Lilly Ann Selby

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LS: I was born in Kelvington, Saskatchewan. I lived on a farm three and a half miles north of the town. We were a seed grain farmer; not just ordinary, but seed grain, which we sold by the bushel in bags to people who wanted seed rather than ordinary wheat. I lived there on the farm for many years. My father was a director of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; he had actually been one of the organizers. My mother was one of the founding members of the local Co-op store. So, I come by my socialism honestly and have never walked away from it. It is the only political scheme that makes sense to me; that we care for everyone in society rather than for ourselves and our own taxes and all that stuff. It makes no sense to me at all.

I lived in Kelvington most of my life until I got married, although we spent one year in Regina going to high school there when I was in grade nine. That was the spring that my father developed cancer, and he died in June of 1944. It was probably the worst thing that ever happened to our family, because we really did need him.

When I was in grade eleven and twelve, I went to Dallas, Texas to go to school, because the local school did not have particularly good teachers at that time. Most of the good teachers had joined the army and were gone. I came back and went to University of Saskatchewan and took Agriculture, thinking that I would someday become a seed grain producer. It never happened. But at the beginning of my second year I met this young fellow from southern Saskatchewan, and we hit it off. So the following September we got married at the beginning of our third year at university. Of course, by Christmastime I was pregnant, and that kind of put an end to that part of my career.

Shortly after that, we wound up on a farm just south of Kelvington. We decided that what we would do is raise dairy cattle. We got a contract with the creamery in Canora to buy our whole milk, and bought I think 12 cows. For the rest of the time we were on the farm, we sold whole milk to the creamery in Canora. But we had crop failure after crop failure after crop failure, and just couldn't make it. You have to have money coming in if you're going to stay farming, and we just couldn't do it. My husband went to Drayton Valley and got a job with Mobil Oil and I ran the farm that one summer. But then, we had a major frost very early and our crop just went.

So, we sold the cattle, sold the machinery, and turned the farm back over to his father, who had provided the money. We moved to Drayton Valley, where Alf was working for Mobil Oil. He stayed working for Mobil Oil for a number of years, both in the field and on rigs. But eventually our children got old enough that they had to go to school. At that time, he was working on a cutline outside of Swan Hills, and there was no school. So I said, "Fine, I will stay with mother and you go and work." So, he went looking for another job, and got a job with the Conservation Board in Devon, Alberta. We found a little house and moved to Devon, and lived there for six years. The kids went to school. I went to university; Alf went to university.

I got a job as a teacher at the school, and eventually in 1965, we moved to the City. Edmonton Public hired me to teach at McDougall Elementary Junior High in what they called a modified grade eight class. I said, "What is a modified grade eight class?" The principal said, "I haven't

any idea; they just put it here." I had students from {age} twelve to seventeen in my classroom. Some of them had failed grade 7 four times. It was an interesting experience. I applied for and got a job at Jasper Place Composite as a counselor, which I had been taking training for.

I stayed at J.P. for five years, but in 1965 my husband developed leukemia and died. That meant that I had these six kids to bring up. I had four of my own and two of my cousin's by this time. It was challenging, but I continued to work for the Edmonton Public School Board in various positions until 1981, and then got a job as the district psychologist for St. Albert Protestant Separate School Board. I was there for five or six years. I then worked for one year in Calgary and moved to Vancouver with the Special Services Resource Team, which dealt only with multiply handicapped children, and their placement in the normal classroom, and the provision of aid and all kinds of stuff like that. I worked for Vancouver until I retired, and I retired in I forget what year; doesn't matter.

I was sixty-six when I retired. Then I did contract work for West Van and Richmond and Maple Ridge and any of the other districts that needed a psychologist for a number of years. Ultimately, when I got to be seventy-four, I quit working and came home. My kids were here, with the exception of Anita, who was living on Vancouver Island and still is. The rest of the kids are here, and I'm here, and there we go. That was in 2004 I came home. Since I came home I've been involved with the Stephen Lewis Foundation group called 'The GANG.' We raise money for the support of grandmothers in Africa who are raising their orphaned grandchildren because of AIDS. I also belong to the Canadian Federation of University Women, and this group provides bursaries and scholarships for women who are going to the University of Alberta. I have been at various times involved with the NDP at the local level and the provincial level since I came home. I've recently kind of moved away from that. You can only do so many things when you get old, and I think I'm now classified as old.

Q: What do you remember about Jasper Place?

LS: We moved to Jasper Place in 1965 into what was a nice kind of middle class labouring community. There was, of course, public transit. We were on 163rd Street right across from St. Francis Xavier. I worked at Jasper Place Composite, which was four blocks down the road. The kids went initially to Jasper Place, Hillcrest, and Mayfield schools, because of their ages. The second year we were there, I went to work at Jasper Place Composite full time, and Alf went to university full time, working evenings for Drug and Alcohol Abuse. He worked for them for the rest of his life, and ultimately was the supervisor of the outpatient clinic.

Jasper Place at that time was very much a successfully working-class neighbourhood. The people who lived next door to us worked for transit; the man next door to that worked for the Royal Bank as an administrator of some sort. Everybody had a job. There was no unemployment that we were aware of. The streets were well maintained and nobody seemed to be in need, which was rather nice. Jasper Place had been a separate community until two years before we got there, and then it was taken over by the City. Whether this was a takeover or an amalgamation, I was never sure. But it was part of the City by the time we got there.

Bernie Keeler was the principal of Jasper Place Composite when I went there, and the second year, he became the president of the ATA, and we got somebody from Edmonton Public, who I didn't think was a particularly good principal. I stayed at that school and worked with the kids. It was kind of a middle class, lower middle class community, with lots of kids doing what they wanted to do, what was ahead of them, what they could expect. We used to spend a lot of time talking about what the possibilities for them were. It was a very interesting job; I liked it a lot. The community was well served by Edmonton Transit. There were buses up and down 163rd all the time. There were lots of schools, lots of families with young children to high school age kids. They all had schools to go to. There were Catholic schools and Protestant schools, and just a good mixed neighbourhood.

Q: Was there an ethnic mix?

LS: It was pretty white. Most of the time that we lived in J.P., it was mostly white - religiously mixed, but basically Europeans.

Q: What about Indigenous people?

LS: We had one Indigenous young man who lived with us for a while and went to Jasper Place. My daughter and her boyfriend found this kid in the Fort Saskatchewan jail. He had been arrested for smoking weed, I think, but he ended up living with us. When he got out, he came to live with us and went to J.P. for the rest of that year. He was a Cree from Yellowknife and ultimately became a clothing designer. His name was Tim Sikyea, and I don't know whether he's still around or not. But certainly, he had made a name for himself for a while. But, he was the only Aboriginal I met in all those years.

Q: Were you aware of any Chinese families who ran convenience stores?

LS: I don't remember any Chinese convenience stores when I lived there.

Q: Where did you do your shopping?

LS: I did my shopping on Stony Plain Road at the Safeway. It was the only big grocery store around. With six people eating, you needed to get to a grocery store.

Q: Did you have a garden?

LS: No, I was not a gardener. It just wasn't one of those things I did.

Q: Were there gardens in the community?

LS: I didn't see it, if it was there. The yards were not that big. I think they were 50 feet wide and 120 feet long, something like that. There wasn't a lot of land to plant gardens.

Q: Why did you choose to live in Jasper Place?

LS: We had lived in Devon for six years, but we'd been back and forth to the City; it was kind of our go-to place. I don't know who found the house to rent on 163rd, but we rented the little house on 163rd and then bought the bigger house beside it at 9217 – 163 Street.

Q: Might the fact that it was a more affordable area also have been a factor in the mix of people who lived here?

LS: Certainly it was a factor with us. We could afford to make the down payment on the big house next door. The people who lived there were a really nice American couple. He worked for Burns. They liked us. So they were pretty reasonable on the arrangement.

Q: Were people judgemental against women working outside the home? Was that something you encountered?

LS: No, I don't ever remember running into that particular barrier; I think because I started out as a teacher and moved on into educational psychology not too many years later. It was a different group that I associated with.

Q: It can be a struggle balancing work with raising a family.

LS: Until '69, of course, when my husband died, we had two salaries. By the time he died, Peggy was in university and Jim was working in Prince George, and I only had the four younger ones at school. So it was easier.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the Alberta Teachers' Association?

LS: I was just a member of the ATA as a result of being a teacher. I never became involved with the political aspects of the ATA. I was busy doing other things.

Q: Were you involved with their strike?

LS: We were all out on the street. You were told where to go and when to be there. At one point, they appointed me a district supervisor, and I had to get up early in the morning and gather up all the pamphlets and go out and distribute them to the various schools where there were teachers gathered, giving out pamphlets to people going by.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the strike? What led to it? How well did it go?

LS: The strike was basically for wages. The wages for teachers in Edmonton had been almost stable for a number of years, and there'd been a push, but nothing gave. So the Alberta Teachers' Association took us out on strike. We were out the first time for three weeks, and at that time the government paid the school as though we were working for three weeks. But if we stayed out longer they stopped paying the wages. On the Sunday before, it would've become the third week the government met and ordered us back to work. So we never found out whether they would actually pay or not.

Q: What was the result of that order back to work? Did you see wage increases?

LS: We kept negotiating and negotiating at that level, and ultimately we got, I think, six percent; six percent sticks in my head as what we got as an increase as a result. But we certainly didn't get the 14 percent which we wanted.

Q: What were the possibilities for students, given the working-class community?

LS: They had mostly hourly wage jobs. There was a group at J.P., I forget what they were called, but they were all the top academically. Every one of them went on to university and became doctors and dentists and teachers and lawyers. But the rest of the group, for the most part, got

what we would call hourly wages. They worked at the tire shop; they worked at the grocery store; they got the jobs that they could find.

Q: Was university regarded as a ticket out?

LS: Yes.

Q: Were you aware of residential school students being bussed in from St. Albert?

LS: Yes they did. But somehow when they got to J.P., they didn't really become part of the student body. It was almost like they brought them in as a group and they were kept in those classes. The only place where there was mixing was in sports. These kids were mostly from Vancouver Island; they were Haidas. Many of them were excellent athletes. They were on the basketball team and the curling and hockey and football and you name it. You found the Aboriginal kids there, but not in the political aspect of the school or student body. They didn't appear at all.

Q: Was it almost designed so the students couldn't integrate, because the bus would arrive just before and after school?

LS: That's true. I hadn't really - that's interesting; I never thought of that. I was busy in my office with other kids who had stayed after school to talk to me. So my awareness of what was happening with those Aboriginal kids was very limited.

Q: When you were young in Saskatchewan, what was your feeling about the CCF?

LS: We lived in Regina the year of 1943 and '44. We were in Regina when the CCF won. My brother and I went downtown, and the Leader Post had a big bulletin across the top listing the MLAs as they were elected. The people were cheering and carrying on; then they realized what they'd done. They're kind of looking at one another and the place got quiet. They had never imagined the Socialists winning. That of course was T.C. Douglas and his group, and they were such a good government. They made lots of mistakes, don't get me wrong, but they were a good politically sound government. My favourites, even if I was too young to vote.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the challenges of farming?

LS: First of all, you have to have the land itself, which is expensive. But you have to have the equipment with which to do the work. It cannot be done by hand. The machine age is well upon us, and machinery is very expensive. The only place the farmers usually can get enough funding to buy equipment is to go to the bank. Of course, the bank is not in the business of supporting farmers for the good of the farm; they are there to make profit. Every month, out of the small amount of money that we made selling milk, we owed the bank half of it before we had a nickel to spend. They got their half and then we had what was left. The weather is the biggest enemy of every farmer I know. There's nothing we can do about it. Even prayer doesn't help. But you live with it because you know that's the reality that farming is. There's no predicting what's going to happen, and you just go along until you can't anymore.

Q: All the farmers I know are equipment-rich and cash-poor.

LS: That's for sure; that's for sure.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the dairy industry?

LS: I don't know anything about it. I've been away from farming since - oh God!

Q: So the issues around it weren't present at the time you were farming?

LS: Had nothing to do with us.

Q: When you started at J.P. Composite, it must have been quite a new school.

LS: Actually the high school was built, I think, five years before I went there. It was a big, well-designed school. It had wings with flat rooves and was intended to be built up. Instead, when the Edmonton Public took over, they hired an architect and he designed this circular thing that sits out there with very little classroom space. I don't know where they found him.

Q: I believe it was leading the trend in composite high schools. What is a composite high school?

LS: A composite high school, as I understood it when I went there, is a school that has a strong academic line. It has a regular 'kids go to school,' and then it has the trades. In Jasper Place there was automotives, there was plumbing, there was typesetting, there was diesel, carpentry, hairdressing; a lot of different trades. The basic training could be given at the school so that when they came out, they went into their third year of apprenticeship instead of starting from zero. It worked very well. But the Edmonton Public School Board didn't like the concept, and after a number of years they got rid of it. I understand it's coming back, but what do I know?

Q: Was there streaming?

LS: Yes, pretty well. There were some some crossovers, but not that many. The trades, in particular, were kind of separate from the rest of the student body.

Q: What was the interaction between those students?

LS: I have no idea.

Q: Regarding transportation, was it difficult to get downtown from Jasper Place?

LS: I had a car. I never rode the bus. I didn't know you could ride buses.

Q (Mark): I don't necessarily have a question, but I did a quick lookup of the Indigenous gentleman that you talked about that you brought into your house. I just came across his daughter looking for pieces from when he was a young designer. If it's the same person, he's now moved on to running spiritual Aboriginal ceremonies.

LS: Oh I'm sure that's Tim; sounds like him.

Q: Are there any other memories of Jasper Place you'd like to share?

LS: When I went to Jasper Place when Bernie Keeler was the principal, that staff worked very well together. After he went to the ATA - and I think the guy's name was Meyer that became the principal - it didn't work that well. I was told that, at one point, he said when I moved, on "that's the last of the Keelerites." So he had moved all of the original staff to other schools.

Q: How about some of the people you worked with? For instance, Art Walker?

LS: Oh, Art Walker had been a defenseman on the Edmonton Eskimos when they won the Grey Cup. He was a really fine person and a great counselor. I understand he was there for two years when I was there, and then he moved back to Chicago, I think. I was told many years later that he had drowned scuba diving in one of the big lakes in the northern states. I have no idea; I didn't follow up on it. But he was a very fine man. Pat Calvert was a fulltime counselor, and she and I were friends for the rest of her life. We went on trips together; we just spent time together - always. She was one of my very best friends. Over the years you acquire a friend here and there and the next place, not always at the same time, but you get the long-lived ones that are really worthwhile.

Q: Were you there at the time that Johnny Bright was coaching the basketball team?

LS: Yes.

Q: Do you have any recollections about that?

LS: No, I had nothing to do with basketball.

Q: It was a big school.

LS: Yes, 1,850 kids the day I walked in the door. That's a lot of kids.

Q: Were you there in the period of the caretakers' strike? I think that was October, 1970.

LS: No, I was gone.

[END]