

Conducted at Archie Smiley's home - 106 Myers Crescent, Maple Creek, SK

**AS = Archie Smiley: Interviewee**

**MG = Meagan Gough: Interviewer**

**SP = Susan Pridmore: Camera**

**2008 March 11**

MG: So, your name is Archie Smiley?

AS: Archie Lloyd Smiley is my full name. I was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December in 1917, in the old hospital in Robsart. It is still standing. I never needed a birth certificate until 1952 when I went to work for the elevator. Before that, you got a job and didn't need one. When I got my birth certificate back from Regina, it said December 30<sup>th</sup>. My mother was still alive at the time, so I said, "Look Mom, you've made a mistake." She said, "Oh no, I didn't make a mistake," but then she figured out that I was born at 4 o'clock in the morning, and when everything was over, the old doc looked up at the bank calendar and it still said December 30<sup>th</sup>, so that's what he wrote down.

When I had to get a passport when my wife and I travelled to Japan one year, and New Zealand the next, I had to submit my birth certificate, so my passport came back with December 30<sup>th</sup>. From then on, my official birth date is December 30<sup>th</sup>, even though I was born on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Goes to show how mistakes are made.

MG: Well, now we will record it the right way for the books! Wow, so you were born in Robsart at that Hospital that still stands?

AS: Yeah, and I've got a picture here, that just came out in the paper, of the old hospital and of me standing looking at it. *(Pointing to the photo Archie says "I was born right there in that room." He indicates the bottom right room.) There is also a write-up about the hospital.*

MG: It says, “Archie Smiley, born December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1917 at the old Hospital at Robsart, built the summer of 1916, picture taken in 2000.” So, what is the history of that Hospital, when did it shut down?

AS: First off, the article says the hospital was built in the summer of ‘16; however, it was actually built in 1915. It was closed as a hospital in about 1921, and was then used as a private residence. From 1936-1942, it became the home of the International Bible School from Moose Jaw. It was then again used as a private residence until it was abandoned somewhere around 1955-56.

MG: Did your parents settle in Robsart then?

AS: My parents came from Nova Scotia to North Dakota in about 1906. Conditions in North Dakota were terrible at that time. The first Christmas they spent in North Dakota, they were seventy miles from the closet tree. My mother was sad, as there were no trees for Christmas, and being from Nova Scotia, where trees are everywhere, she really missed them. Anyway, they went out and got a big sage bush and trimmed that. When they heard about free or cheap land in Canada, they came up here, in hopes of seeing a few more trees.

MG: What were your parent’s names?

AS: Joseph and Hattie Smiley.

MG: And your mom’s maiden name?

AS: Cameron.

MG: So, they moved from North Dakota up to Robsart?

AS: Yeah, in the fall of 1913. That was quite a hardship. My dad came up from North Dakota in the spring of 1913 with three other fellas. They brought bicycles with

them hoping to use them to get around, however, it rained most of the time they were here, so they mostly just pushed them. My dad finally moved my mom and two children up in November 1913 about thirty-five miles south of Maple Creek. My sister Martha (born in 1912) was just over a year old and my other sister Doris (born in 1908) was about five. They built a shack out there for the winter. They only had two or three cows and a couple of horses. My mother always said it was a good thing the first winter was easy; they were thirty-five miles from anything, town, railway or even roads. When I look back it seems practically unbelievable.

MG: So, they settled in Robsart in 1913?

AS: Yes, in 1913. In 1914 my dad bought a new 'democrat'. I don't know why they called them a 'democrat', but it was a four-wheeled buggy. There was no crop or anything around here, so they went back, them and the two kids, to North Dakota with this new 'democrat' and two horses. It took them ten days to get down there, and that was pretty good time with that mileage. You could cut across, 'cause there were no roads at that time. Then they got work over there, and they never come back until the spring of '15 (1915). By that time the railroad had come to Robsart, so they shipped the democrat back and sold the horses down there. They come back on the train in 1915 to Robsart and went back to the original farm twelve miles north of Robsart.

In the spring of 1924 my dad built Clear Valley School. That was the year I started school. When I first started school the desks hadn't arrived so we just sat at shelves along the wall. 1924 was also the last year we used slate; after that we had scribblers. So after the school was built, I went with my sisters until the fall of 1928. Over the years I went there, there were usually between ten and twelve students.

Our closest neighbour was a bachelor, Gordon Pack, who lived about half mile away. Moirs were about three and a half mile away and their son Mac was about four years older than me. Archers lived about four miles away. There was no children close

enough to play with and my mother always said she was lonesome for other women to visit with.

We had only summer school, as the winters were so tough. My parents wanted us kids to have a better education so we moved into Robsart in the winter of 1928.

In 1929 we went back to the farm and my dad planted a large crop of fall rye. Well, that was a year of total crop failure. Then the tax collector came along, and our taxes hadn't been paid. My dad couldn't pay these taxes, so he said, "Who do I have to see to abandon this place?" The guy said "You can do that right now", so Dad said "let's write the papers then, and I will abandon it." They told him they would give him \$600 for improvements on the farm; there was a house and a barn with a little blacksmith shop. We abandoned the farm and moved to Robsart in 1929. We never went back to that farm again!

And we never got the \$600. We didn't complain though, because we felt we got the money back in the form of government 'relief'. If we'd had the \$600 we wouldn't have got 'relief'.

I was born in '17 (1917), so I was about twelve when we moved to town. I completed my Grade X, and, and part of Grade XI but then quit to find work and help my dad put food on the table.

We stayed in Robsart and my dad got a job hauling the mail from the post office to the train everyday. He got paid \$12 a month. He was also a handyman, so between that and doing blacksmithing and draying, he made a meager living.

1937 was one of the worst years of the drought on the prairies, so the government had a scheme, that if someone would 'vouch' for you outside of the 'relief' area, they would pay for your transportation to that area. My mother and father had lots of relatives in Nova Scotia, so our application was accepted and in February 1938 we received tickets for my parents and me to go back to Nova Scotia. We had a little sale and sold things from around the place. The community put on a little party for us at the Lutheran

Church. They took up a collection from Robsart and district and gave us \$16. We had a list for many years of the people who donated, but somehow it must have got lost or destroyed by mistake; but it would be something to see today; lots of donations for five or ten cents. One fella, he ran the store with his wife and sons, he put in twenty-five cents because there were four of them. It would be hard for young people today to believe things could be so tough.

Then we went back to Nova Scotia and it was wonderful. You could get all the fruit and vegetables that you wanted. My uncle was one of the biggest vegetable farmers in Hants County, so the next spring I got a job hoeing weeds. He had sixteen acres and all the fields had to be hoed by hand. I got paid \$1 a day.

MG: What town was this in?

AS: Close to a little village called Brooklyn. It's about fifteen miles out of Windsor, Nova Scotia.

Before we left Robsart, we had this little 1923 Model-T Ford truck. There was only one fella in the country that had any money, this Pargee fella, so we tried to sell it to him for \$50. After much going back and forth he finally bought it for \$47.50.

So, when we got to Nova Scotia, Dad sent me into Halifax to try and find a cheap car. I found a '29 Pontiac with just 30,000 miles on it and four good tires. The guy at the garage said to come back in four hours. I came back and bought the car, but on the way home the radiator started overheating. I went back into Halifax to complain, and as it turned out, the guy in the garage had taken the radiator out of the car in the four hours I was gone and put it in another car for someone who needed a radiator in a hurry. I guess he knew I'd be coming back, so by the time I got back he had found me another good radiator.

In August of '38, five of us came back to Saskatchewan for harvest. We left my mother in Nova Scotia. We all got jobs, and worked from August to October and then went

back to Nova Scotia in November of '38. Before we left, we ran into this fella who was working on the Cypress Lake Dam. He was also from Nova Scotia, so he asked us if he could go back with us. We agreed, so there was six of us ended up driving back in that Pontiac. Took us seven days coming out from Nova Scotia, and ten days coming back. We had a few extra dollars, so we stopped and visited a few places. (I wrote this story first in the seniors' paper.) My dad acted as banker and handled the expenses. When we needed money for the car everyone would chip in \$10 or \$20. I didn't have to pay anything as I furnished the car. When Dad got out east we figured out how much it cost. It was about \$54. I remember we bought a second-hand tire in Pembroke, Ontario for \$2.50. To think, I can go downtown today and not get enough gas for \$54 to fill my tank. I remember one place in Indiana where there was a gas war on and you could get gas for 10¢ a gallon. Our tank held about ten gallons, but it was only half empty, so we could only get that good price for half a tank. The highest we paid was about 35¢ a gallon.

In the early part of 1939 my dad built a hundred-foot long chicken house for this cousin of mine in Nova Scotia. He made enough money for us to come west.

My sister Doris married Willie Green in December 1929. We spent the fall and winter of 1939/1940 at their place south of Robsart. In those years there was terrible drought and the land they lived on couldn't grow crops. The government relocated them and others living in this semi-arid land to Rolling Hills, Alberta where they built an irrigation district. I helped Doris and Willie move to Rolling Hills in March of '40.

That same year my dad and I got a job in Medicine Hat at the new airport they were building. If you wanted to work you just went out to the airport and they would hire you. That fall (1940) the airport job finished, so we packed up and drove to Vancouver figuring we'd get the same kind of work out there. When we got out there we found out you couldn't get a job unless you had papers and worked for a contractor. To make matters worse, there were hundreds of men like us looking for the same work.

That was the toughest winter I ever put in, in my whole life. There was a war on and yet you couldn't buy a job. We would go down to the shipyards every morning, but no work, no work at all.

Eventually, my dad and me got jobs with a man named Thomas H. Hamilton; he was the inventor of the three-blade propeller. He had been a construction man when he invented that, so he had big royalties. He was building these cabins up north of Vancouver in the Princess Louisa Inlet. He built these cabins like a French village and a Swiss village, to get away from income taxes mostly, I think. He was from Malibu, California, and he called his yacht *Malibu*. He took us up there in his yacht in February, but it was so fancy he made all us working guys stay on deck; we couldn't go inside and it got mighty cold out there.

He was a millionaire, even in those times, so he was able to pay us \$60 a month plus board. My mother came with us, and there was one other guy who had his wife there so she had some company. We worked for him for about four months and then came back to Vancouver in July 1941. He told us rather than write us a cheque right there he would give us a slip and we should go to the Vancouver Hotel and collect our wages. We had told Mr. Hamilton we might be back, but as soon as we got our wages we got our car out of storage and headed back for Saskatchewan. If we had stayed in B.C. any longer we would have had to put a B.C. licence on the car, and in order to do that you needed an inspection. Well, our car was old and the brakes were shot, so we knew it would never pass. I had asked a friend in Saskatchewan to mail our Sask. plates to B.C. to another friend's place before we left to go to Princess Louisa Inlet. By the time we got back the plates were there, so we put them on and headed home.

1941 was a grasshopper year, so my dad got a job mixing grasshopper poison here in Robsart and I got a job working for a farmer. We lived in Robsart for the next year and in 1942 I got my first permanent job working for the railroad. I worked for them from 1942 to 1946. In the meantime I married a schoolteacher, Lavone Beyers, in 1944.

Lavone was born and lived on a farm north of Vidora. She attended grades one to ten at Cypress Lake School. Only grades one to eight were actually taught in that school so when she decided to be a teacher she took correspondence at the school for grades nine and ten. For grades eleven and twelve she boarded out and went to school in Consul. She then attended Normal School in Moose Jaw and got a teaching diploma. Her first teaching job was at Atkins School, about fourteen miles east of Robsart. In those days Christmas concerts and dances were a big source of entertainment and it was at one of these Atkins School Christmas concerts that I first met Lavone. I knew right away that she was the one.

After we were married we lived with my parents in Robsart. I worked on the railroad and Lavone taught school, first at Whitemud School north of Robsart where she stayed with her aunt and uncle, Ethel and Sigurd Brekhus, and then at Ridgecliff School about ten miles south of Robsart, where she lived in the teacherage and only came home on weekends.

In 1946 I got a job with Ducks Unlimited building dams. The work was from May to November so Lavone joined me at the job site during July and August. I worked for Ducks Unlimited until about 1951. Our eldest daughter Donna was born in 1947 and was ready to start school in the fall of 1953. I didn't want to be on the road with construction and have Lavone at home looking after Donna by herself so I quit the job at Ducks Unlimited and got a job buying grain at the Pool elevator in Govenlock in 1952.

MG: How many children do you have?

AS: We have four - Donna, Myrna, Lynn and Joe. Joe is the baby; he now lives and works in New Zealand. That's Joe and his wife Sue's wedding picture there on the wall. They got married about four years ago.

So then, when I went to Govenlock we rented a house, but before long this fellow I rented from sold the house. There was no place else to live, so I quit the Pool and

started looking for another job. A fellow from Brooks came along from the McCabe Grain Company and offered me a job there. I went up there to look things over and this seems hard to believe now, but I couldn't find a place in Brooks for less than \$60 a month. In those days that was a lot of money. My wages would have been about \$160 per month and I couldn't afford the \$60 per month for rent. I was so disgusted at that time with McCabe that I didn't wanna work for a grain company again. So, I went back to Robsart and worked on the railroad again for a few months.

But then I got a job offer from Pioneer to buy grain in Robsart. I asked the wife what she thought and she said, "Maybe we better try it for awhile." So, we tried it and twenty-nine years later I retired from that elevator.

MG: What years did you work there?

AS: From 1952 to 1980. After I retired in 1980 we stayed right there. It was a pretty fair little town then. We had the store, the curling rink and the garage. Well then, the town started slipping downhill, downhill, downhill, and so in 1998 we decided we would move to Maple Creek.

My daughter and I bought this house in here. When we came in here the floor was bad, so we had to put in a new subfloor. The carpet and the linoleum in the kitchen cost us the same as what we got out of the house when we sold it in Robsart. Twenty-three hundred dollars was all we could get for that house, and I had put new siding on it a few years before, new shingles on the roof and we had those new modern windows - better windows than I have in here too. They were worth nothing there.

Coming to Maple Creek was good. I knew lots of people here and my wife was a quilter; she was always quilting. She passed away from cancer two and one-half years ago. Since that time, I play the violin at the odd dance, play a little cards and visit with

friends. My health is pretty good other than one bad leg. I said to the doctor a few years back “I got this bad leg”, and he said “Well, for your age that isn’t bad”; I said, “how come Doc, the other leg is the same age and it’s not so bad!” (*Laughing*) So, that is kinda my life history.

MG: Who taught you how to play fiddle?

AS: I never took a lesson in my life. I am self-learned. As time went on, I found I knew what key I was playing in, but I can’t read music.

MG: When did you start playing?

AS: I started playing in about 1932. I had the mumps, so was confined to the house and got bored. I started to learn then.

There was another thing. Dad had a violin; he played some, but not that great. He had this fiddle and never had a case for it. He was on the farm and kept it on the wall. One time, the school teacher was there and this neighbour guy came over and in some way they got tussling around; it was her birthday and he was gonna give her a spanking or something. Anyway, they bumped into that wall and smashed the violin.

We had heard of a fellow named Sidney Eagle in Maple Creek who fixed violins, so we sent it in there. Of course that was really tough times then and I don’t know how much was against it, but we couldn’t afford to pay for it. I had a couple other fiddles and I wrote this Eagle and said, “I would like that fiddle as a keepsake. I have two other violins here; I will give you these two violins for the repairs.” He accepted and said he would do that. But, that was the time we left for Nova Scotia, so I never did get my dad’s fiddle back.

Years later, when I was in the elevator I rebuilt fiddles as a hobby – buying them and rebuilding them. At my sale in Robsart in 1999 I had sixteen violins; I sold most of them

at the sale and still have five here yet, one for each of the kids plus the one I use to play all the time.

MG: Do you like to play still?

AS: Oh yeah, I still have a couple of them around here.

MG: Is there a chance we could get you to play us a little song?

AS: I could play one here for you in a little bit.

MG: I would love that! What were some of the favourite songs you used to play at dances?

AS: Favourite tunes or dances?

MG: Both.

AS: Well, at that time the dances we played for were based on old-time music, like the old time waltz and the schottische, the two step and all of that. We have quite a few young ones now starting to come; we give them great credit for that.

I did lots of repair work and hobbyist work my whole life, but can't do much of that anymore. So, music is the only hobby I've got left you might say.

MG: What a great hobby!

AS: Yes, it is. I have no arthritis so far, my eyesight is pretty good, and my hearing is good, so I can still enjoy the music.

MG: So, did your parents farm or ranch?

AS: Neither really. When my dad and mom came out here in 1913, they had a half section, and they farmed some, but not too much. The most my dad ever broke was about eighty acres. That was 12 miles north of Robsart. It was a rockpile up there, and was also bad for early frost. Gilchrists have it now; it's great for cattle. My dad froze out

a couple times, and being 12 miles from town, with no trucks, and hardly no roads, it was a real hardship. If you ever did get a crop, you had to haul it 12 miles to town, with a team of horses and a wagon. It's practically unbelievable to me, even now, and I lived through it. I don't even tell stories like that, to the young people, because I know when I leave, they will say, "that old fella is getting pretty crazy."

MG: Oh, no.

AS: Well, some of these stories are pretty hard to believe. I can hardly believe them myself.

MG: What are some of the ways that the older generation coped with these hard times?

AS: We made our own fun; we went to dances, (it cost 50 cents for the men and the women got in free.), we had a young peoples' group, and we used to skate on a homemade rink out at Olmsteds. We also used to ski on the little hills behind the Ralph Amundson place.

For money there were odd jobs and Government relief, social welfare now. I remember this fella, Albert Vingy, he lived in a little shack about two miles west of Robsart. He used to walk into town every day to play a little pool and get the mail or some groceries. He got a relief cheque every month for \$6.80. My dad and mom, and myself, were also on relief; we got \$12.90 every month for all three of us. My dad also had a little job hauling the mail, so we got by. But just barely, I'll tell you that. In the fall, we would get some apples and other fruits from Ontario. We would also get a little extra money to buy a pair of shoes, or jeans, or for whatever you needed the most. We could buy eggs for 5 cents a dozen, so they were a staple.

My dad ran the livery barn for about three years in Robsart. I remember this fella who used to bring the mail into Robsart. He never had the money to board his team. It cost 10 cents to put the team into the barn, without feed, and 20 cents with feed. He never

had any cash, so every so often, he would send in a 10 pound crock of homemade butter to cover his bill. Boy! That was good dairy butter, and it sold for 10 cents a pound. When I was a young fellow, I used to help out at the livery barn. When people would come to the dances, they would put the horses in the barn, and it was my job to go to the livery barn after the dance and collect the dues. All of this was quite an experience. It's kinda nice to look back, but boy, I wouldn't want to go through anything like that again.

But people in this country will never go through that again. We have different ways of doing things and we live in a land of plenty. Now, in some countries the food just isn't there, but here, there's plenty of food, so if the grocery guy wants to sell me groceries, and I want to buy them, I can.

Of course, what burned a lot of people up back then was that you couldn't find cash money nowhere. Then, the war broke out in 1939, and suddenly, there was lots of money. My dad and I worked on the airport in Medicine Hat, in the fall of '40, and they just wasted money. I worked as a carpenter and got 90 cents an hour. That was the most money I had ever made in my life, to that point. My dad was also a good carpenter, but he was scared to go up in the air, so he took a job doing labour that paid just 45 cents an hour.

Well, one day, we was putting a roof on the hangar, when our boss came over and said he we was running short of supplies, but was expecting a load of lumber any day. In the meantime, "we don't want to lay any of you guys off, so take it easy". So, we'd take it easy, but so many of us, even when we took it easy, would do more than he wanted. The boss came back again, and said "I thought I told you guys to take it easy". So, the next day, we sat up on the roof of the hangar, and played Rummy. Didn't do nothing! I could look down there and watch my dad working away trying to make 45 cents an hour, and us guys sitting on the hangar roof playing Rummy, making 90 cents an hour. It's still kinda like that today; truth is, some people just get paid to sit around.

MG: So, you didn't fight in the war?

AS: No, but I was called up in 1943 to Regina. I was working on the railroad at that time, and I wouldn't even had to go then, because when the road boss came along a few days after I left, he said, "Where's Archie?" The foreman told him, "Oh, Archie got called by the army to go to Regina." The road boss replied, "What he's doing here is essential work; the army should have got hold of me, and I would have saved him a trip." But, as it was, I was only there about two weeks. My feet, you might say, are a disfigurement; one is about one inch longer than the other. Well, the army said they would have to have my boots custom made, and then asked me if it bothered me much. I told them, only if I walk very far. I guess they figured it was too much bother, with marching and all, so two weeks later, they gave me a discharge.

When I originally went from Robsart to Regina I went through Shaunavon. When I was discharged they would only gave me a ticket back to Shaunavon, and this train only ran once a week. I told them I wanted a ticket to Maple Creek, cause I wouldn't have to rent a room while waiting for the train, and I could catch a ride home better from Maple Creek. They flat out said, "No". So, I really got mad at this guy, and told him where he could put his ticket. I told him I worked for the CPR and I would just notify them, and would have a ticket delivered to me faster than they could even make one out. The guy said, "Just a minute sir.", and it wasn't five minutes until they gave me a ticket to Maple Creek. So, as soon as I got back to Maple Creek, I caught a ride to Robsart with a rancher. Boy, were my mom and dad happy when they saw me. They never knew I was coming back, so when I walked in the door, Boy!

MG: What a surprise.

AS: So, therefore, I didn't go into the service. I worked for the railroad until the spring of 1946, and then I worked for Ducks Unlimited until the spring of 1952. I did construction work for them, mostly putting in these little dams. Ducks had only the one

construction outfit for the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, so we travelled all over. We put in dams around Robsart, Claydon, Shaunavon, Yorkton, and in and around the Quill Lake area. We met a lot of nice people. Some, we still send Christmas cards back and forth and kind of keep in touch.

We lived in a little trailer about 14 feet long. We did a lot of our cooking outside on a Coleman stove, and Lavone had to do the laundry outside with a washtub and scrub board. Hard to believe now, but guess it was kinda like camping. Anyway, like I said, Donna was getting to be old enough to start school, and I didn't want to be away all the time, so I left that job, and started to look for another.

MG: Then, from 1952 to 1980, you ran the elevator.

AS: Yeah, that's a painting of it up there on the wall. Now, everything in that picture is gone. That's where it sat, just east of Robsart.

MG: When was the elevator brought down?

AS: We had our sale when we left Robsart in 1999, so I think maybe 2000. I have a copy of the article from the newspaper, about when it was demolished.

MG: Do you work on your own history?

AS: I just take cuttings out of the newspaper, and put them in my copy of the Our Side of the Hills history book.

MG: So, you have seen a lot of changes in the town of Robsart.

AS: Yes, I've seen it come, and I've seen it go, you could say. When we moved in during the fall of 1928, it had already gone downhill a bit. The town started in 1914, so it was 14 years when we moved. The hospital wasn't running anymore and an undertaker place had closed just before we came to town. They had a 30-room hotel back then,

and I remember one summer, my dad and I were in town, and there came a rainstorm. Of course, we couldn't get home right away, due to the mud, so we tried to get a room at the hotel. Every room was filled. So, we were standing there, wondering what to do, when the Chinese fella that ran the place came over and told us someone had just cancelled and we could have that room. Boy, that was a treat for me! It was some great thing to have a hotel room. That was about 1926.

MG: And the hotel was owned by a Chinese family?

AS: Yeah, but they didn't build it. It was built in 1914, by an outfit that had built hotels in Admiral and Shaunavon. When it was built, it was a modern hotel, with 30 rooms, steam heat, a bar, kitchen, and café. Prohibition came on January 1, 1915. The bar only operated for one day; it nearly broke the owners right there. In 1936, beer parlours became legal, but the government said it was illegal for Chinese people to own a liquor licence, so the beer parlour was rented out to Tom Smith, the butcher at the time.

There were strict rules back then; no food allowed in the beer parlour. Boy, if you wanted something like a beer sausage, you had to sneak it in, and only take a bite now and then when no one was watching. It was also against the liquor laws to operate a radio or have any type of music in there. I'm telling you, it was just like prison.

MG: Why! Was that the Government rules?

AS: Yes, like I said, the rules were very strict. There were big signs stating "Licensed Premises", and "Warning to Minors". Only men were allowed and you had to be over 21 to go into these beer parlours. You couldn't even move your beer to another table; the barkeeper had to do it for you. No walking around with open beer.

It was the same in Manitoba. When we were working there for Ducks Unlimited in about 1950, the rule was that you could only buy offsale beer if you were going to take it back

and drink it at your residence. Well, all we had was a trailer, with no fixed address, so we used to use Lot 24, Charleswood, Manitoba, so we could buy beer.

The beer parlours used to close early too, usually at 10:00 p.m. I used to play for dances all over the country, and there was no point in starting to play for a dance until after the beer parlour closed, cause no body would show up. We would then play until 12:00, and break for midnight lunch, then start again at about 1:00, and play until 2 or 3 in the morning. I remember playing one night in Vidora, and there came along a big snowstorm. Nobody could get home in the storm, so they took up a collection plate, so we would keep playing. We played until 7:00. We made more money from the collection plate than what we originally charged to play for the dance.

Our orchestra was called the A.B.C. Orchestra, made up of A for Archie, B for Bill Brown, and C for George Cunningham. We played from 1946 to about 1950. Yeah, because I think in about 1951 George moved to Winnipeg, and that put an end to our band.

MG: Who were some of the neighbours you grew up with in Robsart?

AS: The Dahls, Skauges, Olmsteads, Morrisons and Browns, just to name a few. I went to school with Elmer Skauge and Cliff Brown. We remained friends our whole life, and when we all moved to Maple Creek, we were within walking distance of each other's houses. I guess I have to say Cliff was my best friend, for as long as I can remember. I really miss him since he passed on. We were also close to Sigurd and Ethel Brekhus. Ethel was Lavone's aunt, and they stood up with us when we got married. Now, all my school chums have passed. When I forget something or can't think of a name or place I have no one to ask. I just have to figure it out for myself. One thing that helps out a lot is the history book, (*referring to Our Side of the Hills*). My wife and I helped on that, and it's a great thing to have around. I know, or knew most everyone in that book, and I think at one time or another, I've read nearly every story.

MG: Did you know any of the Merryflatters who now live in Maple Creek?

AS: No, not many of them. Merryflat was way out of our district in the early days. I remember one time about three or four of us young people went over to a dance in West Plains, and even that was a long way to go. Now, it's almost the same district and they're our next-door neighbours.

Now, a lot of the younger people don't understand how back then there was a schoolhouse every few miles, but when you're walking, two or three miles is a long way to go. In later years I'd hear guys complaining that his kid had to walk a quarter of a mile to catch the school bus, and I think they're just spoiled. Me and my sisters had to walk two miles every day, rain or shine, and nobody thought anything about it. The school districts were quite small; two miles west of Robsart was Luce school and two and a half miles east was the Olive school.

MG: We have a little less than ten minutes left on the tape. Is there anything you can think of, that you would like to share for the record? I realize that this is a broad question, but some people have told us stories about the flood of 1952. Did that affect you?

AS: No, not too much. That was the last year I worked for Ducks Unlimited. I worked with Donald Brown, we called him Dutch; he was Cliff Brown's brother. Anyways, him and me were in Regina that spring of the flood. My dad had cancer at that time, and I had come home to take him to Regina for treatments; we left just ahead of that flood.

One thing that flood did was clean out that old town of Eastend. Before the flood there was no sewer system; just those old outhouses. The flood swept them down the river. It was a terrible thing, but it helped clean everything out.

But then, back in those days, when you came to a town of any size, the smell of the toilets and the flies around were just terrible. I've often thought how bad it was in those really big cities like London. I remember Alf Brown telling me, when he was in Italy,

during the war, that they just had these little alcoves, almost right off the street, where people went to relieve themselves.

MG: When did indoor plumbing come to Robsart?

AS: Well, we had to put our own in. Consul had a water system put in, but Robsart wasn't big enough, so we had to do it for ourselves. In 1969 four of us went together and bought a well machine. We drilled our own well, put in our own septic tank, and everything. Before that, it was just an outhouse for the toilet, and a washtub or basin to wash up in.

MG: That seems very late, doesn't it Archie.

AS: Yes, it does, but it was an expensive thing to do, when you had to do it on your own.

We had a town well in Robsart, and every Sunday there would be all us kids lined up to fetch water for Monday wash day. The well had good water, but it only held about a barrel of water. Once you took that water out, it would take a few minutes to fill up again. They would pump that well dry a few times on Sunday evening. People would be there with their boilers and pails to take the water home.

There were no automatic washer or dryers either. People would put the clothes out on the line to dry. In the winter, the clothes would freeze on the line, and then you would have to bring them in to the house and hang them all over on racks.

I think that's why, in those days, lots of people didn't live so long. They faced so much hard work and many hardships. It was hard enough for everyone, but I think the worst for women. They had to bear the children, cook no matter what, and they didn't even have a bathroom. Had to go out to the outhouse and sweep the snow off the seat. Just unbelievable!

But, I would say, I have lived through some pretty interesting times. I don't think there will be as many changes in the next eighty years, but who knows. Possibly there will be, but I guess I can't imagine what they will be. See, today I have this digital camera, and there's e-mail, and computers, and everything. Just yesterday, I talked to my son in New Zealand, and it wasn't different than talking to someone in Consul. Last summer, he told me he was looking on his computer at a map of Maple Creek, and he could see my house. He knew it was mine because he could see my red car in the driveway.

MG: Google Maps, I guess.

*(Tape paused; Archie has gone to get his fiddle to play us a song.)*

AS: This fiddle is dated 1783. I got it from a friend of mine from Admiral back in 1946. I think I paid him \$10 for it. Neither of us knew that it had a sticker in it that said 1783. I didn't find it till years later.

This little charm on my fiddle came from Japan. My wife's brother lives there. In 2000, we went to visit them. My sister-in-law's mother, who was nearly 100, made it for me.

Let me figure out what to play for you. I think "Down the River of Golden Dreams."

MG: Wonderful.

*Tape ends as Archie plays a tune. Clapping, Susan and Meagan thank him.*

*Archie tells about a video he appeared in where he discusses ghost towns and Robsart. He passed the video along to be copied by the Consul Museum.*