feet, and the paths between the plots were so small that I couldn't help but encroach on other people's garden. I was forever... stamping out some of their prized seedlings or something. But, can you imagine 135 students, each with a little... I don't know was it four by eight or what... plot, on which we were encouraged to sow seeds and weed them and... eventually go out to our little schools and encourage... agricultural education. Of course, during the First War, perhaps more than the Second War... People were encouraged to use vacant plots, and there were hundreds around Victoria that ended up plowed and cultivated by people to grow food, to grow vegetables, mainly vegetables. I'm not sure how much, how many school gardens... Resulted from our school garden, but it was a one of, another activity.

[Long pause]

[23:50] PW: I think Dunlop House, that's the house to the east of the Normal School... I think it was there at that time. I do hope that in the expansion of Camosun College's... Large, new... I don't know, the hundred thousand square feet they are going to add to something, I do hope it doesn't come in front of the... I hope it won't be. I don't, I... Perhaps they'll take out Army huts and put it in the back there somewhere but... It's amazing to think of all the... the fact that that building now... Is the center for, I presume hundreds of people... even working in the halls. Certainly we'll, we'll look forward to seeing the refurbished... Young Building in 1980.

[24:46] [END OF AUDIO]

[24:55] [END OF RECORDING]