Conducted at the home of Les Fairbrother on Nolan St, Consul, SK
LF = Les Fairbrother: Interviewee
MG = Meagan Gough: Interviewer
ET = Emmelia Taylor: Videographer
7 March 2008

MG: Oh, technology—

LF: I got one of those global positioning things—

MG: Oh, "GPS"?

LF: So I am trying to learn how to use that, so I am making some headway.

MG: Yeah, it takes a while to learn how to use these sorts of things and then we figure it out.

LS: Yeah, once you get kind of the hang of it and what they had on their minds, you can get what it is all about I guess.

But I came from Edmonton then and still have a lot of nieces and nephews up there. I seldom get back to see them.

MG: You came from Edmonton?

LS: Actually, our hometown was Tofield, Alberta; we moved there in 1933 because the country was dried out. It was a post office town I guess at that time. So we were in between three or four towns that were about the same distance I guess. New Sarepta, we got our mail there for awhile, because my brother was running a truck out there, hauling groceries and cream out there in the dirty thirties. My brother had a cream haul 14 miles east of Tofield so he would occasionally pick up the mail there. Otherwise, they got their mail in a farmer's (rural) mailbox up the road.

MG: And you were born there? What year?

LF: My folks actually, when I was born, were living in Fleet, Alberta which is between- do you know where it is? It's between Stettler and Coronation.

MG: Was it a little town, Fleet?

LF: It was at the time. It had a few businesses and things; it didn't have a bar or anything like that, but it had good business and stores. A man that was talked about a lot there was a man named Mack Schlemp; he ran the store, even though I was only about five years old.

MG: Mack Schlemp? What was the story about him?

LS: Well, he was one of the storekeepers and like Dad took all his grain to him there in Fleet.

MG: So what year were you born?

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LF: December 5, 1927. Then, my folks, when the dirty thirties hit, decided to move up into the Edmond country, up in the bush, so it was forest country up where we moved to and they worked really hard and I think we had a better life there, once we got some of the bush out of the way. Whatever we grew it always got some good rain, sometimes even too much rain – and too many mosquitoes, too! Because we were using horses, not tractors, too, mind you we had tractors as well. We didn't have a tractor for quite awhile, but later on they could afford a tractor I guess.

MG: What were your parent's names?

LF: My dad's name was Carter Marion Fairbrother. Marion was his middle name and my mother's name was Frances.

MG: And what was her maiden name?

LF: Peters. My dad's parents, they actually came from England to the States there.

MG: Oh, really?

LF: But my dad was born in the states and he lost his mother when he was a baby, I guess. So, my grandfather he had, I guess, some special friends who brought him up, but he left at about 15 years old on his own, him and his brother. His brother was older than him. And so they ended up in North Dakota just north of a place called (?) which was a pretty good-sized town. I was up and visited there in the seventies, that was the first time I got to see there. Then we had a family reunion in Wisconsin where they originated and they worked along the way. I think my dad worked in the iron mines along the way somewhere. I think it was a mountain of iron actually and they had horses and fresnos for digging out the dirt and I guess it was pretty lousy with the iron. He said you could be going up the hill and had all these little breakthroughs and you could look down and see people working underneath. I got to wondering if there was any danger of ending up underneath! However, he didn't stay in any danger for long.

MG: So what brought you to this part of the world?

LF: I was on seismograph here and I met my good wife.

MG: She's from here? And what is her full name?

LF: Margaret Julia Fairbrother, a wonderful woman. I can't even explain it. She'd just make you so welcome when you come around. Anyone—

MG: What is her maiden name?

LF: Backman.

MG: So she is related to the Backmans?

LF: She was the Backmans' daughter, yes. These boys out here, I guess you have probably heard of Blair and Clare, have you interviewed them?

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MG: Yes, I interviewed Blair a couple days ago.

LF: He's the brother to my wife. Oh, life goes on I guess. She would have been 78.9, I guess. A lot of people are living up to 100 now, but 78 is pretty good, too!

MG: And you have children?

LF: I got seven children. They are all so good to me. I got four daughters; they all resemble their mother so much. Whenever they come around I always feel so comfortable. The boys are good, too.

Rodney, he is my third child down, and he works for his uncles' Blair and Clare and he has some property here of his own and bought this elevator here in town. I don't know where he's got the time, but he runs a ranch. He's got a share in a ranch near here and he went into pigs, so he's got a pig farm. He's got over 300 pigs now I guess. So, on top of all that, I don't know, I think he's got too much to do, in my opinion! But he comes in to see me regularly.

MG: You mentioned you were working seismograph.

LF: Yeah, I decided to take a little break off the welding thing and I went off for a few months to do seismograph but then went back to welding. I really was a shooter, I guess. To start with, I was the shooter's helper and then I became the shooter, the one who gets to handle the dynamite, put the dynamite down the hole and shake the ground. Yeah, I got some pictures handy. Do you want to see any of them?

MG: Sure! We'd love to see them, any of them you want to share...

LF: Well, here we all are at this family reunion I told you about in Wisconsin.

MG: Wow. May I take it out and we can take a picture of it?

LF: Oh, absolutely. I think this one, he is not my grandfather as it happens, but he was married to my grandma, he was killed in the Civil War.

MG: Wow, so he's your—

LF: He's William Swan. He's no blood relation. Anyway, he's got quite a history there.

MG: Wow, is that ever neat. He's in his Civil War uniform here, is he?

LF: Oh yeah, looks like he's on the winning team; he's wearing blue!

MG: Yeah, he's got the winning colours on! There he is again, too, Will Swan?

LF: Yeah, this is him and my grandmother.

MG: Mary Swan? And E.W. Fairbrother, half brother.

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LS: Yeah, she marries him after this widow, so to speak. That's where my roots started I guess.

MG: Wow! (Reading) "William Hadfield Swan was a member of Company One, Infantry Regiment of Wisconsin Volunteers, Federal Forces of the Civil War". He enlisted in the services of the United States on September 17, 1860 under Captain Owen Rogers of Sheboygan County Wisconsin. He was killed in the Battle of Chaplain Hill in Perryville Kentucky on October 8, 1862 and he was buried in a common grave in Perryville, Kentucky. At the time of his death, he held the rank of corporal." That is so neat!

LF: This is a photo of just my family members, my nieces and nephews and that's my oldest.

MG: Is Blair Backman in this?

LF: No, I didn't know the Backmans then. This is the Swan roots. Swan has one son, so these are from the Swan side. This is on our trip to the states, and this is somebody's house there. This is my grandfather's farm out in Wisconsin. The bachelor who lives there, when we went out to visit we didn't like to ask him if we could go into the house, so we didn't bother asking, but we would have liked to have gone in. My parents, my mother, there was 9 in her family; I am the only one left, although I am the youngest. And the same with my dad's brother; he's still alive, but he's 92. In fact, he's just turned 92 here. This is a picture where we lived up near Edmond in the bush; this was taken in the 1930's. This is the old log house. This is my dad and that's my mother there and this is my brother and this is his in-laws. This is a picture of some relatives; they said the first pictures they took of them like this were on those tin plates, but they are relatives, I'm not sure exactly – it would probably take a millennium to go through those things. This is my neighbour, this is my dad, this is our old turkey gobbler – he was quiet though. We kids used to tease him and do all the things we shouldn't do. This is a (photo) of my dad and his brother's grandchildren, I think these ones are visiting friends here and I think these are his WW II pictures. This is Uncle Ernest, my dad's brother. He had seven in his family. These are some people who come up to our reunion here; they are from Houston, TX. That's their house in around Houston. They talk about the snakes –

MG: Garter snakes?

LF: No, they are dangerous; they come up from the bay.

MG: Boa Constrictor?

LF: No, they come up from the Gulf Coast. One of my dad's brother's sons was a medical doctor. I never got to see any of them. The dirty thirties kind of held us down. My dad's sister, they lived in one of the big cities down there, more of a coastal city, one you hear quite often, should have it wrote down, shouldn't I? This is my Uncle Ernest, my dad's brother and here is David, the one I said was 92. This is a photo of my dad and mother. This would be my sister, this is Lou and this is David. They didn't protect these photos very well in the thirties, did they?

MG: No, but we will take some pictures of them.

LF: Wisconsin. That's where my grandparents are buried. In fact, their stone is right up near the fence. I wouldn't be surprised if they share the same one where they are each in there. Some of that farm land down there in Wisconsin, it's beautiful. They think this might be the school where my dad went in the 1800's.

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MG: Is it okay to take the plastic off and we can take a picture of your photo? Then, there will be more protected copies of these photos for you.

LF: We only met a lot of these relatives in the seventies. In 1975 we were kind of in touch with them; my dad and them wrote back and forth. Oh! I think those snakes were moccasin snakes...anyways, this here is my grandfather. He came from England.

MG: David Fairbrother. Wow.

LF: They had a farm there. Here are some of the buildings. He had a tractor there; this was 1955, so I don't know what become of all this by now. This is I guess David Fairbrother's sister. These ones are of some of my family now; these ones are Todd and Terry. Here's one of the tombstones. He died November 12, 1887. She died of TB. I guess she had twins. The only time I saw any of them was when my dad's sister, one of the twins, her name was Nelly, we got to see her. I think it was the thirties she came up.

MG: Very neat! So, what year did you move to Consul?

LF: I moved in here with seismograph in 1959 I guess, fall of 1959 and I worked until ...it was 49, not 1959, so I worked from 1949 until....I worked with Walburgers out here while I was with the seismograph and there was a big runoff that year, a hard winter actually. This used to be my jeep and then I sold it to him, he's my second cousin. I don't know, I should have kept it and drove it all over the place.

MG: So what is one of your most memorable memories of being a shooter with the dynamite?

LF: Well, I got some pictures of that in there, too, I think. This here is a pretty good picture of the thirties. This is my brother's girls and they are hauling wood or something. Now we are getting into seismograph. This is the shooter I was working under, Al Pruett I guess.

MG: It says, "Sand Drilling outfit, Consul, Shooter, 1950"

LF: The ones who invented seismograph, they're from Houston, TX.

MG: So, what is seismograph?

LF: Oh, at that time, I don't know what it is now, but you would string out about a half a mile of cable with sensors on the cable and as the vibrations come they would record it. They must record the speed that the sounds travel to detect (domes?). Apparently where there is good oil, there is pressure and it pushes up a hard dome and that hard dome affects the speed of the travel of the vibrations, is the way I got it figured out. After I sold my jeep, I ended up with that car.

MG: Well, isn't that a nice car! What kind of car is that, a forty-seven?

LF: A 1946 Nashlyn I think. It says 1947. Maybe it is. I'm slipping and I know I'm slipping some. This here is my nephew Roger Foster and his family.

MG: They from around here?

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LF: Yeah, they are. We grew up pretty near like brothers because we were pretty much the only youngsters left in the home.

MG: "My car Consul, February 1950"

LF: Yes, there it is. Here's some photos of the Backmans. This would be Blair and this would be Clare. This is Mrs. Frame's house, where we stayed when we were with the seismograph.

Now here, we would couple this dynamite together in five pound packages so when we put it on there would be 35 pounds. Then we'd blow it!

MG: Wow that is so cool!

LF: And this here is my sweetheart.

MG: Aw. Isn't she beautiful?

LF: I have other pictures of her, too.

MG: How did you meet?

LF: Mm. Well, she was a friend of Mrs. Frames, so I got to meet her there. I hope I didn't take advantage of her!

MG- No! You did something right. You stayed married for lots of years!

LF: She's Margaret's. Their mothers were sisters, the Schmidt's who were here. They kinda retired and are in the Hat (Medicine Hat) now. Here are my grandkids and here's a guy I went moose hunting with one time, with my brother, but he's really a woodsman, that guy. I think he kinda went into retirement living in a tent. He was a good friend. He could converse with things all night; he was really a good talker, very interesting. He would talk about the Indians and how they hunted and so on. This one here is my daughter, Cara Blakley; they just live about five miles out of town. And this here is Margaret when we were visiting in Edmonton, some of her friends. And this is Cara, Blakely now.

MG: She's your oldest daughter?

LF: She's my oldest child. This is the Backman clan. Louis Backman here. This is my sister's daughter and my brothers' daughter here. This is one of me holding one of my children here. This here is something we can just forget about if we can. A boy. I was married twice. I don`t forget about him, but anyway, this was a picture of when I was working with my father-in-law. Anyway, this is the hardest drive I ever did in my life on a horse driving cattle. Oh gosh, we drove cattle and calves that were hard to drive and –

MG: August, 1957.

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LF: Yeah. I thought I should be just about ready to drop and they wanted to put the kid up on the horse and I didn`t even want to do that.

MG: Where was that, here on Backman's?

LF: This is my brother-in-law, Glen Frame. He's alive, he just turned 90. But we married sisters and this was one of when my brother, Clifford came up. Here`s some school pictures, too. This is some of Margaret's sister's children. This is one of the things I did manufacture is these cattle head gates. I made quite a few of them and helped build the house. You know, there`s a nice little lake out west of Edmonton and it had mainly lots of perch (fish) in it. We would be working in town and we used to enjoy going out to it. It was the oddest lake; you could see the bottom anywhere. I have seen a jackfish swimming fifty feet from us! And it didn`t matter where you were in the lake, it`s not a big lake, but it's a lake. Maybe I should be pinched, but oh well. This is my first cousin here and they are all passed away now due to old age. This is my nephew, noted as a character I guess, but he`s passed away on me now too, I guess. He`s the kind of guy that told lots of jokes and this is my sister and brother-in- law here, Johnny Foster. I think here, too is Kenny, my youngest son, of him here in the basement. Somebody snapped a picture of him.

MG: Here's a great black and white one. It's of your dad and neighbour with "Gobble the turkey."

LF: Here's my mom, and there's Mrs. Stouffer. Also, Cliff and Erin, they both married sisters I guess. This is one of my first cousins; she lived to be 96 I guess.

MG: What's her name?

LF: Florence, and did she ever work hard! She had a big family; she had ten in her family, a most wonderful woman.

MG: What is her last name?

LF: Barnhart. German I guess. She married another German. This is one of the old trucks he was driving in the thirties. This is one of my three brothers—

MG: And their names?

LF: Clifford, Marion (?) and Truman, and this is one of some of the Backmans.I don't really know who they are.

MG: So this is out by Robsart?

LF: No, this is Edmond country. This is our house they built in the thirties. They didn't have so much, but we could live off the land. This is how we heated the house. Here's one of the school I went to.

MG: What school?

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LF: Stovestead School in the Tofield area... (? inaudible). Here is one of Elmo Foster and my sister. Here's one who passed away shortly after birth. She got a disease, typhoid or one like that. Here's a picture of the truck we used for seismograph.

MG: Wow, it says "Consul Saskatchewan, 1949". So what was the wildest experience you had working as a shooter?

LF: Oh, let me see. I guess I remember when a mechanic by the name of Elmore Leadson, we went out to pick up a truck a way out south of here and it was a bad winter alright and the mechanic he couldn't seem to get it to go up the hill. I asked him to let me drive it but he wouldn't let me drive it, but he kept trying and trying. We took a pick and began driving it into the ground and a piece flew off and into his hand. We had winches on the truck, but there are no trees in the country, so had nothing to anchor to. Anyway, we backed the truck back down the hill and I took the truck over and sure enough we made it to the top of the hill. I let off the gas and let it catch a little just to give it that little extra. He should have been experienced, but he wasn't a truck driver really, so he might not have had that experience.

MG: So, did you farm in this area?

LF: I farmed with my father-in-law, Louis Backman, for three years until I decided to go back to my welding. I always wanted to start my own shop, so I did, but sometimes I wondered if I might have been better off if I stayed farming!

MG: So what are some of your favourite welding projects you have done?

LF: I suppose some of the cattle head gates were some of my biggest projects that I enjoyed, and we came up with pretty good head gates. They took a lot of work, so I thought well, that's good.

MG: What sort of projects are you up to lately?

LF: I get a little project work on demand now. And I am a little shook up right now, so I am starting to get a hold of myself right now. I am not sure what I will do now. At my age, what should a person do?

MG: Well, lots of fun.

LF-Well, I have had a good life. I've had a good wife and a good family and she actually made the whole thing good.

MG: So what do you think are some of the things that make a recipe for a good life?

LF: I think the main thing is to be worshippers of God, that's number one, to live His way by His commandments. I try very hard to obey Him. That would be number one in our life. And then, anything that will make a living so you always have something to do because it seems like work is what makes us happy, really, unless you are a slave or something! So we are pretty lucky out here. One thing I think I would like to do now is farm, really. I highly specialized in welding; I worked on some pretty good jobs. I have worked as a pipe welder for awhile in a chemical plant

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in the city of Edmonton, so it was my type of work, but I found it very difficult. But to become a professional you need a ticket or a licence and you had to work for 17 years under a pressure welder. But they were so desperate for welders that they gave us a course and then in Alberta, they sent people out to test our welding and if we passed then they said you are going on to pipe work and anyone who couldn't pass they would take on in structural steel welding. In structural steel, they made almost as much as the pipe welders at that time, a few cents less maybe, but that was quite a difference at that time. You could fill your gas tank for maybe three dollars, four dollars, depending. Anyways, we made I think it was $2.60 or $2.40 an hour and it was ten hour days and Saturday and Sunday.

MG: What year would this be?

LF: 1953 or 1954. We were setting up a big chemical plant in the city there—I lost my train of thought—they doubled our wage, double time Saturday and Sunday and time and a half for overtime. Actually at that time that was good wages, real good wages for people like me anyways, I guess.

MG: Is there anything you can think of you would like to share about life in this community?

LF: Well, it seems there have been some bad things happening around here lately and I would like to think of something good.

MG: What makes it a good place to live for you?

LF: Well, we enjoy living here, it's been good to me and the people have been really good to me, really good in fact. Oh, I got children that live in Red Deer country, three families up there; I got one in Gull Lake and one in Swift Current. And my daughter Betty, her husband, he sprays crops, aerial spraying.

MG: What is Betty's last name-- Brown?

LF: Whitney.

MG: Because Blair Backman mentioned I should speak to a woman named Betty.

LF: Did you speak to her yet?

MG: No. Thank you for taking the time with us today, though.

LF: Yeah, I never saw her, you know? She died before I was born you know. I think she died when maybe I was a couple years old, a year old maybe.

MG: Before memory.

LF: This is my sister and her two sons; that's all she has.

MG: Well, thank you for contributing to this. Your time helps record this history of this part of the world.

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LF: I am just trying to think if there is anything. There were the Seiferts, they ran the garage up here and he did well and has been retired. He kept a good stock and repairs, sold General Motors products and later machinery. Later he retired to the Hat (Medicine Hat), then his son took it over, but he discontinued it. I guess, it might have been too much work for him, I don't know, but it sure is a lot of work. Mr. Siefert was a way better man that I am with getting things done.

MG: Well, what we will do is type up our conversation and bring it back to you so there will be another opportunity to talk, so if you think of things you would like to add.

LF: Yeah, I have the boys out west of Red Deer here and my brother-in-law, too. This photo is pretty recent, ten or fifteen years ago now, and this is me, this must be Kenny, I'm not sure.

MG: Will you have more photos next time we come? Our camera is about to cut off here, so that's why I ask.

LF: Well, I do I guess.

MG: Great, next time we can see some more photos I guess.

END OF TAPE

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