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Mary Shepherd Interview January 29, 2015

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Conducted at the home of Mary Shepherd, Cypress Manor, Maple Creek, SK

MS = Mary Shepherd: Interviewee

AB = Ann Behrman: Interviewer

JP = Joan Parsonage: Interviewer

Joan Parsonage: Camera

January 29, 2015

AB: We would like to start out with your full name, your birthday, where you were born.

MS: Okay. My full name is Irene Mary Evelyn Shepherd. I was Mitchell before I was married. I was born in Brandon, Manitoba on April 8, 1926.

AB: And how did you come out here?

MS: Well, I was in the army when Florence Dickieson Schafer came back from overseas; she worked in the pay office with me. So anyway, she knew Jack in the San in Fort Qu'Appelle [Fort Qu'Appelle Sanatorium operated to treat Saskatchewan tuberculosis patients from 1917 to 1972]. She asked me to go out with them— After we got out of the army we roomed together. We went out to Fort Qu'Appelle to the San to see Jack and that's how I met Jack.

AB: Where did you go to school?

MS: I went to school— We lived out on the farm closer to Souris and I went to a country school.

AB: Then after you finished school you enlisted?

MS: It was just a country school so then we had to go into Brandon, into town for high school. I was in Brandon and a good girlfriend of mine who was in the Air Force came home and she said, "Oh, you should join up." So I went to join up.

When I joined up in 1944 all they were taking was in the Army so I joined the Army. I joined up in Winnipeg, took basic at Kitchener, Ontario then I went to Edmonton for a clerk's course. When I was out of the clerk's course we were posted different places. Regina was the only place west, you know, all the rest were down east. So I was lucky because there were quite a few of us from the west taking this course, so I was lucky I came to Regina and worked in the pay office.

AB: And how long did you work there?

MS: Well, almost two years. When the Army closed.

AB: So you didn't have to go overseas?

AB: So you didn't have to go overseas?

MS: Well no, I couldn't go overseas; girls couldn't go overseas until they were 21.

AB: Oh. What were some of the experiences you had?

MS: Oh, really good experiences. I met a lot of nice girls, in fact four of the girls; no, three of the girls—I can't remember, three or four that I knew in Regina—came to Maple Creek and took a CNA Course, Certified Nurses Aid Course, and that was kind of nice. They celebrated their 50th. Gus Henderson was the only one that stayed here; the other ones all left. One girl married Tom Kriwokon—you know the barber, his son—and I still keep in touch with her. Anyway when they had their 50th anniversary, Florence was still living then, so Florence and I went and because I had been their sergeant they asked me to cut the cake which was kind of nice.

JP: Did you have to do basic training?

MS: Yeah. At Kitchener.

JP: What did that amount to? Did you have to do all the push-ups and sit-ups and —

MS: No. Lots of marching. And that was in Kitchener in the winter time. It wasn't very warm. [Laughing]

JP: And that's all though, you didn't have to do all those exercises and run two miles?

MS: Oh no, no. That was for the men. [Laughing] The men did that.

JP: Okay.

MS: The only thing I remember in Kitchener on basic, we had to do a lot of marching, and going downtown. Me, a country girl, and going downtown in Kitchener and we'd go find the bake shops. My gosh, it made me pretty hungry. They had quite a good—oh what in the heck was it—chocolate store in Kitchener, too, big, good chocolates. But I can't remember the name of it.

AB: What were some of the most challenging things about being in the Army? What was the hardest?

MS: Well, I was pretty darn lucky. It wasn't very hard. I guess the hardest was writing the exams.

AB: Or being away from home.

MS: Yeah.

AB: Was it unusual for girls to join the Army?

MS: Oh no, no. There were lots of girls. Yeah, there in Regina there must have been two or three hundred of us. That was just Regina. Calgary and all the provinces, all the different stations had lots of girls.

JP: You must have been pretty adventuresome, though, because most girls at that time were being teachers or—

JP: You must have been pretty adventuresome, though, because most girls at that time were being teachers or—

MS: Well no, I was just finished school and this girlfriend talked me into it. No, I wasn't into being a schoolteacher that's for sure. *[Laughing]*

JP: When you were in the military did you have any social parties that you would all go to in your uniforms?

MS: Well, we went kind of our own way because we were too darn— I was one of the ones that chummed with the privates and that because I was 18, whereas most of the sergeants were quite a bit older than me.

JP: So what did you do when you went out for an evening? Did you go to dances?

MS: You know like the Legion Hall here. It was out across the track there and they used to have parties. We used to go to quite a few dances and parties at the hall. We had the same kind of a hall as the Legion Hall.

AB: That was out where the vet clinic is now, wasn't it?

MS: Yeah. Yeah. That was part of the army buildings out there during the war. When I came to Regina, [I was asked] do you want to stay in Regina or do you want to go out to Maple Creek or—dammit, what was the other place? And I didn't know so I stayed in Regina. I was lucky because it wasn't very long after that that they closed Maple Creek—oh, what was the other place? They closed the small places.

AB: After the war was over?

MS: Yeah. I don't know how many they used to have out here. There were different girls out here, I know.

AB: Do you think that when women could join the Army that it was a step in them getting to be more independent and ready to work, go out and get a job and work?

MS: Well, maybe. I don't know. When I was 18 it was just when they were getting short of help, and Brandon has the Mental Hospital so I was taught to work in there in the summer holidays. You didn't need to worry about work. Actually when you think of it, getting a job—say, going through for a teacher or something—I could have went up to the Brandon Mental Hospital there right today and got a job because they were so short of help.

AB: When or how long was Jack in the San before you got married?

MS: He came back from overseas—oh, let me see—when Hugh and Joyce [Frame] got married. [1945] He got back then; he went into the San then. Then he got out. He must have got out in '48 and we got married in '49.

AB: And then you moved to the ranch?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

AB: Was that quite a difference?

MS: Well, I was born and raised on a farm. Farming out here is altogether different. Like in Manitoba, they had good crops, you know. A five bushel [to the

MS: Well, I was born and raised on a farm. Farming out here is altogether different. Like in Manitoba, they had good crops, you know. A five bushel [to the acre] crop at home was a disaster where out here it wasn't too bad. [*Laughing*] Another thing I couldn't get over—as you will see in that book I gave you—we had a big barn we used to keep our cattle in. We used to keep our cattle in the barn all winter. Of course, out here— Well, you don't put the cattle in the barn.

AB: Oh. Everything was in?

MS: Oh yeah. Everything. We had a big barn. In fact, you know the barn that Parsonages have up at Merryflat that was down below? Jack figured that was a big barn. You didn't have a big barn if it was not any bigger than that. I took him home and showed him a barn at home. It held 50 horses. My dad used to raise horses.

JP: What kind of horses did he raise, Mary? Heavy horses? Clydesdales? Or Percherons?

MS: Yeah. Clydesdales.

JP: Oh yeah.

AB: Well, when you came out to the ranch then did you do lots of riding?

MS: No. I never did ride. My brothers rode all right; [ours] were work horses. We didn't have saddle horses. I do know how to milk a cow. I used to milk lots of cows at home.

AB: On the ranch?

MS: No no. At home when I was a kid. I used to milk four or five cows before I went to school.

JP: What did your dad do with the horses then? Was that a business he had of selling them?

MS: He used to sell a lot of them, and they used to have a stud. Yeah, he sold a lot of horses. At fairs he used to judge horses.

AB: Did you miss that when you came to the ranch?

MS: Well, it was sure different. It was just altogether different. Out here, of course, you didn't have the rain that we had. The country is altogether different.

AB: When did you get married and start having kids?

MS: We got married the 11th of November in '49, and Barbara was born the 29th of January of '51.

AB: And after that?

MS: There is Sheila [1952] and Cindy. Cindy will be 60 next month [February], and then there is Susan [1958].

AB: Four girls. Four queens.

MS: [*Laughing*] Yeah. Jack and his one brother— There are no Shepherds left; his brother has just girls, too. Well, actually it's his half-brother that has a girl and then his cousins have boys.

MS: [*Laughing*] Yeah. Jack and his one brother— there are no Shepherds left, his brother has just girls, too. Well, actually it's his half-brother that has a girl and then his cousins have boys.

AB: Did you notice quite a difference when it came time for the girls to decide what they wanted to be and the choices that you had had?

MS: You know when you think of it, it was that many years ago; it is altogether different. When I grew up everybody went in for a teacher. When our girls grew up there were different things for them to go into. They could go in for a secretary or something like that.

AB: Do you think that the way the girls were able to get different educations made them a little more independent when they grew up?

MS: Well maybe. We had quite a few relatives that went into different things so you got different ideas. The likes of that cousin of Jacks, Gordon Shepherd. He was in Saskatoon and he has done a lot with the astronauts (which a lot of people don't realize). I still think of when he was with the astronauts Tony Hammerschmid was sitting looking at the TV and everybody was going on about the astronauts. He says, "There's Gordon Shepherd!" [*Laughing*] Yeah, some of them did pretty good.

AB: What were some of the experiences that you had on the ranch that stand out in your mind?

MS: Of course, we never ever did any branding [at home].

AB: Oh, didn't you?

MS: No. We didn't have that many cattle. Well, we did have quite a few cattle, but we did not brand.

AB: If you didn't brand how did you mark your cattle?

MS: We didn't mark them.

AB: Oh, you just ran slicks.

MS: Yeah, we didn't brand cattle down there.

JP: I don't think people in Manitoba brand today, Ann.

MS: Probably not.

AB: Oh. Didn't you used to have rodeos at your place?

MS: When I was first married it was West Plains Picnic, but they only had that for a couple of years because the folks moved away and quite a few of the neighbors moved away. Of course, there was the Oxarat Picnic. Oh, and we had rodeos, yeah, yeah.

AB: What years was that? [It was about 1957 to 1969.]

MS: I can remember when Susan was a baby we had rodeos there. They used to have picnics there. Where we had the rodeos is where the house is now, and so then we moved it across over east. A lot of the neighbors used to come on a Sunday—oh, this was before we moved up there, up to the creek. A lot of people used to go up there on a Sunday and have a picnic because of the creek [Battle Creek]. They'd swim and they used to go up there fishing a lot, too. I remember

Sunday—oh, this was before we moved up there, up to the creek. A lot of people used to go up there on a Sunday and have a picnic because of the creek [Battle Creek]. They'd swim and they used to go up there fishing a lot, too. I remember when we moved, built the house up there, a lot of people missed that fishing spot.

JP: Did you get a new house right after you moved down there then?

MS: No no. We were married in '49. Well then, Jack ended back in the San in '59. We were going to build a house in '59 but didn't get it built until '60. The house that Sheila and Arnold live in, we built in '60.

AB: I didn't realize he'd been in the San twice.

MS: Yeah.

JP: When rodeos were going on at your place, though, Mary, we were married at that time, and you remember Bruce Bartlett—

MS: Oh yeah. Bruce used to be at our place a lot.

JP: Mick Walburger was big in roping then.

MS: I can remember, we were still living down at the Old Place and it would be raining, and Jack would say, "Well I don't think there's going to be anybody this weekend." Looked down this road and there they still came, every Sunday.

JP: That went on for a long time.

MS: It went on for quite a few years.

JP: You didn't have to do anything though, right?

MS: No. Just feed half a dozen men that night.

JP: Oh. You did. You did get in on that. I wondered about that.

MS: Well, I know all the guys. Well, one would be Robert Smith, and who else? I kind of forget now just who all did, but there were always three or four of them always stayed for supper. I kind of forget now who all, but I know Robert Smith and probably Bruce Bartlett.

JP: Cow riding was the thing at that time. Not bulls, it was cow riding.

MS: Oh yeah. Yeah. And roping. Oh yeah, one of them that used to come was Wilf Cornelsen.

Well, I've known them for years. They came out here for the pasture [Arena Community Pasture], but they used to live in Saskatoon, and he happened to know Uncle George, Jack's uncle. He [Uncle George] says, "I've got a nephew living out there." Of course he [Wilf] was into roping and stuff, too, so it didn't take long to get to know him.

We've been good friends— Okay that was another one. Wilf and Jack started the 4-H Beef—not Beef, Light Horse I should say. Why did I say beef? Light horse.

AB: So then you had 4-H meetings at your place?

AB: So then you had 4-H meetings at your place?

MS: No, they were mostly at Wilf's.

AB: Oh.

MS: Well, we used to go down there. Wilf was really good. Well, and the other men, too. They'd go down to Wilf's and he'd take them down to the barn and show them this and that about horses, and maybe do a little riding. It's been too many years now to remember what all they did, but Wilf was really good.

AB: And that's when your girls were small?

MS: Yeah. Sheila and Cindy and Susan were in it. Barbara wasn't because Barbara left home when she was 15. She went to Saskatoon to babysit for this Gordon Shepherd. In fact, she went with them and went overseas with them for a year for schooling.

AB: Where did they go to?

MS: They were over in England. He was doing something over there and needed a babysitter, so it was kind of nice. She still keeps in touch with a couple of the girls.

AB: What are some of the biggest changes that you have seen? Like between the ranching when you first started to when you were finished, when you left the ranch?

MS: I don't know. I don't think there was much. Pretty well the same all the time.

AB: A little bigger equipment.

MS: Yeah. Well yeah. Newer equipment and better equipment. Yeah, that's right, yeah.

AB: And when did you sell to Arnold and Sheila and move to town?

MS: When they got married so that would be what? 41 years ago. [1974] Must be. Let me see. Oh brother. Cindy and Jack got married on the 10th of November [1973]; it was our 24th Anniversary.

AB: Quite a while ago.

MS: Well, that's right. Yeah. It would be 65 years last fall.

AB: That you would have been married?

MS: Yeah.

AB: What would you like to see change? Like, what do you think could be improved on?

MS: You know I never really think much on it. I'm just sitting here. As long as everybody in here [The Manor] gets along that is the main thing.

AB: Yeah. What are some of the things that you still do that you have done your whole life?

MS: Oh, but I'm going to quit! [*Laughing*] Not my whole life, but after we moved

whole life?

MS: Oh, but I'm going to quit! *[Laughing]* Not my whole life, but after we moved into town, some of us used to go to the figure skating a lot. You know, there is no figure skating near. We used to go to Calgary and even Victoria, but now none of the figure skating is out here much. I went to a lot of the curling, too. In fact, I am going to Moose Jaw for curling *[Scotties Tournament of Hearts which is the annual Canadian women's championship in curling]*.

AB: What about reading and playing cards and that sort of stuff? Do you still do lots of that?

MS: Oh yes. More than I want to. I belonged to the Legion for over 69 years. That's one thing that is good that has changed. When I first joined the Legion the women had to stay just with the Ladies Auxiliary. We [women] could not join the Legion. The man off the street could join the Legion. Not that I was overseas, but some of the girls that were overseas, why couldn't they join the Legion? They went overseas; a lot of the men didn't go overseas, but they could still join the Legion. I have belonged to the Legion now for quite a few years. They finally let us join. When I was the Ladies Auxiliary Zone Rep we used to have to take curlers to the curling. That was kind of interesting. I think Kay Wilcox went with us. And when I came into Maple Creek here I was Zone Rep here, too, and that was interesting because that was different places. Aw, I kind of quit, well, when Jack passed away; I still went to meetings and that, but I didn't do that much. We were supposed to go down to Tompkins a week ago to play cribbage. There isn't that many of us anymore. Well, I might as well go down just for the day, to see if I knew anybody. Of course, there is nobody I know anymore. I went down to play and then ended up winning. *[Laughing]*

AB: Good for you!

MS: Now I come back to Maple Creek next month *[to compete in cribbage]*. A friend of mine, we go to a lot of hockey games and watch the great-grandkids play hockey.

AB: How many grandkids and great-grandkids?

MS: I have 13 great. You pretty well know all of them. Of course, Sheila and Arnold's are here *[4]* and Cindy and Jack's *[4]*. Barbara has got three; they are the oldest. Barbara's oldest grandchild is 13 in Grade 8. Susan has one grandchild.

JP: When you came to town, though, you weren't too long before you took a job, right?

MS: Well yes. Can you imagine? Nobody wanted to work floors. That was too low a job.

AB: In the hospital?

MS: In the hospital. Yeah. Well, the floors need to be cleaned just as good as—I'm not saying they are more important than nurses, but it is important to have the place clean. Anyway, Beryl Tenborg (and Les) lived across the street from us. Beryl came over and she said, "Would you mind working floors?"

I said, "I don't see anything wrong with it." They supplied uniforms and paid into my pension. What more could you have? You know, when you think of it.

AB: How long did you work there?

AB: How long did you work there?

MS: 15 years. When you think of it, working floors, I couldn't see anything wrong with it. I met a lot of nice people. Maybe not you girls, but I met a lot of people from out south having babies.

JP: Well, the hospital was busy in those years, too.

MS: Oh, that's right. You know when you think of it now, we had two doctors living just on our street, Dr. Smith and Dr. Burns. Both lived just a couple of doors from us. And then Beryl [a nurse] across the street. No, it was good. As I said, you met a lot of nice people and I couldn't see anything wrong with it. It is still a job. And they paid good.

JP: I wonder how people would get that idea.

MS: Well, you look at right now, a lot of them want to start at the top; they don't want to start at the bottom. You maybe don't realize that. No, they don't want to start at the bottom. It's just too bad. And you know, when you think of it, some of these girls going to school now—boys, too—working in restaurants and that, it gives them some money and gives them some experience.

JP: When you worked at the hospital, probably Winnie Andreas would have been matron, was she? For most of your years.

MS: Yeah, and then Sheila Mulatz. Oh, that was a shame. Her and Sheila are the same age and there she is gone; she went way too young.

JP: Did you have any special hair styles when you were—?

MS: No. Not really. It was funny when I was down getting my hair done this morning they were talking about everybody wearing wigs. You know how everybody had to have a wig.

JP: Weren't pin curls more the rage when you were growing up, though? Even in my time pin curls were kind of—

MS: Oh yeah, yeah. I used to do my hair up in pin curls, but these last few years I got lazy. It's easier this way.

JP: But when you were growing up, though?

MS: Oh yeah. You know my hair, even when I first got perms, you'd be surprised the number of hairdressers that didn't like to do my hair. My hair was just like a horse's tail. It was terrible, terrible! They have better perms now. I know they used to have a heck of a time with my hair. It was just terrible.

AB: What about the styles? There's quite a difference between when you were younger and —

MS: I guess so. Yeah, I guess there was.

AB: Could you wear slacks when you were growing up?

MS: Oh no. No.

AB: Just dresses.

AB: Just dresses.

MS: Just dresses. Oh no. My mother did let me wear slacks once in a while for something.

I am surprised. I'm looking at old pictures, even when I was first married I wore dresses. I was surprised. To tell the truth, I can't remember when I started to wear slacks.

JP: And hats, hats! You had to wear a hat.

MS: Oh yes, hats! You always wore a hat to a funeral. You didn't go to a funeral without a hat!

AB: Or dressed up!

MS: Yes. I had forgot until I looked at some old pictures, I'm always wearing a dress. Maybe even in the wintertime. I don't know. If we were wearing slacks you'd think we'd be wearing them in the wintertime.

JP: What about the new technology - the computers, iPads, and the tablets, and iPhones? Do you think that is quite an advancement for everybody?

MS: It could be, but I don't have them. I don't have a computer, you know, so—

AB: You have never been interested in trying to learn one?

MS: Well, Jack will be gone ten years here next month. A cousin of his sent him a computer and stuff, and he got on to it. He was always after me to do it and I made the excuse that it gave him something to do. And then when he passed away I just gave the stuff to the girls.

JP: Some people that we have talked to in the past figure that TV spoiled their social life.

MS: I think it does. I know it does. Especially here. I should be going down to the front and playing cards and stuff, but oh, there is curling on.

AB: It's good company though.

MS: Oh yes. But I can see it; we do watch TV too much.

JP: Well, out at the ranch maybe it would have been— People say they used to get together and play cards.

MS: When we first got married we used to get together with the neighbors and play cards a lot. Like, when Jack and I first got married, his mother and Uncle George, the other two families lived in the yard besides us.

AB: You all lived in one yard?

MS: Yeah.

JP: Something else that you have done for a long time is buy a team when the Ranch Rodeo—

MS: Oh yeah. I've bought that for years. Yeah.

JP: You started that before Jack was gone, did you?

JP: You started that before Jack was gone, did you?

MS: Oh yeah. We started— We went together. I think we bought a team right from the very beginning [Maple Creek Ranch Rodeo began in 1987]. I actually did win once.

Thank goodness. I'm glad I won once because they don't have buckles anymore. I won a buckle, and Dean [Dean Mackie, Mary's grandson] was on the team which was nice. But I've got the one buckle. And I've got one grandson [that keeps asking], "Grandma, have you got that buckle yet?" Not a grandson, great-grandson.

AB: Oh.

JP: So what do you see going on for the future, Mary. We're going to have a brand new hospital here pretty soon and—

MS: Don't hold your breath.

JP: Do you think we are going to see people living longer and longer and longer?

MS: Well, they are. Okay. For myself, when I was born I had jaundice so yellow the doctor said to my mother, "No sense taking her home." But she took me home.

AB: Good thing!

MS: Yeah. Now, you know the kids still have jaundice, but people have found out, just put them under lights.

JP: So do you think it's a good thing that people are living longer every year?

MS: Well, people are more educated for one thing than they were. Like my mother, they were lucky if they had Grade 4 or 5. They had big families. You think of it now, it's hard for them to have hockey games now because they don't have any kids.

MS: Now you know, two or three kids. Well, I've got three grandkids that have three all right.

JP: Do you think generally speaking that people want to live longer now? I'm talking longer life expectancy.

MS: Well, if you are feeling well that's fine, but if you are not feeling well I still think that you'd be glad to [go]. Something like Jack, you know. He was okay and — Can you imagine? He had breakfast and walked uptown, had coffee with Norman Tenborg and some of them. Then he always went to the Legion to play cards. Walked into the Legion and [that was it!]

AB: For him it was perfect.

MS: That's the place where he would like to go. You know, that's where he wanted to— You know, because he spent a lot of time at the Legion.

AB: It's tough on everybody else, but for him it's good.

MS: Oh yeah. His brother— Well, even when Jack passed away, he was getting

AB: It's tough on everybody else, but for him it's good.

MS: Oh yeah. His brother— Well, even when Jack passed away, he was getting Alzheimer's. He just passed away last year. You know, so that's tough. That's tough on the whole family.

AB: Alzheimer's is a horrible disease.

MS: Oh, it's terrible, terrible! Like Norman Tenborg. I phoned Norman and told him [that Jack had died]. He didn't believe me. He came to the house. He'd just had coffee with him. And Norman lived just across the street here.

AB: Now he's gone, too.

MS: Yeah. He's gone, too. He's been gone for a couple of years now. But in a way, I feel sorry for these older guys. Like, Norman really missed Jack after Jack passed away. He used to go down to—maybe before that, I don't know—to Caroline's [Restaurant] for meals. And a couple other guys his age, they eat together all the time, and they miss Norman now, you know.

JP: Well, just to finish up, Mary, tell us what you want to do tomorrow, your biggest hope for tomorrow.

MS: Well, I don't know. Just to be in good health, I guess.

Editor's Note: Jack Shepherd died in February, 2005.

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