

“THAT’S THE WAY IT WAS”: ORAL HISTORIES OF WOMEN FROM
THE EARLY DAYS OF BRIERCREST COLLEGE AND SEMINARY

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

Briercrest Seminary

April 2007

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Abstract of a thesis presented to Briercrest Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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by

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Significant material has been published on the founding and growth of Briercrest Bible Institute, yet most books and articles feature roles played by men, with comparatively little attention to the women involved. In this thesis I ask the question, "What were the experiences of women in the early days of Briercrest College and Seminary?" then take an oral history approach to find answers. Oral history searches out lived experiences not necessarily found in standard historical documents, gathered through deep conversations about significant events and ideas. Scholar Linda Shopes suggests understanding it "as a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record."¹ This thesis presents four autobiographical

¹ Linda Shopes, "What is Oral History?" *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web* [course online] [cited 3 March 2007]. Available from <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html>.

narratives that arose from such conversations with five women who were involved in Briercrest prior to 1960.

Chapter one introduces my own background and process for choosing this topic. Chapter two surveys an interdisciplinary cross-section of literature about Briercrest, women's history and psychology, Mennonite history, and delimits the epoch from WWI through the appearance of feminism. Chapter three explains oral history as discipline and method, exploring the researcher's role. Chapter four presents the results: the women's narratives. Chapter five highlights themes, demonstrates preliminary analysis, discusses what I have learned, suggests further research and practical applications, and asserts the value of the research.

In the founding of a school that grew into a town, women were usually outside the classrooms and offices, yet they had immeasurable influence, especially in the wider community. In fact, it seems their particular roles provided necessary balance in establishing the new place.

This thesis is for the women of Briercrest College and Seminary—past, present, and
future,
particularly those women who have entrusted me with their stories:

Jean Rhode Mahn
Esther Edwards
Selma Penner
Irene Fender
Lillian Diggins

My story is important not because it is mine, God knows,
but because if I tell it anything like right,
the chances are you will recognize
that in many ways it is also yours.
Maybe nothing is more important than
that we keep track,
you and I, of these stories
of who we are
and where we have come from
and the people we have met along the way
because it is precisely through these stories
in all their particularity,
as I have long believed and often said,
that God makes himself known to each of us
most powerfully and personally.
If this is true, it means
that to lose track of our stories
is to be profoundly impoverished
not only humanly but also spiritually.

Frederick Buechner in *Telling Secrets*, p. 30.
Poetic line breaks mine.

I am a poetess,
and one day I will take my place
among the grandmothers and wise women.
I am a poetess:
between the silences
I hear stories and find the words to speak

Colleen Taylor, "Poetess,"
1998.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While much has been written on the history of Briercrest College and Seminary¹ and the men involved in its founding, the stories and voices of their wives and female co-laborers have more rarely been heard. This thesis explores the experiences and contributions of women at Briercrest, particularly in the first twenty-five years after its founding. Oral history narratives will begin to reveal what life was like for women in the early days of the institution, providing insights regarding the formal and informal contributions of women in establishing and educating at these schools. The participants in this thesis were Jean (Whittaker) Mahn, Esther Edwards, Selma Penner, Irene Fender, and Lillian Diggins.

This study will hold interest for historians of women's studies, plains research, and religious education, particularly the Bible college movement. It should also interest administrators who wonder how to involve women in leadership and who want to better understand attitudes of and towards women. The research will find an immediate audience among alumni, associates and their spouses, and students.

This highly original research has great potential for gaining a broader and deeper understanding of our college and the people who helped to establish it. While the

¹ In the time period examined by this thesis, the school's name was Briercrest Bible Institute. The present name is Briercrest College and Seminary, which also covers a third entity: Caronport High School. For this thesis, when referring to the institution as a whole, I will simply use Briercrest, though context will dictate the use of the full name, former names, or other terms such "the college," "the school," or "the schools."

research may not directly influence theory or policy, its first significance is “for its detailed description of life circumstances that express particular social issues . . . [and] to illuminate the lived experiences of interest by providing rich description.”² In drawing out and telling the stories of women who were involved in the first years of Briercrest, our institutional narrative will thicken, and our understanding of our past—and present—will be enlightened and enriched.

This research is undertaken lest women from the early days of Briercrest disappear. Given the dearth of women’s stories and voices, one question drives this thesis: What were the experiences of women in the early days of Briercrest? Other question may be interesting (i.e., How were women's experiences different from men's? and What were the women's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes about their experiences?); however, the goal of this project is to create a descriptive body of work, reserving in-depth analysis for later research. Mary Belenky writes, “The stories of the women drew us back into a kind of knowing that had too often been silenced by the institutions in which we grew up and of which we were a part. In the end we found that, in our attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice, that voice had educated us.”³ I believe that we can discover wisdom previously undetected.

My Background

In 1998, my final project for an MCS at Regent College was an arts thesis in which I wrote songs and poems, presenting them in a concert. The theme was “Finding a Voice,”

² Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999), 37.

³ Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996), 20.

and it explored three dimensions: finding one's own voice, giving voice to the voiceless, and hearing God's voice. One of the lyrics has these words: "I am a poetess / And one day I will take my place / Among the grandmothers and wise women. / I am a poetess / Between the silences / I hear stories and find the words to speak." Those lines feel like a prophetic word that is now being fulfilled. Certainly with this thesis I have taken my place among grandmothers and wise women and have heard stories for which I am finding the words to speak.

A second component in the arts thesis was 30-page academic paper on a related subject. I researched the poetry of three Mennonite women, spending significant time in the Columbia Bible College library in Abbotsford, B.C., pouring over literature about Mennonite women and their history. Little did I know that this would lay a strong foundation for future research. Interestingly, an article by Julia Kasdorf, published four years prior to my Regent thesis, draws an essential connection between oral history and the poetry of Mennonite women.⁴

Funerals

Within the space of one year we buried the wives of two former presidents: Joanne Barkman and Inger Hildebrand. Attending these funerals stirred a desire in me to pursue some kind of research about women at Briercrest. I stood with the honour guards inspired by their lives, yet wondering, how truly representative were they of women at Briercrest?

⁴ Julia Kasdorf, "'We Weren't Always Plain': Poetry by Women of Mennonite Backgrounds," in *Strangers at Home*, ed. Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 312-338.

Job Description

My concern for women at Briercrest intensified as my work responsibilities changed and increased. In 2002, I moved from the teaching faculty to Student Development as Associate Dean of Students. My supervisor, Glenn Runnalls, wrote into my job description that I was to “speak intelligently and broadly to women’s issues,” a heavy yet inspiring mantle. As I surveyed the schools and the village of Caronport, seeking partners on behalf of women, I wondered how our community had gotten to be the way it was.

Project Ideas

I began to sort through possible project ideas, first considering a project on generativity, comparing women’s self-in-relation theories with male concepts of autonomous self, intending to use Erickson’s stages of human development to evaluate gendered ideas about women’s potential to make generative contributions to institutions. Then I wanted to research beliefs about reasons for educating women, possibly through surveys and quantitative interviews. Both ideas are still compelling, but premature. We need to understand our origins first.

My next idea was an historical question: What informal contributions to education have women made at Briercrest through the decades? Barbara Neville, an adjunct faculty member, knew what I was wrestling with. When she heard that I was going to B.C. in late October 2004, she urged me to interview Henry Hildebrand before it was too late. That got me thinking about interviewing women, too, so I called Marilyn Zink for referrals, and set up interviews with four women before I even knew what I was looking for! I had not yet written a thesis proposal, never mind getting it approved, and I did not know my discipline. I was going on hunches, seeking conversations. I just wanted to talk

with these women.

Early into the interviews, I realized that “informal contributions” was the wrong question. Men’s and women’s lives were apparently so separate that the women often had little or no contact with students. Generally women had supportive roles as stay-at-home wives, and sometimes as secretaries or other support staff. The better question was to explore what life was like for women in their own voices, guided not by predetermined themes but by the memories and values of the women themselves.

Thus I have settled on an interdisciplinary thesis with a strong historical angle. We need to know the stories before we can evaluate them. We need to learn to listen—more and better.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interdisciplinary

The crux of this interdisciplinary thesis is the collection of oral histories from women who were involved with Briercrest before 1960. The written process will draw upon insights and methods from a range of disciplines: history, theology, psychology, gender studies, sociology, and educational studies. The eclectic flavour of this literature review results from an intentional decision to combine these disciplines for a fuller understanding of women's history, particularly that of the women of early Briercrest.

Primary Sources: Literature about Briercrest

Four significant publications focus on the founding and growth of Briercrest Bible Institute: *Miracle on the Prairies* and *Beacon on the Prairies* by Bernard and Marjorie Palmer, *In His Loving Service* by Henry Hildebrand, and *Wind in the Wheatfields* by Henry Budd. Although women are given some mention, these books mainly document the men. For example, *Beacon on the Prairies* is subtitled *The Men God Uses In Building The Briercrest Bible Institute*. Bernard and Marjorie Palmer do have a chapter in *Miracle on the Prairies* titled "The Dean of Women Speaks," and Henry Hildebrand writes clearly of Annie (Copeland) Hillson,¹ and dedicates two further chapters of his memoirs to women (chapter 8, "The

¹ Henry Hildebrand, *In His Loving Service* (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Bible College, 1985), 47-48.

Founding of a Bible School” and chapter 10, “Enter the Heroine”). Henry Budd’s pictorial history is the most inclusive, giving fair coverage to women along with the men, in text as well as pictures. However, all of these books are authored mainly by men² and focus on the institution, which was male-led with support staff comprised of some men and many single women. In these writings we do not read of the school’s practice of not employing married women, a significant factor excluding women from institutional influence.³ The primary sources portray an idealized image of home life. Esther Edwards and Selma Penner noted that Inger Hildebrand (“the Heroine”) was not necessarily typical and was so exemplary as to be intimidating for other women.⁴ The day-to-day experiences of married women are generally overlooked.

One exception, *Treasures in Heaven* by Beatrice Sundbo, is the story of a wife who, with her husband, “saw four of her five children die.”⁵ The Sundbo family began serving at Briercrest early after the school moved to Caronport.⁶ This little book is full of names well known to those familiar with Briercrest history. Yet, Briercrest’s centrality is geographical coincidence; this book is the memoir of a family’s grief, not a deliberately historical record about the school.

² Note: I have not investigated Marjorie Palmer’s role in co-authoring the two books with her husband.

³ Esther Edwards, Selma Penner, Irene Fender, and Lillian Diggins all referred to this practice.

⁴ Esther Edwards and Selma Penner, interview by Colleen Taylor, tape recording, 2 November 2004, Abbotsford, BC.

⁵ Beatrice Sundbo, *Treasures in Heaven* (Beaverlodge, AB: Horizon House Publishers, 1977), back cover.

⁶ Briercrest Bible Institute relocated to Caronport in 1946. Mrs. Sundbo supplies some dates, but no years, not even of her children’s births. Dates here are estimates. Mrs. Sundbo writes, “Before Donald was three months old, we moved from our home in Weldon, a small town in northern Saskatchewan, to the Briercrest Bible Institute at Caronport Saskatchewan” (21). Donnie, who died of leukemia at age 4, was second of the four children lost. Another clue to dates is in the acknowledgements: “The story of Donna, Donald, and Baby Garth was first published, privately, in 1955.”

Another exception is *Joyful Servants*, a biography of David and Jeannie Hildebrand, written by David's father, Henry. The account documents mundane details of David's childhood such as colds, flues, earaches, and frequent visits to the hospital. There are also references to David's mother and Hildebrand family life in the towns of Briercrest and Caronport.⁷ In this book, Henry Hildebrand is compiler as much as author, and many other writers are women. This book focuses on people more than the institution, yet two factors disqualify it from this study: (1) the women are not writing about themselves, and (2) recollections prior to 1960 are few.

Three other Briercrest Seminary students have addressed women's concerns. Krista K. Rackham's thesis examines *Female Students in the Context of the Bible College: Retention as Seen Through Motivation Factors*,⁸ Jeanette Lee's thesis looks at *Factors which Influence and Inhibit Women Becoming Faculty in AABC Schools*,⁹ and Cheryl Busse's thesis chronicles *Evangelical women in professional ministry in the 1990's: examining internal dynamics*.¹⁰ Valuable as these studies are, they focus on academic or ministry-related concerns, not contributing specifically to domestic knowledge regarding women at Briercrest. Methodologically, Busse's thesis is most instructive as a qualitative study using interviews to open up the inner worlds of a sample of women, yet her goal was to discover common themes among

⁷ Henry Hildebrand, *Joyful Servants* (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Books, 2001), 5, 10-15

⁸ Krista K. Rackham, *Female Students in the Context of the Bible College: Retention as Seen Through Motivation Factors* (MA thesis, Briercrest Seminary, 1999).

⁹ Jeanette Lee, *Factors Which Influence and Inhibit Women Becoming Faculty in AABC Schools* (MA thesis, Briercrest Seminary, 1998).

¹⁰ Cheryl Busse, *Evangelical Women in Professional Ministry in the 1990's: Examining Internal Dynamics* (MA thesis, Briercrest Seminary, 1998).

anonymous participants, while the goal of this thesis is to offer particular life stories of named women.

Curiously, though women have received little attention in books about Briercrest's founding and history, early publications of Briercrest's monthly newsletter, the *Echo*, feature many writings by and about women. Prior to 1948, women are frequent contributors, and the only editors named from June 1944 through December 1948 are women: Jean Whittaker and Violet MacLaren. After 1948, women still write often, along with men, but the voice of the *Echo* takes a different tone, with emphasis moving from short original articles to reprinted sermons, articles and quotations, supplemented by alumni news.

Silent and Hidden Women

The Palmers write at the end of *Miracle on the Prairies*: “Who can say what has been done at Briercrest as a direct result of the silent, happy acceptance of the personal sacrifices made by the wives and families of staff members that serving at such an institution demands?”¹¹ If published literature was the only witness, there would be no argument. But, after interviews with only five women who lived and worked at Briercrest prior to 1960, it is apparent that the wives and families may have been silent, but not all were happy with or accepting of their situation. Jean Whittaker regrets the frequency of giving up her bed for visiting students and Bible teachers during her teens, and is still frustrated that she could not get a desired bicycle when her father gave a car

¹¹ Bernard Palmer and Marjorie Palmer, *Miracle on the Prairies* (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Bible Institute, n.d.), 190.

to the principal of the school.¹² Esther Edwards tells of how her children wanted a pony. Not being able to work for pay at Caronport,¹³ she took a clerical job in Moose Jaw and rented a school-owned car (for two dollars a day) to get there.¹⁴

When I contacted my first interviewees by phone—Esther Edwards, Selma Penner, Irene Fender, and Lillian Diggins—each one expressed doubt in her ability to contribute much to the project. Esther Edwards was the first secretary to Henry Hildebrand and later became the wife of Homer Edwards. When I told her that my research revealed a lack of information regarding women, she responded, “We were supposed to be seen and not heard, like children.”¹⁵

While this silence among women at Briercrest may be disquieting, it is not surprising. Silence among women, as in lack of voice and agency, is a common theme in psychological studies,¹⁶ women's history, and even church history. Women's historian Gerda Lerner writes, “Selective memory on the part of the men who recorded and interpreted human history has had a devastating impact on women. . . . In effect, this process . . . has taught both men and women that women did not contribute to the making of civilization in their own right.”¹⁷ Some may feel that Lerner's language is too

¹² Jean (Whittaker) Mahn, interview by Colleen Taylor, tape recording, 4 June 2005, Athens, Ohio. Jean learned about the car through reading Henry Hildebrand's memoir, *In His Loving Service*.

¹³ Recall that it was standing practice not to employ married women, even those without children.

¹⁴ Esther Edwards and Selma Penner, interview.

¹⁵ Esther Edwards, conversation with Colleen Taylor, 26 Oct 2004, telephone.

¹⁶ Belenky, 17-18.

¹⁷ Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 205-206.

strong to be applied to Briercrest, yet these sorts of effects are evident.¹⁸ Even so, I do not believe that the people of Briercrest ever actually believed that women's activities were less valuable—just differently valued.

Briercrest's founding principal, Dr. Henry Hildebrand, a Russian Mennonite, told me in his 95th year that women and men "each have their place,"¹⁹ an idea clearly borne out in his writings about his wife and his sermons: a woman's place—her highest calling—is in the home, and this was her greatest contribution to the college.

Women's segregation to the home, where they may have subsumed their identities with their husbands and the wider institution, has even hidden women from each other, often leaving them with few resources and supports, effectively devaluing their activities and their very selves while their men have gone off to study and administrate. The isolation can be unsettling and unhealthy. Women like Isabel Whittaker apparently bore the pain and suffered in silence.²⁰

It has always been obvious that men and women are different, though innumerable theories speculate how. Carol Gilligan has been influential in changing the perception that typical adult development is a linear progression from dependence to separation, from relational, interpersonal-definition to individual self-definition.²¹ In the past two decades or so, researchers such as Gilligan have begun to identify the linear model as a decidedly male experience and to articulate women's development as more relational and

¹⁸ I mean, specifically, the Briercrest of this thesis' time period, though his also applies to the current situation.

¹⁹ Dr. Henry Hildebrand, interview by Colleen Taylor, tape recording, 2 November 2004, Abbotsford, BC.

²⁰ Jean Mahn, interview.

²¹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

less autocentric. An important insight into women's development and health is the "self-in-relation" theory: "the recognition that, for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships."²² The average woman's unique need for relationships with other women, family, colleagues, community, etc., is widely acknowledged.

These are not just categories noticed by secular writers. Faith-based writers observe women's need for connection, and some, like Tucker and Liefeld, point out female invisibility:

In many instances the role of women in the church has not been as noteworthy as that of men. After all, it is mainly men who have preached, led church councils, and written theology. But frequently women have been overlooked even when they made outstanding contributions. "As so frequently happens in the writing of history," writes Patricia Hill, "the women have simply disappeared."²³

This thesis will be undertaken lest women from the early days of Briercrest disappear.

Mennonite Connection

It is interesting to notice similarities between Briercrest's origins and those of "Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools in Western Canada"²⁴ While neither the Briercrest Gospel Assembly nor the Briercrest Bible Institute were explicitly denominational, appointing Henry Hildebrand, a Russlander Mennonite, as the first pastor and principal introduced a significantly Mennonite dynamic to the school.

²² Judith Jordan et al., *Women's Growth in Connection* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 52.

²³ Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 13.

²⁴ Bruce Guenther, "'Monuments to God's Faithfulness': Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools in Western Canada, 1913-1960," *Direction* (2001). Available from <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1160>.

Not only did the young principal have Mennonite background, the strength of MB Bible schools was waning in other parts of Canada as MB students gravitated towards non-denominational colleges. Bruce Guenther writes,

from the late 1930s onwards, Mennonite (not all MBs) students consistently made up twenty-five to thirty-five percent of the student population at both Prairie Bible Institute and Briercrest Bible Institute. Once established, it was difficult to stop the flow of Mennonite students into transdenominational Bible schools. Personal loyalties towards these institutions became entrenched and sometimes lasted for several generations: financial resources and personal energy were allocated away from local churches; satisfied alumni tended to recruit other students.²⁵

A cursory glance through Briercrest literature shows a visible Mennonite presence with names like Penner, Froese, Friesen, Regehr, Martens, Sawatzky, and more.

While it is important to consider the broader evangelical and fundamentalist milieu of the day,²⁶ Mennonite history provides insight into the social structure of the fledgling community, especially as it concerns women. Extensive research has been done about and by Mennonite women regarding their history, as evidenced *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, a collection of essays. In Julia Kasdorf 's essay, "We Were Not Always Plain," she writes,

History is a rich source for Mennonite writers because our group has consistently relied on historical narratives to sustain a sectarian cultural and religious identity . . . More than theological writings or church doctrine, community and family stories have shaped a sense of Mennonite identity in North America.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bruce D. Hindmarsh, "The Winnipeg Fundamentalist Network, 1910-1940: The Roots of Transdenominational Evangelicalism in Manitoba and Saskatchewan," *Didaskalia* [journal online] (Otterburne, MB: Providence College and Seminary, Fall 1998) [cited 26 October 2004]. Available from <http://prov.ca/Didaskalia/Articles/fall1998.aspx>.

²⁷ Kasdorf, 317.

Of course, at a place like Briercrest, Mennonite characteristics are less distinctive, yet still important influences. I have already done one thesis with a component on Mennonite women and think it a compelling source for understanding Briercrest's underpinnings.²⁸ Mennonite history will not dominate this thesis, but will definitely inform it.

Historical Setting

The time period for this thesis spans from the early 1930s through 1960, from the Great Depression to the advent of feminism. The Depression cultivated rugged, sacrificial people, and it was during this time that the dream of opening a Bible school was conceived and fulfilled.

Prior to the 1930s, education for women in Saskatchewan was promoted by The Homemakers' Clubs of Saskatchewan (established in 1911), "to promote the interests of home and community."²⁹

The Homemakers, which were patterned on the Women's Institutes (WI) of Ontario, were a part of the extension work of the University of Saskatchewan in Adult education. . . . Through these affiliations several Saskatchewan women made national and international connections which broadened their horizons. Even more women had their lives enriched just by going to district conventions or even better by attending the annual convention on the university campus.³⁰

Around this time, Annie (Copeland) Hillson started teaching women's Bible studies in the town of Briercrest.³¹ Not only was there a hunger for knowledge, there was a hunger

²⁸ Colleen Taylor, "Finding a Voice," tape recording (Vancouver, BC: Regent College arts thesis, April 1998).

²⁹ Kathleen Storrie, ed., *Women: Isolation and Bonding* (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), 81.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Palmer, *Miracle*, 14-20. Hildebrand, *In His Loving Service*, 47-48.

for truth, as demonstrated by Isabel Whittaker who enrolled in Scofield Bible courses from Moody College to check Annie Hillson's teaching.³² As Homemakers had their national and international horizons broadened through conventions, Christians in Briercrest and surrounding areas were also having their own horizons broadened.³³ What began as a women's initiative grew to Bible conferences, then an interdenominational church, and finally, in spite of economic hard times, to a college.

Today, Henry Hildebrand's praises for the women who helped to found Briercrest sound strange next to their limitations. He writes,

The saints at Briercrest were unique. . . . They were also unique in their gender. Beginning with a Ladies' Home Bible Study, the original assembly was comprised mostly of women well-instructed in the Scriptures. The few men we had did not avail themselves of the Home Bible Studies and so, in contrast with the women, knew little of the Bible. Still they were to be my elders.³⁴

It seems paradoxical to praise these women who were so well trained and who had taken so much initiative, then bar them from leadership based on gender. In fact, Hildebrand claims that the women were so "well instructed in the Word, the men could profitably ask questions of them at home as to the deeper meaning of the Word."³⁵ What a reversal of I Corinthians 14:33-35! In spite of the women's maturity and proficiency, apparently all the Briercrest believers shared the assumption that the men would lead and the women would support. Tucker and Liefeld would not be surprised by the Briercrest situation: "Another pattern indicated by our research suggests that women often had significant

³² Palmer, *Miracle*, 19.

³³ International influence came through prayer for and visits from missionaries.

³⁴ H. Hildebrand, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

leadership positions during the initial pioneering and development stages of a movement, only to be replaced by men as the movement became more ‘respectable.’”³⁶

For Briercrest, two great consecutive events were World War II (1939-1945) and the move to Caronport (1946). During the war, men and women all pitched in to do what they could for freedom.³⁷ Elaine Storkey observes how, after World War II, Americans and Europeans tried “to put it behind them and plan for the future . . . to return to normality.”³⁸ Jeannie Hildebrand marks the end of the war as the beginnings of 1950s suburbia, where “women were so relieved . . . because there had come within them such a longing for security. . . . And what they wanted most in life was to return to normality and to have love and home and family.”³⁹ Then she locates soil for feminism in the disillusionment that grew up among women in suburbia, and seeds of feminism in Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique*, stating, “And she [Friedan] said, ‘Girls, it is time to get out of your home and get into the real world.’”

That clear shift is the boundary line for this study. Jeannie Hildebrand seems to assess gender issues as essentially emotional and faith-based: “We should know that if we’re Christians . . . not a marriage or a family or a house or an acreage gives us satisfaction. Only the Lord can give us satisfaction, no matter who we are.”⁴⁰ Storkey, also a Christian, takes a sociological view, seeing gender questions as a natural outcome

³⁶ Tucker and Liefeld, 15.

³⁷ Jeannie Hildebrand, “How It Came Together and Where It Went,” tape recording. (Caronport SK: Pastor’s Conference—Ladies Time Out, March 14, 1989).

³⁸ Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 14.

³⁹ J. Hildebrand, “How It Came Together.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of rearranged roles during the World Wars.⁴¹ Even though America had experienced emancipation, women's suffrage, and the temperance movement (with campaigns often led by women), the 1950s were not particularly self-conscious about gender issues or history. There was an "absence of analysis" that was "curious."⁴² This was no less true at Briercrest. During the war years, Briercrest's classes were chiefly comprised of women. With the return of the servicemen, enrolment doubled and the school got on with the work at Caronport. Women who took training headed for foreign missionary work, settled into domestic life, or worked in largely supportive roles in the college.

This is the epoch from which our sample set comes: the period from World War I up to the appearance of feminism. Our task is listening to the past, and our primary method is oral history.⁴³

⁴¹ Storkey, 14.

⁴² Ibid., 15.

⁴³ Even though Irene Fender's and Lillian Diggins' presences at Briercrest overlap the 1960 boundary line, we might expect their experiences to be less influenced by the fomentation of the '60s. Consider Madeleine Albright's comment: "My youngest daughter, Katie, was born in 1967, and by the time she reached college there was a course on the sixties. She took it. . . . In many ways those of us who graduated at the end of the fifties missed the sixties. While our younger brothers and sisters were doing their own thing, we were doing our parents' thing, starting careers and raising families." *Madame Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 61.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The Discipline of Oral History

Even though this thesis is interdisciplinary, the method for data collection is singularly rooted in oral history. Linda Shopes calls oral history “a maddeningly imprecise term” and suggests understanding it “as a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record.”¹ Through this thesis I have generated “oral history memoirs,”² or narratives, from conversations with women who were involved in Briercrest College and Seminary in its early days, focusing as much as possible on the first two and a half decades (1935-1960).

Oral history asks and answers questions about long-term memory and lived experience, with the potential to uncover more than the basic facts of who, what, where, and when, thus making it an appropriate method for asking the question, *What were the experiences of women in the early days of Briercrest?* While artifacts such as letters and journals and even recipe books could be helpful in pursuing this question, how much better to talk to the women themselves? Marshall and Rossman concur:

¹ Shopes, “What is Oral History?”

² Baylor Institute for Oral History, “About Us,” Baylor Institute for Oral History [cited 12 May 2005]. Available from <http://www.baylor.edu/oral%5Fhistory/index.php?id=23343>.

For a study focusing on individuals' lived experience, the researcher could argue that one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions—their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds; the researcher, therefore, needs to understand the deeper perspectives captured through face-to-face interaction.³

While oral history also approaches questions about how and why as well as what, the oral history interview goes beyond them, searching out nuances of lived experiences that are not necessarily found in standard historical documents. Even autobiographies (memoirs), though not history textbooks, have certain liabilities compared with oral history: they are intentionally written, even calculated, and can give an official perspective rather than a candid one. Because the oral history narrative arises out of a more-or-less spontaneous conversation, it is potentially less formal and less self-conscious.

Of course, it is not always true that oral history interviews provide less formal information. My conversation with Dr. Hildebrand was essentially a rehearsal of his book; in fact, he often directed me back to his writing, saying, “Well, it’s in my book.” It was nearly impossible to elicit any “new” or more “personal” anecdotes from him. Everything he wanted to say was already in the written record.⁴ Jean Mahn also relied on previously written documents. She was very organized with files of correspondence and clippings, giving the impression that she had been collecting it for a researcher, yet she was also more candid. For most of the women I talked to, this was their first time to speak publicly about their early experiences at Briercrest, giving freshness and originality to their stories.

³ Marshall and Rossman, 57

⁴ I have not used Dr. Hildebrand’s interview much in this thesis, partly because it was not very useful, and partly because I was pursuing the previously unheard voices of women.

Unlike standard historiography based on written documents and material artifacts, the primary source of oral history is the narrator, and the process of writing oral history is interactive and creative, involving both narrator and researcher. Narrators can help us to reinterpret what we may have misinterpreted in the written documents, or to challenge popular opinion.⁵ Narrators also “help us create all of the histories that we still do not have enough of . . . projects that would help fill the gaps.”⁶

Rather than engaging in thorough thematic analysis, I have aimed to let the data speak from the participants’ narratives. Marshall and Rossman list life histories and narrative inquiry as secondary methods;⁷ however, given the collaborative process of working with the participants to *create* their life histories, the narratives generated here can be considered as primary sources, that is, original documents.

Considering oral histories as primary documents can be problematic. Shopes warns, “Oral history is not simply another source,” and using it that way overestimates its reliability.⁸ The narratives gleaned through this thesis must be weighed against one other and verified in comparison with other forms of historical documentation. “An interview is inevitably an act of memory,” writes Shopes, “and while individual memories can be more or less accurate, complete, or truthful, in fact interviews routinely include

⁵ Heather Fraser, “Doing Narrative Research,” *Qualitative Social Work* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004).

⁶ Katrine Barber and Janice Dilg, “Documenting Women’s History: Using Oral History and the Collaborative Process,” in *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (Winter 2002, v103, i4, p530) [journal online]. Infotrac Expanded Academic ASAP [cited June 14, 2005]. Available at <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/menu>.

⁷ Marshall and Rossman, 120-123.

⁸ Linda Shopes, “Interpreting Oral History,” in *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web* [course online] [cited 3 March 2007]. Available from <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/interpreting.html>.

inaccurate and imprecise information, if not outright falsehoods.”⁹ Inaccuracies include names, numbers, and places, and imprecision can arise from collapsing two events into one story.

Of course, careful oral historians are concerned with getting facts straight, but they are more concerned with the larger context of the memories, “what might be termed social memory.”¹⁰ Oral history is “not so much . . . an exercise in fact finding but . . . an interpretive event, as the narrator compresses years of living into a few hours of talk, selecting, consciously and unconsciously, what to say and how to say it.”¹¹ Often the narratives tell the same stories two or three times, but with discrepancies. This demonstrates the individual and perspectival nature of memory and, by extension, of all history. The aim of this thesis is not to harmonize accounts and resolve discrepancies (though I do give this some attention in chapter five), but to let these acts of memory be witnessed for the first time through cohesive personal narratives (chapter four). Harmonizing and resolving are later historiographical tasks and beyond the scope of this research.

While Shopes admits the limitations of oral history as source material, the editors of *Rethinking Canada*, Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason, and Adele Perry, make this bold claim:

In order to recover the fullest possible account of the past, historians have broadened their understanding of what constitutes evidence. . . . Whatever its particular value, no single source gives a complete picture . . . nor is everything

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

we assemble on the past equally instructive or a fair representation of what occurred. We need to judge both the material itself and its provenance.¹²

Strong-Boag, Gleason, and Perry are convinced that oral history enriches us by “bringing women into the historical narrative” and that “oral history gives women the opportunity to describe, and interpret in their own words, events in which they participated.”¹³ They remark, “Historians are heirs to a scholarly tradition that venerates the written and either ignores the oral or denigrates it as ‘myth’ or, especially when spoken by women, ‘gossip’.”¹⁴ The concerns of women may be commonplace, but that does not make them insignificant. There can be a fine line between gossip and oral tradition, but oral history is far from merely “telling tales.”

Tucker and Liefeld recommend studying women in church history to understand how they were prominent and influential in the church “even though they were systematically denied positions of authority.”¹⁵ That was 1987 and at that point in women’s history, prominence and influence were useful concepts in securing a woman’s place in history alongside men. While there is still much to study in the lives of powerful woman, that point has been made many times over. The goal of this thesis is to raise interest in all areas of women’s lives, thus gaining a fuller understanding of life in the early days of Briercrest from women who, though they may not have been leaders, certainly have been an indispensable part of the fabric of living in the towns of Briercrest and Caronport.

¹² Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason, and Adele Perry, eds. *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History* (Oxford University Press: Don Mills, ON, 2002), 220.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁵ Tucker and Liefeld, 14.

Oral historians do well to remember that memory “is slippery and malleable and can be manipulated in a way that is similar to but also different from the written record.”¹⁶ For this reason, Baylor University’s Institute for Oral History hosted an interdisciplinary conference on memory and history, bringing together oral historians with cognitive psychologists. Oral historians are concerned with long-term memory, cognitive psychologists with short-term memory, and both with individual memory. The Baylor conference wanted to explore ways in which “even in memory the individual and the community are more closely intertwined than traditionally perceived.”¹⁷ I believe looking behind the scenes of life at early Briercrest will provide insights for understanding Caronport’s current social fabric, data which has, until now, not been gathered, much less received scholarly attention.

The Participants

The women who participated in interviews are Jean Rhode Mahn (nee Whittaker), Esther Edwards, Selma Penner, Irene Fender, and Lillian Diggins. Though there are many other women whose stories could and probably should be gathered, limiting the sample set to five women is consistent with the nature of qualitative research. Qualitative research sometimes needs as few as one or two subjects, since the researcher spends so much time with the individual participants¹⁸ through interviewing, transcribing, and corroborating (aka triangulating) to verify information.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., xii.

¹⁸ Bev McIntyre, Telephone conversation with Colleen Taylor, 13 June 2005.

My first interviews were landed opportunistically.¹⁹ I had just realized that I wanted to research the history of women at Briercrest and was about to take a trip to Vancouver. Barbara Neville said, “You’d better go interview Henry Hildebrand while you can,” which led to looking for other leads in BC. Marilyn Zink directed me to Esther, Selma, Irene, and Lillian. I quickly brushed up on my Briercrest history and did some background research in oral history and interviewing strategies, setting my goals for these interviews to establish rapport and simply have a conversation about the women’s memories. This decision was based on a paper by Rita Berry in which she lists “the informal conversational interview” as one option for in-depth interviewing: “This type of interview resembles a chat, during which the informants may sometimes forget that they are being interviewed. Most of the questions asked will flow from the immediate context.”²⁰ Heather Fraser stresses “taking the time to ‘really’ listen” when doing narrative research, noting that certain types of questions may be useful, but “little energy is usually expended in trying to create the ‘right’ questions because it is more important to concentrate on” the narrator.²¹ With this mindset, I had delightful “chats” with my interviewees.

Since I was going to BC’s Lower Mainland anyhow, there was little to lose in meeting with these women. At the same time, acting so spontaneously was a huge risk. I feared finding out that these were weak interviews requiring extensive follow-up, so avoided transcription for quite some time. Eventually I got down to the work and was

¹⁹ Marshall and Rossman, 78.

²⁰ Rita S. Y. Berry, “Collecting Data By In-Depth Interviewing” [cited 28 Oct 2004]. Available from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172.htm>.

²¹ Fraser, 185.

pleasantly surprised with the quality, which Marshall and Rossman would attribute to intuition as an initial part of conceptualizing. Intuition can be substantiated as the researcher “locates it in a tradition of theory and related research.”²² Though the interviews could have been tighter had I been more informed about both Briercrest and oral history techniques, the transcripts have yielded more than enough valuable information for this project.

Collaborating

Generating oral history memoirs is a collaborative process between the researcher who interviews and the participants who narrate their life stories. Collaboration, writes Katrine Barber, “is based on the narrator’s trust that the interviewer will listen carefully and not intentionally misinterpret what was said and that the interviewer will care about and for the narrator’s history. It consists of a nuanced and complicated relationship.”²³ I have seen for myself the need for this trust-building and care-giving. Receiving hospitality from each of my narrators was important as part of the whole context: coffee, meals, even an overnight stay. I was not just pursuing information, I was pursuing a relationship and, as a researcher who was also an alumna and employee at Briercrest, I provided a tangible link to each narrator’s past.

²² Marshall and Rossman, 43

²³ Barber and Dilg.

Interview Conversations

The oral historian is primarily a listener, an active, not passive, role in collecting “society’s otherwise unorganized memories.”²⁴ Thus, the first listening task in oral history is gathering data via in-depth interviewing. Aside from collecting stories, Heather Fraser suggests that analysis begins at this point.²⁵ While conversing with a participant, the interviewer must “listen” with her whole being. “Registering emotions stimulated through the discussions, we reflect on the body language used and the feelings depicted and/or described. We do this because they often provide clues about the meanings made.”²⁶ Journal keeping and listening to the audiotapes are two useful tools here, and I used both of them to process my experiences with the women.

My interviewees were fully aware of the tape recorder sitting between us as it had to be set up and tested before we could commence interviewing. The ladies tended to relax and enjoy reminiscing, though occasionally one would make a controversial statement and anxiously ask, “Is that on the tape?” I assured them that nothing would remain in the final analysis without their permission.

Transcribing

Having done the initial interviews, the next step was to transcribe the tapes. With an old cassette Dictaphone and a typing speed of seventy words per minute, I transcribed the interviews myself. Though time consuming, this was important for reliving the

²⁴ Donald A. Ritchie, “Fore word,” *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 1994), v. Available at http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/ritchie%20fore%20word.pdf.

²⁵ Fraser, 186. Fraser’s essay discusses other narrative research methods besides interviewing.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

interview experience. I would have benefited also from listening to each interview once or twice more, but after several hours transcribing each interview, I had little motivation to listen to them again. That said, I did not treat transcription as a mere task to accomplish but as a reflective process, giving myself ample time throughout to stop, ponder, and write about the interactions between myself and the participants.

For the most part, I avoided “cleaning up” the speech at this stage, including colloquialisms and stylistic speech, admitting some speech tags such as “um” and “uh,” etc., while omitting others.²⁷ Preserving a transcript as a verbatim record of the interview brings high accuracy to data collection.²⁸

Editing

"Between the oral interview and the written manuscript is a long, meandering journey in which a narrative is crafted," writes Rebecca Jones.²⁹ This has been my journey, crafting the transcripts into autobiography with first person voicing, considering questions about how to organize and provide connective tissue.

I drafted each narrative immediately after transcription. This sort of research calls for a certain amount of summation and interpretation, but I maintained that these oral history narratives should largely stand on their own. Donald Ritchie highlights the oral historian's active role in collecting “society's otherwise unorganized memories”:

The ‘organized memory’ traditionally entrusted to historians reflects how a whole society or its component groups recall and interpret their past. By contrast, oral historians work with individual memories, which can range from sharp to dim . . .

²⁷ The transcriptions include references to pauses and various utterances that come with speaking.

²⁸ High accuracy in these transcripts is not equivalent to high accuracy in data.

²⁹ Rebecca Jones, "Blended Voices: Crafting a Narrative from Oral History Interviews," in *The Oral History Review* (Vol. 31, No. 1): 23-42.

[and] concede that dealing with memory is a risky business, but it is inescapably the interviewer's business. . . . the reliability of oral history is bound to the reliability of memory.³⁰

Entrusted with such precious memories, editing is a means to organize them.

I struggled mightily with the question of authentic voice. Writing descriptively in third person is relatively easy and safe. Somehow, trying to convey the stories in first person felt presumptuous, especially in the case of two participants in the same interview: (1) Esther and Selma, (2) Lillian and Gordon. Then Rebecca Jones came to my rescue with this paragraph:

The dilemma for the writer of a published text is to what degree is it appropriate to edit the words of the narrator? . . . While faithfully reproducing the spoken word in a textual form may be desirable in the transcribing phase, and appropriate for certain oral histories that are not published or are aimed at an academic audience or a particular cultural group, I argue that this is inappropriate for interviews or extracts that are published for general readership. When publishing for a general audience, extensive editing is necessary to create a document that is not only readable and accessible, but also conveys the flavor of the experiences.³¹

So I pursued the first-person voice, effectively making each narrative autobiographical, then set the narratives in context by including a short, italicized, third-person preface for each.

In the two-participant interviews, stories were so intertwined that it is hard to separate the voices. In the case of Lillian and Gordon Diggins, I wrote the narrative from her perspective, retaining one small section of dialogue about their courtship. I usually integrated Gordon's comments into Lillian's voice and, where Gordon's comments are interesting or helpful but impossible or unnecessary to integrate, I placed them in the

³⁰ Ritchie.

³¹ Rebecca Jones, 25-26

footnotes.³² In the case of Esther Edwards and Selma Penner, I decided that the dialogue between old friends should be maintained, with some integration for narrative flow. Firmly committed to an autobiographical approach, I completely removed my own questions and statements, except in rare footnotes.

Corroborating and Ethical Considerations

After drafting the transcript's raw material into a reasonable personal narrative, I mailed the transcript and narrative to each participant, along with a letter explaining the project, a consent form, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). Each woman corrected, added, and deleted as desired, signed a consent form,³³ and returned the documents to me in the SASE. I did some follow-up with phone calls to clarify.³⁴ Turn-around time for each woman was excellent, except for Irene Fender who, having become quite forgetful, needed help from Lillian Diggins to complete her part.³⁵ I had hoped to corroborate and collect the signatures in person, but had to settle for Canada Post.

Unfortunately, I realized that my consent forms came later than necessary in the process. Typically interviewees sign an agreement *at the beginning* of the project, either just

³² In the future, someone may want to take a different approach to my transcripts.

³³ Marshall and Rossman discuss ethics and give examples of consent forms, 89-101.

³⁴ For example, how did they deal with the challenges of adapting to their new environments? How did they feel about the new territory they had entered? What were their concerns on a variety of levels: practical, emotional, social, spiritual? Who did they live with and work with? How did they relate to their husbands and children? What were their hopes and dreams?

³⁵ Irene Fender appears to be experiencing age-related memory loss. In our telephone conversation I quizzed her to be sure that her confusion would not disqualify her from the project. Though she never retained my name in her short or long-term memory, given some prompts, she could recall the project. Satisfied that she still had enough comprehension to finish, I enlisted Lillian Diggins to visit Irene and help with the final documentation. Fortunately, Lillian had email, so rather than mailing the narrative and consent form, I could send it electronically.

before or just after the interview.³⁶ I wish I had known this at the start. The possibility of a participant becoming incapacitated or dying before the corroboration phase is one reason to obtain permission at the interview. Obtaining consent at the interview also frees the researcher to use the interview at her discretion. Instead, I waited until the corroboration phase *two years later*. As a result, I had to explain much to my participants to refresh them.

Also unfortunate, my Statements of Consent/Release are too detailed, delineating permissions and limitations in confusing ways. They are also inconsistent, with drastically different content for Lillian and Gordon Diggins than for the other participants. These things need not disqualify the data, though they do complicate future research beyond this thesis. They should be much simpler and clearer, perhaps accompanied by a Code of Ethics statement outlining rights and principles of conduct for the research.

I have included scanned copies of each signed release form as an Appendix. I have also included a sample letter introducing the project to my participants.

Corroboration is a generous, often illuminating gesture, though not required. I invited my women in with trepidation that seeing their words in print would produce excess caution. The women used great discretion, rewriting or omitting statements that seemed derogatory, yet I was surprised and relieved to see how much honesty remained. While cumbersome, the practice of checking with the narrator increases the integrity of the final texts.

³⁶ Marsha MacDowell, "Collecting Stories: The Oral Interview in Research" in *The Spoken Word* [database online][cited 20 August 2007]. Available from <http://historicalvoices.org/spokenword/resources/collectingohistory.php>.

Katrine Barber writes of feeling an ethical obligation to her narrator, Barbara Mackenzie “and, by extension, [to] her family” to produce

something useful to her and to them. . . . I believe that this decision had an important role in my continued growth as an historian. I have come to regard my scholarly work as including a responsibility to serve my community (defined broadly), and it is in this believe that Barbara Mackenzie has provided me with a fine model.³⁷

Barber’s struggle resonates with me. At times I have wanted to engineer this project to make certain points, yet my responsibility to the narrators means I must attend to them, not my own preconceptions or agendas.

Analyzing

While waiting for narrator edits and approval, I carried on with other tasks such as content analysis,³⁸ comparison, interpretation, and writing, making adjustments as narrators returned their feedback. In chapter five, I combine a fairly straightforward identification of themes with more nuanced interpretation of the text.

Though it may not be possible to generalize for all Briercrest women from the lives of these individuals, it is possible to extrapolate themes and patterns and to make recommendations for further research.³⁹ Fraser says the process of analysis begins at the first conversation and continues through to writing narratives.⁴⁰ The editing/writing process itself is an analytical and interpretive event.

³⁷ Barber.

³⁸ “Qualitative Social Science Research Methodology” [June 13, 2005]. Available from <http://faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/308/308lect09.htm>. Cf. Marshall and Rossman, 117.

³⁹ McIntyre.

⁴⁰ Note: for Fraser, narratives are academic reports, lifting segments and selecting themes directly from the transcripts, then summarizing and evaluating them line-by-line. For my purposes, narratives are autobiographical accounts based on interview transcripts, with themes then mined from the narratives. My process removes thematic evaluation one step further away from the original encounter.

Analysis does not end once the narratives are crafted. It continues with comparing and harmonizing the narratives (only preliminary in this thesis), and as each reader approaches the text, bringing his or her knowledge, experiences, and presuppositions.

The Researcher's Self

Though my exact words have been removed from or integrated into the narrative texts, and though I have worked to maintain distinct voicing for each narrator, it would be naïve to think I am completely absent from the text. I am not merely a bystander nor merely a researcher. As an evangelical Christian woman and an employee and alumna of Briercrest, I am joined to these women on many levels.

"Be candid," advises James Key. "The [qualitative] researcher should not spend too much time attempting to keep her/his own feelings and personal reactions out of the study."⁴¹ In fact, Key claims that the researcher's feelings may be relevant. At the same time he warns against the temptation either to overestimate the value of one's research or, conversely, to lose one's nerve and devalue and undermine it. The researcher is an integral part of qualitative study.

When I talk with others about the history of women at Briercrest, I bring my own understanding of the place, acquired from 1985 through the present as student and staff member in all three schools. I come as a single woman who has pursued education and career yet desires to marry and have children; one who has lived internationally and hope to do so again; who has loved words and writing since childhood; who feels a vocational pull to listen to and record other people's stories; who has benefited from formal and

⁴¹ James Key, "Qualitative Research," *Research Design in Occupational Education* [database online]. (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University) [cited 13 June 2005]. Available from <http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage21.htm>.

informal mentoring during my college years, and has tried as an administrator to provide similar connections for college women. With a deep concern for ministry between women, I have networked to help provide for the needs of women. Bringing all this and much more to the research, do I need to set it aside to achieve some elusive objectivity? David Goa insists that objectivity is impossible, especially if we seek meaning, not just information. “Our capacity to speak deeply together requires us to open our self-understanding to their self-understanding. That is why we come away from such conversations challenged, renewed and thinking.”⁴² This contrasts with typical research views.

The standard method of oral history taught interviewers to set aside their perspectives, concerns and ultimately their own being. I see the layers of memory, tradition, place and experience that make up our identity as central to our capacity to approach the other.⁴³

So my experiences, my sense of place, and my whole self, become “the ground upon which we may stand and must stand if we are to open to the other and have the other’s world of meaning and being open to us.”⁴⁴

Someone has suggested that as interviewer I am the primary instrument of research. The term “instrument” reifies me. Am I instrument or participant? I do not come in some static form, like my tape recorder, merely gathering data to organize and present later. I must come as a participant, one human being meeting with another human being, open to the possibility that we may be changed in the encounter.⁴⁵

⁴² David Goa, *Working in the Fields of Meaning: Cultural Communities, Museums and the New Pluralism*, unpublished manuscript (received by email, 31 July 2007), 39.

⁴³ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

As an alumna and a former employee, I consider myself an insider, with ongoing links to Briercrest College and Seminary. I will not use this project as a soapbox, yet my commitment to the extended community means I must serve the community by telling these stories, courageous to let the “truth” speak, though at times it may be painful. As an oral historian I stand in the gap, maintaining a “collective memory” (i.e., continuous living contact with the past), reviving from or preventing regression into “historical memory . . . ‘when social traditions are broken and living contact with the past has been lost.’” When a culture experiences historical memory “all that remains are fragments as artifacts.”⁴⁶ It is possible that these narratives one day will be relegated to artifacts, but for now I am providing an outlet for these women’s voices to maintain “living contact” with our history.

Fraser advises that “in the process of pulling together threads of others’ stories, we will be telling stories of our own. The participants’ stories intermingle with my own.”⁴⁷ Final decisions about what to include, omit, add, and how to rearrange words and phrases have been entirely mine. Throughout the process I have felt responsible to the text, my audience, and my narrators.

Some researchers advocate preserving the exact words and, as possible, the rhythms and accents of a narrator. Others argue that our responsibility is to make the narrator “sound” as good as possible. William Zinnser comments, “All oral material needs a certain amount of tidying for print; the ear makes leaps that the eye won’t tolerate. . . .

⁴⁶ Linda Sandino, “Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects” in *Journal of Design History*. Vol. 19, 2006: 275-282.

⁴⁷ Fraser, 195.

The hard covers of a book confer permanence, as editors of informal talks have to keep reminding themselves.”⁴⁸ This is also Linda Shopes’ conviction:

As we attempt to transform conversation to print, we must radically intervene—‘mess around with what is said’ to show clearly what is meant. . . . We must present [our narrators] well in writing and not patronize them in doing so.

Next edit and contextualize, rearranging to create a coherent and tight narrative. Editor needs to be ruthless. Beware of tangents that are off the point.⁴⁹

I have tried to find a middle ground. In some cases, my narrator herself changed grammar from slang to more “proper” English, e.g., “yeah” to “yes.” Another narrator ignored these details. I have relied largely on instinct for this, sometimes testing the feel of the text with friends. The key has been to spend time with the interviews: reading, re-reading, familiarizing with themes, editing bit by bit, rearranging, and gradually letting a coherent and faithful story emerge.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ William Zinnser, *Spiritual Quests: The Art and Craft of Religious Writing* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 23.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Mulligan, “IOHA CONFERENCE MASTER CLASS – Editing for Oral History Publication (notes on a Master Class by Linda Shopes),” IOHA Newsletter, September 2006 [cited 3 March 2007]. Available from <http://www.flexi.net.au/~mulligan/Newsletter.htm>.

⁵⁰ Gwendolyn Joy Chappell. *The Journeyman Musician, The Phoenix, and the Spiritual Musician*, thesis (Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan, March 2005) [cited 10 June 2005]. Available from <http://library.usask.ca/theses/available/etd-03312005-184310/unrestricted/CHAPPELL2005.pdf>, 41.

CHAPTER FOUR
PARTICIPANTS' ORAL HISTORY NARRATIVES

I have arranged this chapter chronologically, according each woman's arrival at Briercrest College. Each narrative is written in first person and prefaced by a biographical introduction to each woman.

Narrative: Jean Rhode Mahn (nee Whittaker)

Introduction

Jean Rhode Mahn is the daughter of Sinclair and Isabel Whittaker, who were instrumental in founding Briercrest Bible Institute. Jean was born at the Moose Jaw hospital and lived in the town of Briercrest until going to Wheaton College in 1944. Her early life involved many sacrifices in and for Briercrest, while her later life led to unimagined privileges. She has had a career in higher education, followed by two special marriages, first to Tom Rhode, a Wall Street lawyer, and later to Bob Mahn, a faculty member at Ohio University. Jean is keenly interested in matters of historical record, so was eager to meet with me. She has remained connected with Briercrest up to the present, as a supporter, an encourager, and sometimes challenger. During one season, Jean and Bob lived in Moose Jaw, frequently eating at the Pilgrim Restaurant. Now she resides in Athens, Ohio, still living at home thanks her late husband Bob who had arranged for Jean to have 24-hour live-in care after he died. I stayed overnight in her lovely Athens home on Friday, June 3rd, 2005 and recorded our conversation there on Saturday, June 4th.

The Early Days

I [Jean] vividly recall the endless conversations at the supper table about the Bible school movement when I was an impressionable teenager. This goes back to 1932 and 1934. There were Bible conferences on our family's lawn, speakers who came from the Moose Jaw Bible School, and some students from the Winnipeg Bible School.

Growing up in the village of Briercrest, Saskatchewan in the time of the Great Depression, my parents Isabel and Sinclair Whittaker were concerned about the many young people who could find no work. I recall many evenings when I was doing homework or practicing the piano, and two of their friends, Mrs. Hillson and Mrs. Sanderson, farmers' wives and dedicated Christians, would visit and talk about what could be done for the many unemployed. They were familiar with the Winnipeg Bible Institute; in fact, several of our young folk had attended. I recall that my father paid Ellen Rusk's tuition. Other names I recall are Genevieve Tisdale, Margaret Rusk, and Al Blager. They were able to attend as they had part time jobs. I'm sure the idea of having a Bible school in Briercrest was in many of the older folks minds.

I didn't dream about the Bible school. I just wanted to get an education, because I had done well in school, graduating at sixteen. You had to take French, chemistry, algebra, and trigonometry. Exams were from the department of education—you started in grade 9 with the first and if you didn't make them you fell back. But I was fortunate that I didn't have any trouble. The departmental exams were very difficult, and there was a departmental examiner so there was no cheating. The grades were sent to you in the mail and were published in the newspaper, with grade 12 exam grades unavailable until mid- or late July.

I took my ATCM in piano (Associate of the Toronto Conservatory of Music), practicing four hours a day for months. An examiner came from Toronto to give the exam in Moose Jaw on June 28, 1938. So I had my first degree when I was 17. Before I went to Wheaton I taught music at Briercrest about three years. I liked the students. There were just fifteen students at the beginning. I went to Central Collegiate in Moose Jaw for two years of university, living right in Moose Jaw. Things were already in the process of expanding for me.

It's hard for me to think of it now because it's so long ago that I was there and your thinking was pretty well governed; you had to think a certain way and I could never do that. I used to keep a diary but I've thrown most of those away. I wanted to get to Wheaton and to other places, because my mind would not accept a narrow status.

Wheaton

When we were still in the town of Briercrest, my father was instrumental in having a summer class: the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The course taught students how to reduce languages to writing. Eugene Nida and his wife came from New York. I helped them and did a lot of typing. They said that I should go to Wheaton College and gave me all the information, recommendations, and people to call. I thought, "It will be broader." My parents and I were in Nova Scotia that summer and driving, so we stopped at Wheaton to see what it was like and I decided to go there.

I enjoyed Wheaton very much and did well there. Because it was wartime we couldn't take money across the border. My folks were anxious for me to go, but they'd given it all to the Bible school, so I had to earn my way. I taught music, cleaned

bathrooms, received a scholarship, and graded papers, so that was full time. I enjoyed it, but I was very busy.

I was there two years and graduated in 1946 with a Bachelor of Arts, and my major was music. In 1946 the war was over. My mother came down for the graduation. I was dating Gordon Wright from Toronto. He wanted to marry me, but there was just something that I didn't like.

There was no comparison at Wheaton with Briercrest in those days. Billy Graham had been there the year before. It was such a treat to talk to the people at Wheaton. The openness! They still had some of the prejudices. Then when I got to Eastern Baptist College that was another wonderful open house, because I could feel free to express my mind. The fundamentalist movement in the world has been difficult, yet they've done a lot of good.

Life Beyond Briercrest

After I went to Wheaton, I was not at Briercrest except for vacation. My first job was in Salem, Oregon at Salem College and Academy, a Christian Junior College. I was there for two years, and I came home at Christmas and in the summertime.

I volunteered at Arlington Beach for two summers. We did the Jean and Homer radio program from there: I was in dialogue with Homer Edwards, and I played the piano, and my father was the announcer. We made it up every week and talked about everything. It was all Christian, of course. And I also worked at the store at Arlington Beach. The radio station was held in our home for a while. That was in the 40s.

My next job during the year was on the opposite coast in Delaware at King's College. I was there for five years, but I went home every summer and worked at the

CHAB radio station in Moose Jaw writing continuity. I was taking the place of announcers and other people that were on vacation.

I went to the University of Delaware after that, then I went to Eastern Baptist College in Saint David's, Pennsylvania, and that's when I got into administration. It was a broadening experience and I really enjoyed it. These were all very devoted Christians, without the narrowness, and that was what I wanted, to be able to live the way you wanted and not to have to just go a certain path.

Eastern Baptist College is now Eastern University. I was Assistant Professor of Music and was in charge of the senior recitals. The Dean was a Canadian and we were very close. He wanted some assistance one year and said to me, "Would you mind not having vacation this summer, but going to Boston to this Middle States Association, for AACRAO—the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers?" I agreed.

I enjoyed it, but I didn't know a soul there, or anything about it. My father always said, "Anytime you go to a strange city, be sure to take a bus trip if you can," which I did. I was sitting on the bus about 8:00 in the morning, I didn't know a soul, the bus was filling up, and this tall man came down the aisle looking for a seat. I said, "You're welcome to sit here." That was Bob Mahn, the man I married twenty years later, but it wasn't a romantic relationship then because he was married and I was dating someone, but we were very good friends.

Bob kept in touch with me all through those twenty years, helping me because I was still on the faculty as Assistant Professor. I learned a lot from him. I did a lot of writing and planning with the administration. I was there the week that the Middle States were

there, answering their questions, which was very involved. Through that meeting we were fully accredited by the Middle States Association.

I stayed at Eastern for fifteen years, and was dating Tom Ferguson who was on the faculty. He even came out west with me, and so did his sister and her husband. He asked me to marry him, but I didn't feel right about it.

Marriage, Widowhood and Marriage Again

When I finished at Eastern, I went every Christmas back to Moose Jaw to be with my parents. They also came east, while my first husband, Tom, and I were on our honeymoon, because our wedding was in Wayne, Pennsylvania at our church there. They came several times and we would go back to Canada to stay for a week or two at a time. Tom was very fond of my parents. He liked them so much that he wanted to be buried near them out in the Moose Jaw cemetery. He had cancer of the prostate, and in those days they couldn't do much for him, and he died, sad to say. The W. J. Jones funeral company handled the burial.

When my mother became ill, I decided I wasn't going to let her be alone, so I sold the house in New York and bought a condo on the outskirts of Wilmington, Delaware, because I thought that would be closer somehow or other. Well, I had a lot of friends there, because I graduated from the university, but I only stayed there two years. I decided I didn't want it for the future, so I went back to Moose Jaw.

Going back to Moose Jaw was very depressing, because Tom and I had lived in New York and I missed it so much. I used to go out and walk the dog and cry because I was just so depressed, but I didn't want my mother to know how I felt. I told her that I would never buy anything in Moose Jaw in the way of clothes, because I was so used to New

York and it was such a shock to see the difference. She said, "You just do whatever you want." Well, I had a Lord and Taylor credit card from New York; I could call and they'd send.

I decided to visit a number of churches and decide which one I liked, and St. Andrews was the tops. I asked, "What can I do to help?" They needed someone to help by visiting, working with the class that was coming in for membership, and helping in the office. I did that full time as a volunteer for several years, and it was very uplifting.

My minister, Brian Brown, and I were very close friends. One day we were out and we saw an abandoned farmhouse, and he said, "How about you sitting there and getting a picture with your little dog." I talk to him about twice a month or so. He and his wife live south of Toronto. He's at the United Church and he's very, very committed. My second husband and I were married in Moose Jaw at St. Andrews. That's where my folks were married in 1917.

Brian Brown was a wonderful Bible scholar and minister, from Nova Scotia. Tremendous. I said to my mother, "Do you mind if I go to St. Andrews?" And she said, "Just do whatever you want." Brian visited her and in her diary later we noticed, she said, "Brian Brown was here and he's a wonderful minister. He's from Nova Scotia."

My parents had this beautiful house and well-landscaped backyard on the river in Moose Jaw, so it was a delightful spot, especially in the evening. I was living there, and we had a lot of parties with friends from there. Then it turned out that the city was going to close off all the houses that were on the river because of flood concerns, so I decided to sell. Somebody bought it and moved the house, so it's not there anymore. I bought a condominium in the city and enjoyed that very much. Of course I had my second Shi Tsu. I did some traveling from there because I wanted to see some more of the world and, not

knowing that Bob Mahn was going to come up and invite me to be his wife, I had ordered tickets for the QEII to London, and the Concord and a trip to the Highlands, and they were very costly.

I always told Bob if he was ever in the area to come up. It was sixteen years ago this weekend that he called: on Memorial Day he had a holiday and was going to see his son in Yellowstone, and he'd like to come up. So he came, and he called from Drinkwater. In those days you didn't have cell phones, you had phones on the highway. He called: "I'm here a little early and I'd like to take you to lunch." And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry Bob but I can't go, I already have an arrangement to go to lunch," and I didn't want to cancel it. He said he was coming anyway. He tried to find a place to eat and everything was french fries, but he never liked that kind of thing. He finally found some place to eat. When I came back from lunch he was there at the condo on the porch. The condo had a second bedroom, so Bob slept in that.

I wanted him to meet some of my friends. That night we had the Whittakers over. The Whittakers and I were very good friends, but they weren't relatives. They lived in Moose Jaw. The Howes from Moose Jaw had a cottage on one of the lakes, and they'd wanted to entertain us, so we went to that cottage and just had a very good time.

In three days Bob asked me to marry him. I said, "Oh I'd like to but I've got these tickets. I don't want to give them up." He couldn't get tickets because they were all sold, so we had to wait until I had those trips. We decided to get married on September 15th, 1989. (My first wedding had been September 5th, right on Labour Day.)

I had the Shi Tsu, Kichi Kuchi. When we came down to Ohio after we were married, I left the dog with the vet because I didn't feel like taking it on the honeymoon. We were

down here for at least ten days and ate at the Inn all the time. That's where we met Dr. Baker, the former president of Ohio University who was over 100 years old.

Bob went back up to Canada with the intention of becoming a citizen. What trouble we had at the line coming across the border. Bob says, "Well, I'm from Athens but I'm going to live at 17 Second Street."

"Well, what kind of papers do you have?" the officials asked.

"Oh, I have my birth certificate," Bob said, "my citizenship and whatnot."

They said, "That's not enough," and we were held at the border for about six hours while they phoned all over the place. They called him a landed immigrant. It was a shock. I had no idea it was anything like that, and neither did Bob. He had to report in Calgary, Alberta at a tax place.

Bob was very popular in Moose Jaw. People wanted him to be on committees and he wouldn't. I think he did go on one and he lasted about two meetings. He said, "It's not for me. I don't want that."

We stayed in Moose Jaw five years. The Whittakers and the Howes were very good friends. I still am in contact with them, although Doug Whittaker has died and his wife has moved out to Alberta. The Howes I talk to almost every week. We had lots of friends and lots of parties. We went out to Caronport almost every morning for breakfast, and we got to know Connie Wiebe so well. We were very close, often going to her place, and they came down to visit that year, because they were married about a month after we were. We ate at the Pilgrim Restaurant a lot, even coming out in the winter when it was cold because we had an in-car heater and block heater and we'd just plug the car in.

Our lawyer said to me, "Jean, you'll never make anything for retirement if you continue to live in Canada and the U.S. It has to be one or the other," because we were

paying taxes in both countries. And so we had to decide. I made the decision to move back to Ohio, because I knew it wouldn't be fair to Bob to have him in Canada since he hadn't been there very long. I gave a lot of my things to the school and came here, but we went back every year during the summer.

Briercrest Women

It could be that the men's lives and the women's lives were quite separate at Briercrest. I hadn't even thought about it. The women were sort of docile. I don't think they'd ever express themselves. I think there was a lot of carryover from the Mennonites: very strong ideas about men and women.

Dr. Hildebrand says that in the early days the women knew more than the men about the Bible. I'm sure it was true, because they studied it. I really don't know how their influence was. Mrs. Hillson was a great Bible student. Her husband was a farmer, and they lived on a farm. People were critical of her. I went to her Bible studies; she didn't have the personality that my father or my mother had. Mrs. Ernie Sanderson was very active. She and my mother were good friends. I'd never talk to Mrs. Sanderson and Mrs. Hillson about my thinking because I just knew it would be a problem, and you learn what you have to do to have friends. But I'm glad that Briercrest is making changes. My father saw it when he resigned.

In those days you couldn't dance. Hazel Tisdale was my Sunday School teacher, so I remember asking her, "Where does it say in the Bible that you couldn't dance?" And she said, "The Bible says, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.'" Well, that's a far cry from answering the question.

When I got the posting at Eastern Baptist College in Philadelphia, I talked to them and said all my life I had wanted to dance and at this point I was hoping to. They said, “Just go ahead.” So I took lessons from Andrew Murray, and then when I’d go on a trip I’d take dancing lessons.

When I went on this twenty-seven day cruise from New York to the Mediterranean—Africa, Gibraltar, Athens, Greece, you name the places—I took dancing lessons and won the first prize for the cha-cha on one of those nights. The prize was a bottle of champagne, and I’d never had champagne; I didn’t drink that bottle.

I talk with Genevieve Tisdale about every two weeks or so. Her name is Blager now. She was a teacher, not at the Bible school, but she and her husband sang on the Young People’s hour. She’s got to be 90. She is in Moose Jaw.

Margaret Rusk taught. She and I went on a Daily Vacation Bible School expedition. She visited me down in the States, too. She was very clever, but I don’t think she ever had a thought about the narrowness that we grew up with.

Mrs. Andrew Glen was a friend of my mother’s. She was from Prince Edward Island. Her children were Reg and Marion and Blanche, who went as a missionary. They lived out on the farm. Her daughter Marion married Harold Healy, who was a Catholic. My father hired Harold to be the head in one of his stores in Briercrest. Harold was a very fine person. My father was very opposed to people who downed the Catholics. He had been brought up in Ontario where there was a lot of anti-Catholic feeling and he vowed when he came out West that he was going to be kind to the Catholics. So he hired Harold, the only Catholic family’s oldest son to be the manager of one of his stores, and Harold dated Marion Glen and married her.

Marion's mother would have nothing to do with the wedding, they were so prejudiced. It was sad. They wrote nasty letters to my father. My father was the only one invited to the wedding—the master of ceremonies at this Catholic wedding, which shows how broad-minded he was.

The Catholics have changed since Pope John the XXII. In fact, I went to Christ the King Catholic Church for six weeks to a Bible study taught by Father Don. I remember one of the students in the class asked him, "You'll go to hell if you're not baptized, won't you, Father?" Father Don said, "Oh no. Baptism is the outward sign of the inward faith." And that was what I learned when I was studying the Shorter Catechism to become a member of the United Church, so there's been a big difference.

I took membership in the United Church when I was about twelve or fourteen, and that was a no-no. That's the church that I grew up in. It was where I was baptized. Then an evangelist came from Three Hills and told us we should leave the United Church. Unfortunately my father was taken in by him. All of the people left the United Church, started our own little church, and had Sunday meetings over my father's store in Briercrest. Those were the things that I saw looking from a distance. It wasn't easy. I'm thankful things have changed.

It's really sad that there's been so much prejudice, because that caused a lot of difficulty with the Bible school. But my parents were very open, and I grew up with that idea that each one has to make our own decision and we can't judge another. Scripture says, "Judge not that ye be not judged," but that's what was going on. In the fundamentalist rank it's been very sad. Fortunately it's changing, and I'm sure it's changing at Briercrest.

Father and Mother

My father and I were very close. And my mother, too, though my brother was more close with her. I commissioned and donated a painting, which hangs in the Whittaker foyer.¹ My father had always dreamed of using the post-war air bases as a Bible school. He used his talents as a former MLA and his own personal funds to secure Caron air base after the war.

My father was of the opinion that he should not consider being a candidate to the Legislature. It wasn't the thing to do. The more I think about that the more I feel it was a sad, sad situation for my father to give all his money and then not have enough to live on, or to educate my brother and me.

In April 1994, at the dedication of the mural of my parents, I was able to tell about the beginnings. The tremendous response of the audience at Hildebrand Chapel resulted in a standing ovation, which made me very happy. Mr. Hildebrand came up and was one of the first to thank me. I wrote a letter to Orville and Clara Swenson saying,

I'm sure that Mr. Hildebrand had no idea of the heartaches and negative publicity which calling him 'founder' has caused. Further I'm sure he would not want to receive credit to which he is not entitled. Unfortunately, too many of the generation now in leadership roles do not know any better, so the untruth is perpetuated.

On May 26th, 1996, the Diamond Jubilee year, I sent a similar letter to John Barkman.

My mother was very clever. She had come from Nova Scotia, because her mother had died when she was six weeks old, and she had to live with relatives and never wore shoes in the summer. The doctor told her she should move from Nova Scotia because there was so much tuberculosis and her relatives were dying of it, so she got a harvesters' train and

¹ The Whittaker foyer is located between the Whittaker dormitories and the college cafeteria.

went to Winnipeg where she stayed with relatives and worked at the T. Eaton Company. She had already gone to normal school in Nova Scotia, so she could teach. She taught in a country school outside of Briercrest, met my father at some friends' house, and they were married in 1917.

My mother got into the Bible school movement with all those ladies at Briercrest. When my father quit—gave up—in the 1950s, by that time she had nothing, he had nothing, and it was all there at the Bible school. So I used to send them money, because my husband wanted to.

My mother and my father were very much alike. She taught English and speech and sacrificed many of life's material pleasures to see the growth of the school. As a woman I think she was more hurt. She kept it to herself, but I could just tell. She did express herself somewhat, but I knew that it wasn't easy for her, because of the things that she sort of expected as a wife of an MLA. My father died in 1974. My mother died poor by material standards but rich in soul.

Founder Confusion

On September the 5th, 1934, my father and I met Mr. Hildebrand at the Harwood Hotel in Moose Jaw and brought him home to Briercrest. The idea of a Bible school was then pushed by my mother and Mrs. Hillson, and the first class was in October 1935 at the Nichols' house. That first Bible school was rented for five dollars a month. My mother taught speech and I taught music. I was just 16.

In the summer of 1939 my father had five stores in different parts of Saskatchewan. It was a time of depression, and he was of the opinion that the Rouleau store wasn't going to make it, so he went to the Briercrest town council and said, "We'd like to get the

hotel, because we can use that as a Bible school,” and my father and the people he could hire would build a town hall, because the town didn’t have one. So he arranged to have the Rouleau store moved, and the lumber from the store was used in exchange for the Yale Hotel. I’ll never forget: all summer we boarded the workers at our house and had meals for them.

By this time the school had acquired the Walker house, which was right across the street from us, the Gilroy house where the Hildebrands lived, the Fonger house, and the Jameison building where the telephone office was. In 1939 war was declared and the enrolment from the Bible school went from 110 to 51. When the war was over in 1945 and there were 50 applicants, that was when my father made negotiations for the air base. He had the trees planted and arranged for the store and post office at the base.

Getting the school moved from the village of Briercrest to the air base is an accomplishment for which my father will always be remembered. He saw the need for facilities beyond those available in Briercrest. He set his mind to securing an airport. The staff, and even Mr. Hildebrand resisted the move, but my father prevailed. He used his talents as a former MLA to negotiate the purchase of the airport and paid the deposit for the down payment. He and I named the base Caronport.

It was in 1950 at a meeting, when Alvin Memory came from Outram, Saskatchewan to give money [to the school], that Hildebrand said, “I wish our president [Whittaker] could duplicate that.” That was all my father needed and he resigned the next morning but didn’t say why. Well, he didn’t want to hurt Hildebrand or the school, but now it’s got to be known. Making it known would be a real tribute, because it’s so far in the past. Hildebrand deserves a lot of credit for bringing the school to the excellent place it is, but

early publications state that Hildebrand was the president from the beginning and he was not.

He'd given it all in '58. He lived for 16 more years, always lauded the school, never once spoke anything but good. My parents lived on the old age pension and what I could send them. That can't help but make you sad, especially when Hildebrand was given all the credit, and I felt he didn't deserve it, but my father just wouldn't speak up.

Paul Magnus wrote to me, "Thank you for your thoughtfulness in responding to our challenge for finances. We deeply appreciate it. Thank you also for your reference to the designation of founder to H. Hildebrand in the Alumni Directory. We apologize. I had not seen the picture or the statement. We will correct it in the future."

A page from *Famous Canadians of the Great Pine Ridge*² pays tribute to my father's contribution to the Dominion at the time of the Centennial celebration. In going through my father's papers, which I intend to bring to the archives, two will be of special interest to present day students: the letter which he wrote April the 6th with his cheque as he negotiated for the air base, and the six pages of legislative proceeding, with the resolution and tremendous tributes from the Premier and outstanding legislators. The Legislative Proceedings document now is in the legislative vaults in Regina. It was dated November 29th, 1974.

One of the first assemblies after my father's death was of special interest to me, to read what one of the legislators wrote. This was a young man who attended the high school at Caronport and who became interested in government as a result of his contact

² Dora Holdaway, *Famous Canadians of the Great Pine Ridge*, Pine Ridge Publications, Bewdley Ontario, 1967, 38. Located in the Trent Valley Archives; list of holdings available from <http://www.trentvalleyarchives.com/Library%20finding%20aid.pdf> [cited 8 March 2007].

with my father. He wrote, “The school was officially organized and chartered in 1935, with Mr. Whittaker as the first president and chairman of the board, a position he held until 1950.”³

Sacrifices

When I think what my father gave up, what I gave up because my father gave his money—it was a fortune. To have Hildebrand getting the credit, that’s all I can handle. On July 10th, 2005, it has been thirty-one years since my father died. Generations have passed, and many have no idea what Sinclair Whittaker accomplished. As Henry Budd wrote at the time of his death, “The Whittakers literally placed their all behind the Bible Institute. No one will ever know how much they invested.” Mother used to say, “Dad is the bank.” As his daughter, I know he gave his farms, his businesses, his insurance policies, his bank accounts, all his financial resources—and I’ll give you this, too: he used to say, “We save to give.” It all went to the school. A local farmer who knew my father well declared, “Sinclair Whittaker would have been a millionaire if he hadn’t given it all to the Bible school.”

I remember wanting a bicycle so much as I learned to ride on a neighbour’s bike, but the Bible school came first. It was only in reading Mr. Hildebrand’s book that I learned that my father gave him a 1927 Chevrolet.⁴ And what I did as a kid, because the Yale Hotel in Briercrest hadn’t been used, and my mother and I boarded the men that were working, then we cleaned the Yale Hotel. I was seventeen, giving up my room for speakers and missionaries. I paid my own way to Wheaton College. They didn’t have

³ Original source unknown.

⁴ H. Hildebrand, *In His Loving Service*, 74.

enough to send me to college. I paid my own way to Wheaton College by giving music lessons at 25 cents a lesson, cleaning bathrooms as my work scholarship, and grading papers.

I suffered as a result of the Bible school. So did my brother. My parents lived on the old age pension and what I was able to send them—they literally gave their all and died poor in this world's goods.

Thankfulness

Even so, I have a lot to be thankful for, that I had such good friends and I don't suppose anyone's had the privileges that I've had in my later life.

It was a joy to live in New York on Long Island. I've lived many places—Salem, Oregon; Newark, Delaware; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Port Washington, New York; but the New York Island was my favorite. I have much to be thankful for, meeting Tom Rhode at Le Moal Restaurant in New York City through a stranger who very kindly invited me to share his taxi when I was stranded due to a snowstorm at La Guardia airport. Henry David, a Jewish gentleman related to the Gimbels, introduced me to his lawyer, Tom Rhode, whom I later married.

When I married Tom, someone gave us a Shih Tsu as a gift. That was 1969, the first year that Shih Tsus were admitted to the American Kennel Society. Our first dog's name was Princey, but she had a Chinese name on the register. My husband had a Chinese man who worked for him, so the certificate of registration was written by the person who knew the Chinese. The name in Chinese was "Lu Er Nu" ("Old First Dog"). That's the way they decide—she was the first one to be born in the litter. I used to go to the

Westminster Kennel show in New York. And I'd go to the Shih Tsu arena. Each dog has its own pen. I'd go to the Huskies and the Shih Tsus.

Tom didn't want me to work, so I had an exciting life. Most of his clients were Jewish multi-millionaires who frequently entertained us. My husband and I would be the only non-millionaires at their dinner parties. Josie Uris, of the Uris buildings in New York, was one such multi-millionaire lady: a Canadian from Quebec and a former Paris model, she had three homes and seven servants. Her husband and his brother built the Hilton Hotel. We became very close friends and I enjoyed her company.

Because of my husband's position as trust lawyer at Irving Trust on One Wall Street in New York City, we were able to stay at the Waldorf Astoria any time, any weekend we wanted. We met most interesting people there as we used the special entrance. One night we joined the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

Tom was wonderful and we just had everything. Both of my husbands were very special.

Another privilege for me was being able to make many trips. Tom and I had a month's honeymoon: Amsterdam, Holland, the island of Mallorca, Gibraltar, Portugal. We had other trips during our time together. I vividly recall Rio de Janeiro, the pyramids in Egypt, and later with other friends, the Highlands of Scotland, the British Isles, Pompei, France, Athens, Greece. Sad to relate, he died of cancer after just seven years of marriage.

My second husband, Bob Mahn, was on the faculty of Ohio University, was a Trustee, and wrote several books. We lived in Athens, Ohio, and that is where I am still living as he died in 2004. Because of him, I have many privileges, belong to two private clubs, and have many friends.

Back in 1983 on my way to New York with two of my friends, I was in a tragic car accident—a five-car pile-up and both my friends were instantly killed. I survived but with many serious injuries and was in hospital for six months then in rehabilitation for six months. Thankfully I have recovered and will be 88 on November 14.

It has been a good life, a blessed life. I have much to be thankful for.

Narrative: Esther Edwards and Selma Penner

Introduction

Esther Edwards and Selma Penner have been friends since 1945. I interviewed them together in Esther's home in Abbotsford, BC on November 2, 2004, receiving the excellent hospitality for which Esther is famous. Her husband Homer wrote a series of devotional books, and in the second volume there is a foreword by Henry Hildebrand with these words:

Reverend Homer and Esther Edwards are a couple with grace and taste. They love the Lord and his Word. To know them is to love them. We love being with them. Both excel in their given role. Esther's wholehearted hospitality and zest for living is an inspiration to behold, while Homer's loyalty to his Lord and to his servants is to be emulated. He has a genuine pastor's heart and excels as a soul winner. Treasures of Truth, volume 2, is the fruit of a life-long walk with God. It has been hammered out on the anvil of affliction. Each treasure will be a benediction to the reader.⁵

During the interview, Esther recalled that she typed the manuscript for Treasures of Truth, volume 2; however, upon hearing this excerpt, Esther responded to me, "Thank you. I don't even remember reading that."

Esther Edwards was a student in the late 1930s, then became Henry Hildebrand's first secretary. After marrying Homer, she focused on renovating or building their series of first homes and on taking care of the family. In her last year at Briercrest she worked in the alumni office. Esther and Homer left

⁵ Homer Edwards, "Foreward," in *Treasures of Truth*, vol. 2 (Aldergrove, BC: Valcraft Publishing, n.d.).

Briercrest to pastor a church in Regina, where they stayed for many years until Homer's Parkinson's disease forced their retirement. She is now widowed and lives in Abbotsford, BC.

Selma Penner has been Esther's dear friend since coming with her husband to the town of Briercrest. Selma and Henry were hard workers and their hands have literally marked this campus through painting houses and planting trees. Selma is also widowed and lives in Abbotsford, BC.

When I phoned to ask for an interview, Esther suggested interviewing herself and Selma together, as Selma was pretty quiet and Esther was not sure how much Selma would have to say. When we met for the actual interview, Selma's voice was very strong, especially dialoguing with Esther. Initially I had imagined writing separate narratives for each of them, but their voices were so intertwined that separation was impossible; therefore, while the other narratives read like personal autobiographies, this one reads more like a conversation.

Esther: In on the Ground Floor

Esther: I think we should feel very highly honoured that we were in on the ground floor of Briercrest, because it was '35 when it started, and I started school in '39. My husband and I graduated in '42. Homer and Harry went to school together. Harry graduated in '41. There are no *Echoes* from our class, 1942.

Selma: Jean Whittaker edited the *Echoes*.

Esther: And she graduated in '42 with us.

Esther: Mrs. Hillson taught. I don't remember what the subject was. I never got anything out of it because I didn't know what she was talking about. But it was

something to do with prophecy.⁶ She was very old, and she probably knew her material, but she couldn't get it across to me.

She and Mrs. Whittaker were instrumental in starting the school. They prayed and the school started with some of the fellows that couldn't afford to go back to Winnipeg Bible College. These fellows knew Dr. Hildebrand, so they got him to come and teach them, and that started it. They were in a little old house (probably was the same one that Selma and Harry lived in). Odd Brygmann did the cooking, I think; then it was just men. There may have been one lady, but I'm not too sure about that.⁷

Mrs. Whittaker taught for awhile, too. She taught English I think, but I can't really remember what that was like. Then there was another lady teacher, Margaret Rusk. I think it was English that she taught. Anybody that didn't have high school had to take English classes—and a lot of them *didn't* have high school. I didn't have to take English because I had mostly high school.

There's a cute little story about Margaret. One day in the middle of the winter Mr. Hildebrand had cancelled her class for some reason or another but had forgotten to call her, and she braved the snow to come. We heard him out in the hall apologizing to her how sorry he was. "Well you better be!" she said.

We women went to Bible school before we were married, then we stayed home and looked after our babies and our husbands. I wanted to go to Bible school so I could learn more about the Bible, 'cause we didn't have any Bible church where I grew up, and it was so lonely. My sister was 5 years older, so I was the only one at home, and I just about died

⁶ Mrs. Annie Hillson is listed in early catalogues as teaching "Dispensational Truth."

⁷ Dr. Henry Budd writes that female students boarded in local homes. *Wind in the Wheatfields* (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Bible College, 1985).

of loneliness. My folks would rather that I had gone to a Lutheran Bible school in the States, but the war had just started and nobody could get across the line, so they condescended to let me go to that “eternal security, once-saved-always-saved” school! Took them many years to believe that!

I did a 3-year diploma course at the school. I went to school at Christmas time, and they let me graduate in two-and-a-half years. I wrote essays to make up for the three months I wasn't there. And that's of course where I met Homer. We used to sing together on the radio. After we graduated I went to Regina and took a business course, then came back and worked for Dr. Hildebrand. And that's really when Homer and I started to go together. All we could do was smile at each other; sure couldn't have a date.

The school had a radio broadcast all across Canada at that time; it was called “The Young People's Hour.” It was aired in just about every province. I did the correspondence for that and receipted the money. I only worked there about a year and a half I think, because Homer and I decided we were going to get married. I was so sure he was the one for me, so I wasn't worried about getting married. So I didn't work, I stayed home. We had an awful apartment with an awful lot of work to do on painting and scrubbing and sanding floors and building cupboards, so that took a lot of time. But that's the way it was.

Homer graduated the same year as I did, 1942, then he stayed on and at first he taught the music course, and then they had him teach Bible, and after that he taught first year Bible and public speaking. He took a Dale Carnegie course, which is fascinating. It put life into the public speaking class. A friend of mine talks about all the funny things that he did. Homer taught homiletics, too, and personal evangelism. He had quite a load.

My husband was Hildebrand's right-hand boy. He said he didn't give him the title—you didn't get titles in those days—but he was his assistant. At first Homer taught singing lessons and led the choir, but my husband was not good at leading, so Mr. Hildebrand said, "Well, if you'll sing in the choir, I'll lead it." So that's what they did. I sang in that choir before we were married, but I don't think I did after we were married. I remember that we did sing as a duet for awhile, because shortly after we were married they wanted us to come over and practice one night. We were supposed to be there at six o'clock, so we had supper and I just left the dishes on the table and threw my clothes off and threw them on the couch; we didn't have a bedroom, we just had two rooms and a couch to sleep on. When we got back the place was full of people. I was so embarrassed. They had come to give us a shower. They gave us a little table that I still have. So that's why I hate surprises.⁸

The School Moves to Caronport

Esther: The next year, 1946, we moved up to Caronport, a former British Air Force base where it is now. I remember because Dale was born in '47. When we moved, it was to fix up another apartment all over again. We were living in an officers' quarters, but it wasn't very wonderful.

Selma: When we first moved there after the air force had been there, there were some of kind of bugs in the kitchen, in the walk-in fridge.

Esther: Cockroaches, I suppose. The place was run by the British Air Force, and the buildings had been empty a couple of years before we moved there. We had to build our

⁸ **Esther:** You know, when they had that fare well for us at Regina, Donna knew about it, it was supposed to be a surprise for Homer, you see. It was Corinne and Paul [Hildebrand] that instigated most of it, but Donna said to them, "You'd better tell mother. She doesn't like surprises." So they did.

own kitchen cupboards, and Homer wasn't a builder. I don't know how he ever did it, but I think he found some old cupboards in one of the shops and dragged those in, and got something built at the top.

Selma: We had to move our wood and coal cook stove to the suite.

Esther: We had to run to the bathroom for water, because we didn't have water in our suites. Oh, we were primitive.

Selma: The bathroom had six sinks and three showers and then there was no bathtub. The toilet part had three toilets, but that had a door. And the showers just had a curtain for each stall.⁹

Esther: We shared it with the next door neighbour. There was one apartment at one end and one apartment at the other end, on both of these A and B dorms.¹⁰ They're not there anymore. We were in B. You were in A, weren't you?

Selma: Yes, we were downstairs.

Esther: We were upstairs.

Selma: And you were with Brygmans at the other side.

Esther: Not only did we have to share the bathrooms with all the families, there was a guest room at our end. So if there were any guests they had to share it, too. Once they sent a fellow up there they just took off the street! Homer was away (he was away most of the summer with the quartet or a music group and I was alone). I was scared stiff! I didn't have any locks on the doors. I should have gone over to that office and blasted them, but I didn't. And I managed to live without being molested. It was a very silly thing

⁹ This type of set-up has been called "gang showers," where all of the curtains could be pulled back. There were no fixed stalls. I remember the showers being like this into the 1980s in C and D dorm.

¹⁰ Most of the dorms, such as A and B, were two-story H-huts, with halls on the long sides and communal bathrooms in the middle section.

for them to do, to send a stranger off the street over to sleep in the apartments.

Eventually after Donna, our last baby, we got that room ourselves, but otherwise we just had the four rooms. We just had two children. But you had how many in four rooms? Or did you have five rooms?

Selma: We had six children in four rooms. Claire was born in what was known as the flour shed. There were four suites in there. Two upstairs and two down. Grymaloskis lived upstairs, Shaufs were beside us, and Eliasons were downstairs and I don't know who else.

Esther: Was it Hieberts? Doris and Elbert. You're stretching our thoughts here! That's where the air force stored the flour, so that's why it was called the flour shed. The school made all their own bread in those days. Harold McKay used to be the baker. He was also the butcher, but he quit because the school didn't want to do any more butchering.

Selma: Gertie's been there for a long time. You should interview her. And Mae Pomeroy.

Esther: And Erna Rempel.

Selma: Erna never was married. She was a twin sister to Ella, who married Lillian Diggins' brother. Ella and Erna.

Esther: That first winter we were at Caronport was a terrible winter. The snow was up to the roofs and that's not exaggerating. It was one awful winter. We had a practical nurse named Tina Blatz and she delivered two babies that year.

Selma: She delivered a baby on New Year's day. It was such a stormy night that Mrs. Hanslien couldn't get into Moose Jaw for the delivery, so Tina Blatz delivered the baby.

Esther: Our son Dale was due in March, and I was scared stiff I'd be stuck out there, too. So I prevailed upon one of my friends in Moose Jaw to let me stay with them for a couple of weeks until the snow melted, then I could come home. He was born on the 22nd of March in Moose Jaw.

Selma: That was the winter when even a train got stuck. The train went right close, not too far from Caronport, just a little bit south. They hauled coal by horse and sleigh from the train.

Esther: See the highway wasn't running right beside Caronport at that time. It was further south and around, so we didn't have very good roads.

Selma: We used to go walking around the runway.

Esther: Till they tore it up. And we used to go bike riding on the runway, too, and they tore it up. Don't ask me why.

Selma: Well, didn't they sell the land or something? Didn't somebody farm it then? I don't know for sure. We used to store the coal on there, remember? Used to have that soft coal for the furnaces.

Esther: I don't know why they tore it up. But, anyway, we were very unhappy about it. When they were building the highway, some of us used to go bike riding. I went one night and they had just put tar on there. Oh, I came back, and I couldn't see what was going on.

Selma: It was wet.

Esther: I spent the whole next day cleaning it off Dale's bike. Myself, too, for all that tar. So that was the end of the bike riding.

Selma and Harry

Selma: My husband's name was Henry, but he always got Harry in public school, because there was too many Henrys in the school. We went to work for the school in the fall of '45 at the town of Briercrest. It was the last winter the school was there and my husband was hauling garbage and sewage. I don't know where they took it.

Esther: One of the fellows, Lloyd Cross, was on detail to clean the girls' toilets. It wasn't flush toilets, it was just cans. He fell down the back stairs, and the stuff slopped all over him. Whether he didn't think of it or whether they couldn't afford it, I don't know, but they didn't send his suit to the cleaners, he just stuffed it in the furnace. I always laugh when I think of that.

Selma: I had known my husband Harry since I was young. We lived two miles apart as children. He was four years older than I. When I was born, Harry's mother was going to come to my folks' place to see the baby, so he said he was going, too. His mother asked how he wanted to buy me and he said, "Oh, that cluck with the chickens." A cluck is an old hen that sat on a nest.

Anyway, he wasn't a Christian and he didn't go to church. His folks used to go to the [Mennonite] Conference church, but he didn't really live for the Lord then.

Esther: Well, how did Harry get saved?

Selma: One fall when Harry went up to Rosetown to work, and he was walking on the road, hitchhiking home or something, and I think that's when he realized his need of the Lord. I don't know how he knew about Briercrest, but he went a couple of weeks early and helped them clean the place up. They were just moving into that hotel. Harry hadn't finished his high school, so when he graduated from college he finished two years

of high school. He wanted to be a policeman, but we were already going together and my father didn't want him to be a policeman.

Esther: He was a big tall 6 footer.

Selma: After he finished school, we lived on my dad's homestead for a couple of years and he helped his dad with the farming. We also went to Toronto and he took a missionary medical course. We were going to go to the Phillipines, but I hadn't had any Bible school so it just didn't work out, but I guess Harry wanted to be in the Lord's work and that's when we went to Briercrest.

We had four kids there at Briercrest. Jordan was born before that, so he was already at Briercrest in that first year we were there. And then we had two girls and then two more boys. They were born in Moose Jaw, not on 'Port. Claire was born when we were in the flour shed.¹¹

Work, Money, and Houses

Selma: I worked in the kitchen some and I took Claire along. She was maybe two, and she would sleep under one of the open shelves there. I had to come in at lunch for her lunch and for her nap. I also worked at the lunch counter¹² quite a bit. And I would go to three farms and do day work. All in one day.

Esther: I worked in the Alumni office—just part time—for about a year just before we left for Regina in 1967. I worked for 40 cents an hour.

Selma: What did I get when I did three houses? I think I got ten dollars.

¹¹ The ladies and I had a long discussion about "the flour shed," trying to determine which building it is. Currently it is known as the Simpson Building, located across 2nd Avenue from Hillson Hall, with five condo-style dwellings.

¹² The service station/restaurant.

Esther: Surely not.

Selma: And then we went to Moose Jaw and shopped for groceries.

Esther: I laughed, once after I was out here in Abbotsford Mr. Hildebrand—well, I call him Henry now because he told me to—he wanted me to do some typing for him. So I did, and then he wanted to pay me. I was working part time at the Cannon Clinic here and getting pretty good pay, but I laughed and I said, “Oh, Henry, I get almost as much now in one hour as you used to pay me for the whole month.” I know times have changed. If it hadn’t been for my folks I’d have been naked. Well, what can you buy for 15 dollars?

Selma: Well, you used to pay 2 dollars for a pair of shoes—a dollar-ninety-eight.

Esther: Not my shoes. My father said, “Esther’s got such big feet, we have to take her to Saskatoon and get them *fitted*. And we have to pay 5 dollars fifteen cents for them.”

In the early 60s I worked in a medical clinic in Moose Jaw for a year, because the kids wanted a horse. Homer had his study at home, so he was home most of the time. Our daughter was about ten years old. They didn’t want to wait for me to come home, so Donna and my husband would make supper. His favorite salad was banana salad: banana and lettuce.

So they got their horse. Donna got a Shetland pony and one was supposed to be for Dale, but I still think they were Homer’s horses. Homer liked really good horses, Arabians, and you couldn’t ride them they were so flighty. So he got his Arabian horse. We had another one, too. Jahnkes from Herbert gave Dale and Alan Unrau a horse between the two of them. It stayed in the little barn that Homer had built. Its name was “Stinky” and he *was* stinky, too. When they put him in the stall he would back up real

fast and break the harness, so my husband fixed that by putting something on back of the heels and he'd back into it and quit doing that.

We used the school cars to get to Moose Jaw. We didn't have a car of our own. How could you afford a car on a hundred dollars a month? I don't know what kind of cars the school owned. All I know is they were black. We had to pay to rent them, too: two dollars every time we took it to Moose Jaw, if we wanted to go to the doctor or something. Homer didn't like the barbers out in school, so he always went in to Moose Jaw to have his hair cut; and then he had a brother that lived in there, so we'd go in there to visit them, too. And, of course, shopping, clothes—we had to go to Moose Jaw for clothes. We sure didn't go very often. They had a grocery store on the premises in Caronport at that time. We did have our own car the last year or two.

Selma: Fenders had a car, but then they had a farm. When we came to the school at Caronport, we brought a cow that we owned.

Esther: Oh, I never knew that.

Selma: I don't know how we brought it there. Can't quite remember all the details now! Then they got more cows, too. They had a nice barn. Harry and Homer were good with the cows.

Esther: My husband always wanted to be a dairy farmer before he decided the Lord wanted him to teach or preach or whatever. When it came to the cows, the school had to have milk, and they couldn't have any other ways but to have the cows right there. So Sinclair Whittaker bought some old scrubs and Homer was horrified. He said those were just awful cows, so he persuaded the board to let him go and find some good cows. He said, "They'll produce twice as much milk as these old scrubs, and we'll have some good purebreds."

Selma: Still need feed, too.

Esther: They had a big barn on the Caronport yard, west of the houses, not too far from the highway. Eventually Highway One got there. We felt like the Lord directed them to put it there, because it would make easy access to Moose Jaw.

Anyhow I don't remember how many cows they ended up with. It was quite a few. They had the best.

Selma: They always went to the Holstein shows in Regina for eight years, and they ended up with the best herd in Saskatchewan.

Esther: That was quite a few years, too. You'll find that in *Miracle on the Prairie* or *Beacon on the Prairie*, one of them. There were two of these books, because in the first one there was too much about the cows. Bernard Palmer came up and interviewed Homer, you see, and he was fascinated with his stories about the cows, so he put a really long chapter in there, a whole chapter about the cattle, and all that transpired with it, like the shows. They used to pick little calves for the children to show at the 4H clubs, calf club. And of course, my husband always picked the best ones and he knew a cow. I could show you a picture of the best one after we moved to Abbotsford. He and a partner of his across the line had the fifth best cow all across the States one year. So the kids always won the prize.

Selma: We used to buy milk in quart bottles for fifteen cents.

Esther: Right, we had to buy the milk, but that made a lot of money for the school. I remember one year they had made \$7000.00, not only in milk but in sale of cows. That was quite a bit in those days. Why did Harry quit with the cattle?

Selma: I don't know why he quit. He went into printing.

Esther: Yes, probably the print shop. Harry could do anything. He used to make the most beautiful corsages out of material that looked like velvet or suede. He'd make these corsages for the girls for weddings and things like that. Then he did the printing. Of course, the print shop belonged to the school. And then he also did a lot of the landscaping around there; he was in charge, and a lot of those trees that are there he planted.

Selma: Our house was just next to Lewises, just north and right next to it.

Esther: Sundbos' house used to be right next door to ours on the main road [Centre Street]. Ours was the first house they built. They used us for guinea pigs, I think! They put in flooring that wasn't dry, and so we had quarter inch cracks. Oh, I did so many things with that house, I just get sick every time I think of it. Homer was away most of the summer so it was left to me to make the plans, and we didn't have any architectural plans, we had to draw it up ourselves on squared paper. And then the men would make a mistake and then they'd say, "Well, you made a mistake." And so I'd bring out my squared paper and they had to count the squares and it was their mistake.

Oh it was a terrible summer. They ended up using the basement for a carpenter shop, so we had all that sawdust upstairs, too. When we moved in we didn't have the water in, and where could we get the water then? It wasn't in the kitchen tap anyway, it was in the bathroom, so I guess that's where we had to run and get it. So many things happened that I don't even like to think about it. Ours and what used to be the Brygmans were the first two houses to be built.

Selma: I painted houses—five houses on the outside, and some on the inside. And you and I did it together, too. We painted the chapel on the inside.

Esther: Inside the motel.

Selma: The motel, yeah.

Esther: We didn't work for the school then, we worked for the man who was in charge, Bob McLeod. Bob and Ruth McLeod took over the cattle herd. He paid us, because I remember he said he has to pay Selma more because she works harder and faster, which was true.

Selma: I cleaned a lot of dorms in the summer, too, with my older daughter Vangie.

Esther: The young kids worked in the garden, to give them something to do so they wouldn't get into mischief. And how they hated it.

Selma: There was such a funny thing—Whittaker said something like we wished they were peeing in the garden. They were working in the peas or something.

Esther: Whittaker was something else. I worked for him one day, and I thought I'd never live through the day. "Well now, do this now Esther." And I'd do that for a while. "Well now we'll quit that." It was when we first moved there, you see, and they were trying to get money to pay for the place and he was taking names out of the telephone directory and sending letters to them, regardless whether they were Christians or not. Luckily after that first day they called me over to the office. I did something else, so I got out of that work.

I worked for the high school, too. One spring the high school typing teacher's husband left her, and so she decided she'd better go, too. I don't remember her name. Grymaloski was the principal, and he asked me if I would come over and help them out, so I did for those spring months. Then some of the ladies wanted to learn to type, so I taught a typing class for a while in the evening. I forget who was in it—maybe Anne Goertz. Then I did office work when Elbert Hiebert was in charge of the alumni. He was also in charge of the choir tours. I think maybe I did it for a year or so. As Alumni

Secretary I answered all the letters and receipted all the donations. Lillian Diggins was alumni secretary after me.

That was the spring we moved to Regina, where my husband was pastor of a Baptist church. We went to Regina on a year's leave of absence but never went back to Caronport. The longer we were in Regina, the more Homer realized that this was the place for him. They were very good to us. Built us a big parsonage, 2000 sq. ft. Used to take Donna and me all Saturday morning to clean it. I was back to the church's 50th anniversary in August of 2004. I gave my testimony and cried all the way through it.

So Selma and I were in Caronport till about the same time. She and Harry went to Swift Current in 1967.

Selma: Harry was doing landscaping in Swift Current. We were there three years and then we went to Vancouver to work at this rest home. Harry was in charge of the outside, a lot of the maintenance, and I was in charge of the laundry.

Women, Students, and Children

Esther: I always said I only remember the excellent students and the bad ones, but not the good ones in between. The only time I really had much to do with the students was once a year we had what we called Student Night and we divided up all the students and designated them to the homes. It was a Friday evening, you see. We tried to serve them hamburgers or pie or something like that. I remember a couple of times I spoke to the high school kids when Ivy Moore was there. She asked me to come over and talk to them.

Selma: She was the Dean of Ladies

Esther: Dean of High School Ladies. She was single.

They preferred to have single ladies on staff. You didn't have to pay them so much. Anyway, they didn't want married women to work. Mrs. Hildebrand never worked, you see, and so everybody was to follow her lead. Once my husband said to me after something I had done, I don't know what it was, "Now Mrs. Hildebrand would never do that, would she?" I said, "Homer, if you want Mrs. Hildebrand, you go and get her! I'm not Mrs. Hildebrand!"

But Inger Hildebrand was a real lady, you know. Everything she did was just absolutely perfect. She set the table perfectly and she cooked divinely. You couldn't ever find fault with anything. Her children were perfect. That's what made it hard for the rest of us, I think. All except Paul. He wasn't perfect. (*laughs*) But he turned out okay. He's the principal of one of the schools in Regina. I don't know what Corinne does; she has a job of some kind. Paul and Corinne are good friends of my daughter and her husband in Regina. And Inger was really one of my best friends!

Mr. Hildebrand used to play hockey with the boys. One winter he broke his ankle playing hockey. It bothered Inger to the extent that she partly had a nervous breakdown. I think it was one of the first years we were there. Probably part of it was lack of finances. Her aunt came and stayed with them. I went over to visit and Inger was flat on her back in bed. She didn't have a repeat of it, that I know of anyway.

After that he switched to curling. They made up a rink once and went down and played a rink that Colin Thatcher was on.¹³ And he was a poor sport. They beat him and so he grumbled, "*mr-mr-mr.*"

¹³ Actually, this was probably Ross Thatcher, Colin's father.

Selma: I didn't have much to do with the students either. My oldest son Jordan graduated from Briercrest, from the Bible school. He was the first Caronport brat. He was so tall. One time I couldn't find him, he had got out of the house.

I have a picture where Jordan is driving off the roof of one of the buildings with a sleigh. That must have been the winter of '47.

Esther: Jordan was a go-getter. You couldn't keep him still. Then Vangie was next. And then Lionel was a friend of my son Dale's, you see. I remember them playing outside and Lionel was kicking Dale for dear life. I wonder how Dale responded.

Selma: My children were Jordan and Vangie and Lionel and Trevor and Claire—Clarice, but she calls herself Claire now. When Claire was born, Vangie met Dr. Hildebrand and she said, "Oh just another stupid brother." Somebody had told her it was a boy. Anyway it was a girl. Then she told Claire, "You know mother was thirty when you were born. You could have been a mongoloid."

Esther: I think I was thirty when Donna was born.

Selma: Well, now new mothers can be quite a bit older than that.

Esther: Joy Brygmann was thirty-six when Carol was born, and then she had Audrey two years after that.

Selma: Well, Joy, wasn't she a Ladies' Dean?

Esther: Before she was married. But later on she taught in the grade school. She used to be Joy Brown, but now she's Joy Brygmann. She and he both died, both Joy and Odd.

Of course the kids had their ups and downs when they went to school. Once we had a teacher who thought that he owned all of them, whether they were in school or out of school, and he made the rule that the girls could not go over to the girls' dorm. My daughter Donna and her friend Marge had a friend over there—I think this was when

they were in grade seven or eight, so they would go over there and see their friend in the dorm. This teacher caught them, so he took away their recommends.

To this day Donna says, “Why didn’t you go after him?” I can’t ever remember his name. It wasn’t Muirhead: he was strict, but he was fair. Anyway, this other teacher took away their recommends. Marge didn’t have any, but Donna did, so she was pretty perturbed about it. Well, I told Donna the reason why I didn’t go after the teacher was because there was a lady on ‘Port that was on the phone to the teacher with any little thing, complaining, and I said didn’t want to be like her. So I said I just thought we’d just take it and shut up. But that teacher didn’t last very long, he left inside of a year or something. He really had no jurisdiction over those kids out of school. Don’t ask me why they didn’t want Port kids visiting dorm kids. I don’t know. Nobody gave a reason.

Selma: Our kids were called Port Brats.

Esther: You see, they really expected the Port kids to be a little special.

Selma: There was no church, they just had to go to church with the students and go to Sunday School. They had no young people’s group that they could really be a part of.

Esther: Port kids used to go to the gym and watch or play or whatever. And they skated at the hangar.

Selma: And they played hockey, too.

Esther: Yeah, they played hockey. My husband liked to curl. They had a curling sheet of ice.

Selma: Yeah, you and I, we curled, too. (*Selma laughs; Esther moans*)

Esther: Every night we hurried up and had supper so the kids could go to the gym to play. Every night except Saturday. Saturday night I’d get the kids bathed and then we’d play games with the two of them.

You know it was a good place for the kids to grow up, but you know there's bad kids there, too. Just because you're in Caronport doesn't mean you're perfect.

Another woman is Freida Teichrob. Her husband Henry taught in high school—he was the principal. He used to do the recording, he and his brother Pete. And they had a little spot in the chapel, what we used to call the chapel, up in some place where it was as cold as ice. They did all the recording on big platters, and then it went directly by phone to Regina.

Selma: Remember when skunks had gotten into that part of the chapel, into the entrance? They couldn't use the chapel for a little while.

Esther: When Marilyn Zink was at Caronport, she fixed up this museum in the old Hildebrand house, which used to be the fire hall. So when I heard about that I said, “Would you like to have one of these old platters? You can have it, providing you'll take all our duets and put all of them on tape,” so they did. And then of course with the equipment they had they cleaned it up so the songs didn't have any noise on them. So I have those. When my husband died we played one of his solos at his memorial service.

Marilyn Zink used to be Marilyn Bergren. Her folks, Ted and Grace Bergren, were farmers up at Viscount, and so when they went home one spring after the winter, she came and stayed with me. I taught her to sew.

I grew up on a farm where I had no company whatsoever. This was just wonderful for me to have a lot of friends around, especially when my husband was away so much. I could visit with Selma. I taught her to sew, and she used to help me if I had trouble with the knitting, 'cause I wasn't very crazy about these fancy patterns, I just knit cable or a plain stitch.

Audrey Lewis (nee Stevens) is the one who used to help me when I was stuck with sewing. If I had a problem I used to go to her: “Audrey, what am I doing wrong?” She’d fix it. I phoned her after I heard that her husband had died.

Selma: Audrey didn’t have any parents then, so Harry gave her away when they were married, so she always called him dad. Then at our anniversary—our 50th maybe—she said, “He called me his daughter, but I’m older than he is!”

Esther: I superintended their reception from the social club, because she didn’t have any parents living. We got to know her because she worked in the post office and store before she married Alvin.

CSSM and Arlington Beach

Esther: My husband got Parkinson’s. That’s why he had to leave the church in Regina. One time he was waiting for me in the mall—I was having my hair done—and this kid came and sat down beside him and noticed that he was shaking and said, “Do you realize that there’s probably sin in your life?” I think there’s a story about it in there. And so Homer lit into him and told him on no uncertain terms that was not biblical.

I typed all of the second book, *Treasures of Truth*. The first one they did at Caronport. At that time he had a little spot on The Young People’s Hour reading these Treasures of Truth when Moira Hunt¹⁴ was there, but then they cancelled the whole program. Out here they cut it off because they didn’t think there was enough support for it, and after they cut it off, they realized there were a lot of graduates out here that were listening. It was on the FM Linden station. So it was gone then. I suppose that’s why I went to

¹⁴ Moira Brown of 100 Huntley Street.

Briercrest in the first place, because of the radio. I knew about the school because of the radio program that came on every Sunday morning from a station in Regina.

Selma: Homer was with the Canadian Sunday School Mission.

Esther: Well he quit that after the first year.

Selma: Wasn't he at the Beach, Arlington?

Esther: He was there the first couple of years. The mission was the first one there and they had bought it. The Free Methodists bought it from CSSM, but they did something with it. CSSM never had any money to do any improvements.

Selma: Well, we cooked there. We had to take the food with us.

Esther: Oh didn't we! Don't even talk about it. It just makes me ill every time I think about it. It was so awful. The kitchen was so unhandy—and we didn't have anything to work with hardly. There were these big pots that we used to cook in, and after camp was over, we put Vangie in one and Dale in the other and took their pictures.

I cooked there I guess a couple of summers, when Homer was still in charge. Then that last summer he collapsed, he just took to his bed; he was done in. That was the summer that Dale got run over with the truck. Carey Lees has been a missionary in Africa for many years. He was one of the workers there that summer, and he always used to let Dale ride with him in the truck. Dale was two years old and he saw Carey get into the truck, so he ran for the truck, and the truck went right over him. Nobody could believe it ever happened because all he had was a couple of little marks on his pelvis, but Ruth Martens saw it happen. He lost his breath and was huffing and puffing. Henry was there and we dashed into Govan. The doctor took x-rays and he was fine.

He was still sleeping in the crib, and the next morning he jumped up and he said, "Mama, I 'tiff." Poor little kid. And I thought, "Oh Esther, there you were working for

everybody else and not looking after your child.” I was mad at myself. But Dale wasn’t hurt really.

Conference Guests

Esther: You know we had a lot of good things that happened. We had conferences both spring and fall. They don’t call them conferences any more. But we had wonderful speakers and missionaries and we learned a lot through that. We didn’t have any guest rooms in those days, so the speakers had to be housed amongst the staff. I just groan when I think of putting two famous people in one bed.

They came from the States. One was Watson; he was an executive with TEAM. And another one was Germaine. I’m not sure if those two came together, but they were put together. Couldn’t get the rest of the staff to take them, so we did because we used to enjoy having them, but to put two men in one bed, I die every time I think of it.

One missionary would get up in the service and talk about how he got up early in the morning to pray and read his Bible. I said, “Yeah, you woke us all up, too.” He was in our house and we were tired. We didn’t want to get up at 4:00, but he did. So he wasn’t my favorite.

When we lived at the town of Briercrest in our first year of marriage, we even had T. J. Bach in our apartment; he was one of the founders of TEAM. He thought it was terrible that I didn’t have a typewriter, so the next time he came he brought me a typewriter.

We used to laugh because he would pray, but he always prayed with his eyes open. And he wrote out his prayers, too. Well it’s typical Lutheran style, you know, to pray with your eyes open. My parents were Lutheran and they always prayed with their eyes open. So I find it hard to close mine, too.

Staying at Caronport

Esther: In spite of the hardships, I don't ever remember wondering what we were doing there. Once Homer had an opportunity to go with the Canadian Sunday School Mission to Ontario, and I remember crying my eyes out. I didn't want to leave Caronport. He didn't either, so it was all right.

Narrative: Irene Fender

Introduction

There is a small dormitory in Caronport called "Fender Hall." For many years it housed young men who adopted the slogan, "Producing Fine Quality Husbands." I wonder if the residents of Fender Hall knew that its namesake was Briercrest's first Dean of Men. Walter Fender had been a student at Briercrest, then went farming after graduation. Later, Irene moved to Caronport with him when he was invited to be Dean of Men, a position he held for 25 years. Irene worked at the restaurant when it was a 50s diner called the lunch counter, but her highest priority and greatest joy was being a wife and mother. Her husband passed away many years ago and she now lives alone in Abbotsford, BC, near to her daughters. This narrative introduces Mr. Fender's wife, Irene, whom I interviewed in her home on November 3, 2004.

Invited to Caronport

When my husband was invited to be Dean of Men at Briercrest, I remember him thinking about it for quite some time. I don't know if I was more certain than he was, but I thought, well, the decision would have to be his. The best thing to do was to go and talk to him about it.

Walter had been a student at Briercrest, but I didn't know him then. I got to know him after he graduated. We married in '43. That's so long ago, it's hard for me to remember all these things. I never was a student at Briercrest. I went out working, started just finding jobs wherever I could find a job.

You know, Walter really was a farmer. We had a farm at Congress, Saskatchewan, near Assiniboia. After we had children the school was closed in our district and we had absolutely no place to send our kids to school. I often thought, "Well how is that gonna work? Where are we gonna send our kids to school? How are our kids gonna get to school?"

We stayed on the farm for just over three years after that. Two of our daughters, Bernice and Bev, were born on the farm. Just before Bev was born, Mr. Hildebrand had been corresponding with Walter back and forth about coming on staff. That took awhile, because we were farming, we had three quarters of land, and that was the way we made our living. But when the kids got older we had to make the move, and since Walter was asked to come to Briercrest we thought, "Well that will answer our prayers concerning our children going to school." Our first daughter Bernice was about a year and a half when we moved up to Caronport in 1946.

We were there at the school 25 years. He was a good dean. I said to him once, "Always give the kids a second chance." And I think that stuck with him for a long time, because he wasn't impossible with the kids, you know. He always said at the school he was Dean of Men, but at home he said, "I'm Dean of Ladies," because he had three girls.

I think he did a very good job while he was there, until he had his heart attack. After that he slowed up and he wasn't the same man. The doctor told him right away, "You've had a severe heart attack, but if you watch it you can live for another 20 years." I can't

just remember what year that was. He died in '81 and he had the heart attack 17 years before that. So, he didn't quite make 20. That was a hard time, going through that.

Mr. Hildebrand is going to be 93 this year.¹⁵ My husband was only two years behind him and would have been 90 now. I can't believe that, that he would be that old, because he was a young man when he died, only 67. Seems almost impossible that the time goes so fast.

Bev has a tape at her house where Walter and I were interviewed by one of the staff, I'm not sure who it was at that time. It's just a short tape.

Impressions of Caronport

The first time that we went to Caronport it was a big air force base. Mr. Hildebrand had asked us to come there after they bought the school and look it over, and oh, it was just one big building after another. We lived in the hangar when we went to Caronport! I think that hangar is still there.¹⁶ There were quite a few buildings there and kind of a bleak prairie. And the storms, the dust storms! They don't have those anymore. They get a lot of wind, though, but lots of rain, too.

We had lots of hard, hard winters. The first winter, the snow was right up to the roofs. And I remember when we'd drive into Moose Jaw, the snow piled up on each side of the highway and you could hardly see the cars driving. That's how deep the snow was. We had ice sculptures in the wintertime. It was amazing what they did!

¹⁵ This interview was done in 2004.

¹⁶ The hangar is currently used as the rink. It used to have a series of apartments around the outside with entrances inside the hangar. These apartments were rented by the school as residences through the 1980s, but at the time of writing are used for hockey dressing rooms, a confectionary, "The Clothes Closet" clothing exchange and community drop-in, storage, and music practice rooms. Mrs. Fender and I had a long discussion about this during our interview.

The dairy was Homer Edwards' specialty. He had one cow they said ended up in some kind of palace in California, I think.¹⁷

I remember the big chapel. I think it is still standing.¹⁸ I remember Mr. Whittaker said to Mr. Hildebrand, "Do you think we'll ever fill this building?" And they sure did. Oh yes. That chapel was full on Sunday mornings. The boys were up on the balcony, and the girls, and some of the guys I think, were also down on the first floor.

Working at Caronport

The school did not have married women working. Mr. Hildebrand was against that, I think. If you look back at the yearbooks, I don't think you'll see any married women. Mrs. Muirhead, well, she was the nurse. Otherwise they were all single women then. I don't think they hired married women as such until they would have them come on staff if their husbands were there first. A lot of the staff were married men and that's how married women came in. There were some of the married women that thought, "Well, why can't we do something?" But I know for a long time Mr. Hildebrand wanted the women to stay home and tend to their families. He liked to see the mothers with the children in the home. That was their first responsibility. And that was important in that time, too.

Of course, that's all I ever did, until I started working at that lunch counter. And I worked there for a good many years. It got so busy down there that they needed help. Quite often we were short of help. I was with that until we moved out West. I think I

¹⁷ "The Cow Palace is known as the 'home' of the Grand National Rodeo, Horse and Stock Show" [cited 13 March 2007]. Available from <http://www.cowpalace.com/index.html>.

¹⁸ The "big chapel" is still standing, is now considered small, and is used as a multi-purpose building called "The Landing."

was the manager for a couple of years there, but it was a small place. We opened up at six o'clock in the morning and we had customers come at six o'clock in the morning. By the time we got down there, there were truckers waiting; they'd drive as far as Caronport and then they'd rest, sleeping in their trucks. As soon as the lunch counter opened up then they had their breakfast. So it was a very busy place.

I really didn't work full-time until my youngest daughter Margie was in grade eight. When they asked me to manage it I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind managing it, but I still have a daughter at home," and I wanted her to feel free to be with me whenever she wanted to. Every day she'd come down to the lunch counter, be there for a little while, and then she'd go home. As long as she saw mom, I guess. But I was usually home in time for supper—I made the meals.

Usually I was at the lunch counter by 6:30 in the morning. When I managed it, I would stay for one whole shift, until I'd get called back. If it got terribly rushed then they'd call, "Can you come down?" But it was a great life.

As far as students were concerned, we had quite a lot of students in the home. I guess a mixture of guys and girls. We had three girls and they were always bringing their friends home, so we had quite a lot that way.

I remember the names of a lot of students. Oh yeah. I *remember* so many girls. I remember. They were students. Nice kids, really nice kids. Lorraine Jost was one. In fact, I think I was better at names than my husband was! But I sure am not today. But I got to know the students pretty well, their names at least.

Those were good years, even if they were a little hard. But nothing really hard. I enjoyed it so much. I just loved it, just being a mother there, and just being part of the

staff, the ladies, and things like that. Anyway, it was a good life. A very good life. I enjoyed it.

Women and Men of Caronport

Some of the ladies from Caronport are here in Abbotsford. Esther Edwards. Laura Wellwood. Audrey Lewis. Tina Blatz.

Tina was the school nurse. Delivered babies, though she didn't deliver any of my babies. Bernice and Bev were born in Assiniboia, and Marjorie was born in Moose Jaw. Tina was only there one or two years and then she went to Germany to Black Forest Academy. So she didn't deliver many babies, but I think she delivered one of the Shauf babies.

Freida Teichrob. She and her husband were on staff. Henry was a high school teacher, a very good high school teacher. I think they were there about ten years. Very capable woman. They had three children. Their oldest daughter is with Trinity Western on staff there. Linda. What's her married name now? Anyway, Linda Teichrob. Very brilliant girl. Henry and Frieda's second child died. Then they have a boy and he's a pastor, but I'm not sure where he is.

My daughter Bev and her husband Wayne live here in Abbotsford. Wayne works for the city here in Abbotsford. Bev is a music teacher, and she's also had a women's ministry, but this year she's not doing it because she wants to finish her course in women's ministry, and if she stays with it till next June she says she can graduate. She's done very well. She says, "I've done this late in life, but I just love it." The church, Seven Oaks Alliance, is going to be calling on her many, many times after this year. Already she works in the church quite a bit.

I never met Annie Hillson. I knew of her, and I did hear her speak, but by the time we came on the scene as staff, she was pretty aged. She would have been a woman of maybe 80 then. Mrs. Whittaker was about the same age. I think I did see her once or twice. Those two ladies were the ones that prayed Caronport, or prayed the school into existence. They were the prayer warriors.

And Mr. Whittaker, I saw him quite often; he was at Caronport a lot. He was the one that got Caronport, you know. He had to talk to the Saskatchewan government that they would like to buy it. I guess Mr. Hildebrand had a lot to do with it, too, but those two they did the work, they did the job there.

I met Margaret Rusk, but I didn't really know her that well. I can't remember *where* she taught. Did she teach at the town of Briercrest? That was before my time. She had a brother from Briercrest—Clarence Rusk. I've forgotten some of those people.

Mrs. Muirhead was the nurse in 1950. I think that was the first year they had a nurse, but they may have had somebody in '47 already. Miss Martin was First Aid.

Erna Neufeld was the Dean of Women. She was a single lady all her life. She was in charge of the ladies, and Walter was in charge of the boys. They both had assistants—one for the high school boys and a lady for the high school girls. Well, Erna and Walter had to work together, with meetings and things like that. But I think she thought many times that my husband was too easygoing on the boys and she, she was so hard. I don't know—I don't want to be critical—but she was hard on the girls we figured, her rules in the dorm, and things like that. I want to be careful what I say. But she sure hung in there for a good many years. She was there a long time.

Mrs. Clements was also the Dean of Women after Erna Neufeld. She was a wonderful lady.

Erna Rempel and her sister Gertie were both in the kitchen, helping in the cooking area. Gertie married Harold McKay.

We knew the teachers, yes. Mr. Swenson was one of the top teachers; and Mr. Edwards; and Mr. Hildebrand. They were the three main ones, I think.

Browsing Yearbooks

I don't know who else was on staff at that time. You didn't get to know everybody. I'd have to look up some of the *Optics*¹⁹ in the early years. I have them right from the beginning, from the time that they started making the yearbooks; I think that was in 1947.

I've got two '71s! One belongs to one of the girls; I know because it says, "Dear Marj" inside. My daughter Bev said, "Mom, don't you ever, ever give these *Optics* away." I got them all up to 1974, and then I stopped buying them because I didn't know anything about the school anymore. Some of the yearbooks I really should never have bought, because we just didn't know anybody. '79-'80 must be the last one I bought. '66 was way past when we were there. You can get a lot of information from the *Optics*. You could spend hours looking at them.

Mrs. Olson was a married woman, but then, she was widowed. She worked in the laundry. The *Optic* was dedicated to her in 1962.

Miss Heron was the librarian. The yearbook was dedicated to her in 1956:

Miss Heron has enjoyed rewarding public service as a public school teacher in our province. She joined the staff of Briercrest Bible Institute in 1950 to be our librarian, and has worked faithfully in her quiet, unassuming way to make our library a delightful and inviting place to study.²⁰

¹⁹ *Optic* was the first name of the Briercrest yearbook. It is now called *Eyewitness*.

²⁰ *Optic*, 1956.

She was at Caronport right from the beginning as far as I knew, but I think she fades out after a few years.

Gordon Diggins. Julian Grymaloski. Harry Penner. Mr. Amundsen. Eliason. Sundbo. Fender. Laura Wellwood's husband Tom, and Irvine Rodine live here. Irvine's first wife died and now he's remarried. I don't know where the Engstroms are. But he was very, very good with his hands, drawing and things like that, you know. And there's this group of single staff.

Joe Shakotko was my brother-in-law. He's gone. His wife Gladys, my sister, is gone.

Mae Pomeroy was on staff. She lived in the town of Briercrest before she was married and worked in the laundry. But she was widowed while she was at Caronport. Her husband was on high school staff: a French teacher.

My sister, Isabel, went to Caronport. Our maiden name was Reimche. She's a Mrs. Gogel now, living in Regina. Merla Gogel is her daughter.²¹

Joan and Jean Little were twins, but I don't think they came the same time. They were from our home district. I think Joan was only there one year. Jean kept on going. The *Optic* will give you information. It usually does. I wonder if the other ladies, Esther and Selma, have their yearbooks.²²

Miss Owens. I wonder if she's still living.²³

Gordon Olmstead. They're still on campus, Gordon and Eloise.

²¹ Merla Gogel is a missionary with SEND International.

²² This is Esther Edwards and Selma Penner.

²³ Lillian Diggins says she is not.

There's a picture of my husband in one of the yearbooks. He got the awfulest [sic] haircut. They had the barber right there at the school, Harold McKay. Walter didn't want to run and go into Moose Jaw, so he just had his hair cut there, and when I look back at it I thought, why did I ever allow that? Why didn't he go into town and get a decent haircut? Esther Edwards said that Homer refused to get his hair cut at Caronport. Well, he was wise. I wasn't.

Well, there's just so much to remember. I'm sure that they've got a copy of each yearbook at Caronport. They *should* have if they don't. It's history! You could spend hours and hours looking at those again.

Narrative: Lillian Diggins

Introduction

Lillian Diggins was the youngest participant – only in her 70s, compared with the other four women who were all in their 80s. Lillian came to Briercrest at Caronport as a student in 1948. She returned as a single staff person after graduation. Her husband came in 1950, Lillian's final year of college and the first year students were allowed to go on a date. He remembers pushing her and her date out of a snowbank to get off campus. The Diggins stayed on staff for approximately 40 years. While her kids were small, Lillian worked at home. When they were older she became Alumni Secretary, and it is still a joy for her to meet Briercrest Alumni wherever she goes. Lillian knows more than most about Briercrest's former students. After four decades of study and service at Briercrest, Lillian and her husband Gordon moved to Abbotsford, BC, where they now live.

I interviewed Lillian with her husband Gordon in their home in Abbotsford, BC on November 2, 2004. Though Gordon was part of the conversation, I was aiming to feature the women, so have written this narrative in Lillian's "voice" with a few comments and footnotes from Gordon.

School Days

My first year at school ('48-49), we were in a dorm that had no partitions. There were four sections in the dormitory, with no partitions. We had lockers all along the wall, and curtains hanging from them so your clothes were hung up behind that, and there were beds out from that, but there were no partitions at all. That was F-dorm. Later it was a boys' dorm, but at that time one side was boys and one side was girls. The laundry was downstairs. D-dorm had married couples and single girls in it.

Miss Neufeld was our Dean of Ladies. She also taught Etiquette. She was there before I was. I never got into trouble with her at all. I know a lot of the kids did, but I didn't. When the rules were there she went by the book. Yeah, she was a stickler, but I never had any problem with her. In fact, my roommate and I lived right next door to her. In second year or third year, I can't remember what year it was, they put us in the high school girls' dorm, right next to Miss Neufeld, and we never did find out whether they thought we acted like the high school kids, whether they thought we could be some help to them, or whether she wanted to keep her eye on us. But we really never had any problem with her at all.

They didn't used to let the girls babysit during study hour. We couldn't be out of the dorm for any reason. They could babysit on Saturdays or Friday nights or something like that. Two hours we had to study, from 7:30 to 9:30 or maybe 7 to 9, and then about 15 minutes of riot hour, and then you had to wash up and have the lights out at 10:00.

Some days riot hours²⁴ were quite the thing. When I was on single staff we lived in B dorm. It isn't there anymore. Anyhow, when it was time to wash up, the girls all gathered in the washroom and they'd be sitting around the floor, talking and we had a great time!

In my first year one of the gals in our room was from Main Centre, and her mom was always sending her great big care parcels. There was a street light right at the end of the dorm there, so after lights were out we'd go down to that end of the room and have our lunch by the light of the street light. That was where I got to like cheese and dill pickle sandwiches. So we had fun.

It was my second year that we were in high school dorm with the high school kids, 'cause they had partitions in the dorm then, but only partway up. And we had bunk beds, so we lay on the top bunks and we'd talk all the way down the hall. Oh, it was fun. And then at the end room their heads would go down and then the next one and you knew Miss Neufeld was coming. I remember one time kids from downstairs came up and pulled my mattress out and put it out in the hallway. These were high school kids and they were always trying to do something with these Bible school kids that were in their dorm. So I just laid down on it, and the kids whispered, "What are you gonna do when Miss Neufeld comes?" I said, "Oh, I guess if she wants me to go in the room, you put it out here." Then Miss Neufeld came along and all the kids were in our room: *What's she gonna say?* And she says, "I really think you should get back in your room. The night watchman might fall all over you if you stay out here." They were so disappointed 'cause they thought I was gonna get into trouble. Oh we had fun that year! I don't know whether we did them any good or not, but we had a lot of fun with them.

²⁴ "Riot hour" was a time slot for washing up in the evening.

Preaching

Students came for three years. It was a three year course. Basically, the men would either be a missionary or a pastor, I think. And with the women I guess it would be the wife of a pastor or a missionary!²⁵

There wasn't the variety of ministries that there are now. Like when Gordon went up to a missionary statesman after he had given quite a challenging message, and he said to him, "I am not a preacher, but is there anything I can do on the mission field without being a preacher?" The missionary answered, "Nope. Preach first. That's it." When Gordon mentioned that to Claire Gifford, a missionary, and he said, "Oh! Where was I when you were wanting to know that?" There's so much you can do on the mission field, but in those days it just seemed like that was the idea, you had to preach. Often, I know when Mr. Budd was on the field, there were so many single ladies that he spend a good deal of his time doing things for these lady missionaries, which kept him from teaching, and where if somebody had been there in a maintenance field they could have done that work and that could have been their ministry.

That's what Dr. Hildebrand said to Gordon after he'd been there a year. Dr. Hildebrand came to him and he said, "Well, what do you think of the place? Are you happy being here?" And he said, "Well, yeah, I enjoy it, but I've had Bible school, I really think I should be doing something different." And Dr. Hildebrand said, "Don't ever feel that way. If you weren't here to do it, we'd have to get somebody else. Your work is just as important as the teachers." And that settled him and he was quite happy to stay there.

²⁵ GORDON: I think you're right there. I thought I'd go there and come out as a pastor or a missionary. I think that was the general feeling. And then sometimes the longer you were there you realized maybe it was something else.

But he needed that emphasis. But that seemed to be the idea, if you couldn't preach or teach there wasn't much to do. It really is too bad, because now there's such a variety of places that you can use your gifts.

You had to tell a story first year,²⁶ second year you had to preach in class, and third year you had to preach in chapel. I would think it would have been pretty close to the '60s before they stopped. I imagine they wouldn't have enough time to get everybody in.²⁷ It wasn't just the men that had to preach, we had to, too.

I might have been nervous. It's such a long time ago that I forget. I still remember what I preached on, though. I think I preached on the donkey that the Lord rode. And submissiveness and being willing to let God use you. Had something to do with the donkey, but I can't remember just exactly the outline. Second year you preached in class.

One of Gordon's classmates, Ron Slade—he was in prison camp with Eric Liddel. His folks were missionaries over in China. Well he got up there, he was a card anyhow, and told what not to do when you tell a story. That was in Child Evangelism class. He wore two different coloured socks and he put his foot up on the railing in the chapel. Oh, he was quite the character. They live in Hamilton now.

Courtship

Lillian: Gordon came in '50-'51, my graduating year. That was interesting those days.

Gordon: I noticed her. But I was a lowly first year. She was a third year. So, that year in the spring, the first year that they let students go on a date, here this guy was

²⁶ GORDON: And then somewhere on the line you [students] gave your [their] testimony over the radio. Well, the boys did, anyway. LILLIAN: I don't remember that.

²⁷ GORDON: I think even just after our day some of the fellows didn't have to preach because they run out of time. In those days there were a lot of missionaries came, and they used to take a lot of the chapel services, too.

taking her out on a date and I was pushing them through a snow drift so they could get off campus!

Then she came back later after graduation and I didn't let her get away twice. I'd been away at home for two weeks and when I came back the other guys I worked with said, "Hey, there's a new girl in the office there. We've got her all picked out for you." I said, "Who is it?" "Well, she went to school here awhile ago." That's when I found out it was Lillian. I wasn't going to let her get away again. I don't remember our first date or anything. I guess it was probably with Richie Anderson and Ruth Lutzer.

Lillian: Maybe we went down to Old Wives Lake with a bunch of the single staff. Somebody lived down there. Gertie McKay's sister and Mrs. Lewis's brother. Gertie's sister and Wilf Stevens were married. So a bunch of single staff went down. After I came back and I started going with Gordon, Dr. Hildebrand said, "I think the next single girl that I employ, I'm going to make sure they promise that they will stay at least two years." I worked in the office for two years, but I was married before two years was up. There were quite a number of them that got married after they were on staff.

Gordon: She got called in the office by Mr. Hildebrand because I used to go pick up the mail and had to drive down to Caron to meet the train, so I used to take her once in awhile, and then I guess we went too often?

Lillian: I don't remember what it was all about.

Work and Marriage

I thought I was going to Africa when I left Bible school, but that didn't work out and I wrote Dr. Hildebrand and told him, because he'd been one of my references, and he wrote back almost immediately and asked me to come and work in the office. I just didn't have any peace about Africa. I started out with the application and got the first preliminary, but I couldn't finish up the final papers. I just couldn't do it. And finally the Lord gave me real peace about going to BBI, and I had that peace throughout the years there. Not that it was always easy. We worked there nearly forty years. I think Dr. Hildebrand kept his staff longer when they did get married.

I worked about a year after we were married, and then I went back to work part time after our youngest, Paul, was in kindergarten. So I'd be home when they got home. Paul, he's our baby. He'd love to have me call him that! There's about six years between Paul and the oldest, nineteen months between the girls. Laurel was born in '57, Paul was born in '63.

I did work for the bookstore a little bit, 'cause we lived right next door to the bookstore where the guest rooms were. When they got new books in, they gave them to me to read to see if I felt that there was anything that they didn't want on their shelf. I did that 'cause I could do that at home. But then I started working in the alumni office just two or three hours a day. Gordon says I started marking papers or something for awhile there, 'cause I could do that at home. Then when Paul got going to kindergarten I started going over to the office. I don't remember doing that. I tell Gordon, "You gotta stay with me," because he's got a better memory than I.

I worked in the high school for two or three years, in the office, and I really enjoyed those high school kids. Some of them just seemed lonely; they'd come in when they had a

spare and were supposed to be working. They would come occasionally, not too often, but there were one or two that just seemed to want to talk to somebody. I enjoyed that.

But most of the time I was working with the alumni. So I got to know them, and I still, if I find somebody that's gone to Briercrest, I immediately want to know if they're still on the mailing list. They used to call me "Miss Alumni" because I was always looking for lots of alumni. But I really enjoyed that, working there.

I don't know how many years I worked with the alumni. I worked with Elbert Hiebert and Les Leskewich. (Bert Hiebert was in my class at school. He also taught vocal and sang in a quartet.) I think I worked with Homer Edwards a little bit. I can't remember who else was Alumni President. But I did enjoy working with them, and I worked on the alumni news. In fact, in the early years I did the alumni news – the *Echo* it was called then. I put it all together. It was sort of overall everything, including little articles. It was people that sent in notes like they do in the *Passport*, articles that somebody'd be asked to write on a certain theme, and reports of activities on campus.

Then it went to the *Alumni News*, which was just alumni news. And then they changed it to the *Passport*, combined it, because they had another paper that they sent out, but not as regular as the alumni news. They combined the two of them. The *Echo* originally was the paper that we sent out, and then it was the *Alumni News*, and then the *Passport*.

I think I remember compiling all of the *Echoes* in the archives, getting them together for the archives. They had them in the library, and there were extra copies of different ones, and we got them all so there was one copy of everything. Everybody kind of worked

on it when Marilyn Zink was in charge. Everybody tried to find as many of the old things as possible.

When I saw the alumni work sort of dwindling away I thought, “Oh no!” But Michelle [Ernst] is doing a super job. Jackie [(Almeida) Kroeker] did, too. Jackie did very well when she was in there. Alumni are our biggest supporters.

I found the alumni work was so rewarding. I just loved it, keeping in touch and seeing where they’re working. Even still I get a thrill when I see one of our alumni, even if I don’t know them at all, that’s a pastor here or [someone] leading a group here—it just thrills me to see what God is doing through our alumni. It was important then, and I still get a real thrill out of finding out. Or when I go to a church that I don’t know and I’m almost disappointed if I don’t find somebody there that has been at Briercrest. But it was very rewarding, just keeping in touch with the kids, and having them come back and tell you how much they enjoy the alumni news, and it was just a very enjoyable job. I don’t know of any one particular thing, but it was just a delight to work with them and keep in touch with them.

Memorable Women

I remember the first time that they asked me to be on the women’s social committee. I had just barely gotten there. They were sitting around, and I was supposed to be secretary and I was supposed to take minutes, and they’d talk about Inger this and Irene that and I said, “Whoa! I don’t know who these people are! All I know of them is Mrs. Fender, Mrs. Hildebrand.” And they said, “Well, Lillian, you’ll have to get to know us by our first name. You can’t call us Mrs. all the time.”

I don't know whether they called me Lillian or Cookie. When I was at Bible school I was Cookie all the time, 'cause my last name was Cook. A lot of people didn't even know what my name was. I remember at our church one time, Wally Grip was in a quartet and he was introducing. He got all the Briercrest people to stand up, and then he started naming them all. He'd go by my girlfriend and I and go on to somebody else, and we were getting really nervous wondering, "What's he gonna do now?" 'cause he was a character. Finally he says, "And there is Cookie!" because he couldn't remember my name! It was so funny.

Because my dad got called Cookie, I never got called that anywhere but at Briercrest. So, if I heard that name I automatically knew it had to be somebody from Briercrest. One day my roommate's nephew, Stan Hindmarsh, came up to me in the office—he was student body president then—and walked by the desk there and whispered, "Hi Cookie." I said, "Oh yeah, I know, your dad's been talking to you." He thought that was so funny.

Mrs. Whittaker was a neat lady. A very stately lady. Lots of fun. She had her own opinions, and she could keep Mr. Whittaker in place. He was a real go-getter! But she could kind of hem him in a bit, I think. It seemed to me that in her quiet way she could keep him from going overboard on a few things, 'cause he could get off on tangents sometimes. But I knew her better than Mrs. Hillson.

I think we heard Mrs. Hillson speak or give a testimony or something. Maybe Gordon didn't, because I was there two years ahead of him. I don't remember Mrs. Hillson being any other way but old.²⁸ Well, Mrs. Whittaker, too. I always thought she

²⁸ Lillian was commenting on a picture in *Wind in the Wheatfields*.

was old. But when I went to Bible school I thought anybody that was 50 and older was old! I think they were about the same age. Mrs. Whittaker was very determined—she knew what she wanted and she wasn't afraid of speaking her mind. I think Mrs. Hillson, to me, was a quieter woman. The two of them were a good working pair. They were real prayer warriors. I think that was the basic part of getting the school started. I could be wrong, but I kind of think Mrs. Whittaker was the leader.

The Whittakers lived in Moose Jaw. They lived right down by the river. Their house was close to being flooded a few times. Fortunately they were up a little higher so the river was down. They lived in southern Moose Jaw. He had quite a few stores, including Moose Jaw and Briercrest. Gordon remembers Gordon Gruchy mentioned something about all the stores that Whittaker had had. Grocery stores, I think.²⁹

Margaret Rusk. She married a Baptie. Mrs. Baptie lived in Calgary, so I only saw her at conferences and stuff. Her brother lived in Briercrest, Clarence Rusk—later in Moose Jaw. She wasn't at the school by the time I got there.

Mrs. Hildebrand. She was such a stately model of a wife, of a Christian woman, a mother. You just looked up and thought, "Oh, I wish I could be like her." She was really a special lady.

I can still remember David Hildebrand just after he'd come home after finding out that he had the cancer. His throat was just raw, but he was working in the store, and he was just so bright and cheery and I thought, "Oh, man, what a kid." From then on he seemed to be just really special. But he did have a very special nature and he loved the

²⁹ GORDON: I think so. I don't think he had any when we got there. When I got there Art Sundbo was running the store at Caronport. But who was in there when you first started? I think Art and Oscar Eliason just took a year of Bible each, then they asked them to go on staff.

Caronport kids and he did all he could with them when he was on staff. He and Jeannie were a very special couple.

And then, well I guess there were some of the staff wives when I started working there. To me they were way up there somewhere, I didn't feel like I was really capable of working with them. There was Mrs. Fender and Mrs. Penner and some of the ladies that we worked with. When Gordon and I were going together after we were on staff, we would go to Mrs. Penner's living room—they let us have it for a Friday evening for date night.

Mrs. Wipf taught missions, and Mrs. Barsness, of course. Adelma Beagle taught in CHS. There were several lady teachers in CHS and elementary school.

Mrs. Sundbo was a special lady. Beatrice. She was so good with our second daughter, 'cause she was a feisty little thing. She was small, but she didn't want people to think she couldn't do everything, and she had one or two teachers that kind of put her down.³⁰ Now she's five one or something, because I'm only five four and a half and she's quite a bit shorter than me. She married a fellow that's about six foot I guess.

One time, thinking of Mrs. Sundbo, a policeman came into the class to talk to the kids about safety when they were in public school, and I don't know what he was talking about, but he asked Kathy a question and he says, "And you, Shorty, what do you think?" And Mrs. Sundbo says, "Right away I saw Kathy's eyes begin to flash and said, 'But you should see her play baseball!'" and that just quietened it down. She just had that way about her.

³⁰ GORDON: I wouldn't say they put her down. I imagine it was comical when she was in grade one and she had to go and write something at the blackboard and she could hardly reach it. And the teacher kind of, according to Kathy, laughed at her, and oh that didn't go right.

She was neat. She used to have the kids come over to her place for tea parties after school. She had them all day, but she'd have them over for tea parties on a Saturday or something. She was a wonderful teacher, she really was, and a very special lady. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sundbo. They lost—was it four of their children? They wrote *Treasures in Heaven*. You'd go over there when they'd lost one of their children and Mr. Sundbo would be there comforting you! They just were able to take everything. They were a very special couple. They lost one before they got to Caronport—run over just before they came to school, and I think that sort of cinched it that they were to come to school as students. They had a boy die with leukemia when he was only four. Then they had a still-born baby. Then they adopted a boy, and he was killed when he was about 18 or 19 in a truck at a train crossing.³¹

I don't know how many years after that Mrs. Sundbo died, too. They used to go and visit as stewardship for the school. One year one of the students from our school had been working as a flagman on a construction site, and he was hit and killed. They went to visit the parents and the father said, "But people just don't understand." Mr. Sundbo said, "Yes, but we do," and they told them their story, and that couple were totally changed, they felt somebody else understood, somebody else had gone through this. With their testimony so many times they just were there when God wanted them. They were just a special couple.

I remember Dale Dirksen's dad, Henry, when his wife died. I went up to him and I started to try to say I was sorry or something and he said, "Well, I guess maybe God

³¹ GORDON: They were hauling gravel and they were told that there were no trains gonna be coming through that day, so they weren't bothering stopping, and a train did come through.

figured he wanted another soprano in his choir up in heaven.” I thought that was so neat. Later he married the Dean of Women, Elaine Wolf.

Tina Blatz lives in Menno Hall (in Abbotsford). I didn’t know her as well as the others, because she was Dean of Women at school in Briercrest, I think. She was in Germany when I came, at Black Forest.

Frieda Teichrob. I haven’t seen her for awhile. They were with Revival Fellowship for a while, too. I think maybe they still do occasionally. He’s sort of a manager of complexes out here. She’s a very good speaker, too, but I never knew that when she was at Caronport. There wasn’t the opportunity. But when she got into Revival Fellowship she was very good, did a lot of speaking. They weren’t students. He was high school principal.

Joy Brown, who married Odd Brygmann, was a teacher. They were married when we went to school, so I don’t really know too much about them before that. She taught our kids in the elementary school. She was a very nice person. She kind of had her favorites in the elementary school. We had two kids and one got along with her and the other one didn’t. Laurel seemed to be able to do whatever she wanted. She could chew gum, she could talk, she could do anything. And our other daughter, I don’t know whether it was a personality clash or what, but she said, “I just have to wiggle my nose and I’m accused of chewing gum.” Our second daughter was a perfectionist, and maybe she saw things differently, but other people felt Joy had her favourites.

But then she was an excellent teacher. She was a very bubbly person. I think she taught a lot of the kids that had gone through the school there. She taught grade 7 and 8, I think, and had the top class. She was principal of the elementary school.

One thing she used to say to the kids: if she asked them something and they started giving her an answer and she thought it was an excuse, she'd say, "And they all began with one accord to make excuse." She would quote that to them so many times. At a big reunion, Monday morning was for the staff kids, and they made up a song about Mrs. Brygmann. It was *so* funny. And her daughters, Cheryl and Audrey, said, "Well if you think she was like that at school you should have been at home, it was just the same." I think I have it somewhere. I'm so glad we went to that reunion for the staff kids, because it was just hilarious. I think that reunion was in '86, it was a homecoming. It was the first big reunion that they had of the reunions. Such gorgeous weather that weekend. They opened up Besant Park just for everybody from the school to come.³²

Mrs. Grace Bergren was a very sweet lady. Just a lovely lady. She worked at the lunch counter, which everybody was surprised at, that she would work down there because she seemed so quiet. She did a super job managing the lunch counter down there for a while, but she was a homebody. Don't know too many stories about her. Just she was always there, helping wherever there was anything being done, any suppers being done, anybody needed anything she was just there. They were a neat couple. They lived in the hangar when they first came.

We lived up there when we were first married. I can remember the first winter, because there were no washrooms in the apartments, you had to go to the other side of the skating rink to go to the washroom. And if you had to go at night, quite often you'd

³² GORDON: Yeah, that was a homecoming, but you're thinking when they opened up the park was in October. That was another something that they had in the fall.

get by those big barrels and a cat'd come jumping out and bats flying around. Eeee! Later they got washrooms in them, but that was interesting.³³

I spent many hours in Esther Edwards' kitchen talking to her. My roommate, Loretta Hindmarsh, was going with Homer's brother, so we used to go and visit them quite often. Homer's brother was his student. They married and went to Aruba as missionaries for awhile and she was never better and he was never worse, so they came back and he was on a stretcher.

The houses in Aruba had slots, you could see down through the floor, and you had to be careful where you placed your furniture so the legs didn't fall through. They said she was a real hell-fire preacher. One time while she was preaching the kerosene fridge below exploded, and it was just red all over the top of it. They lost everything pretty much except a few wedding pictures that they found floating in the water.

Bruce Hindmarsh, that's Loretta's nephew. His dad was Doug Hindmarsh. Doug and his sister Doreen came as students. Doreen married a doctor out in Delta, I think. And there was Loretta. And Cecil. Cecil's son Stan is the one that owns the seniors' home where Dr. Hildebrand is, and Stan's the one that called me Cookie. And then there's Art

³³ The following bit of dialogue was interesting, and even important as a theme, but it didn't fit the narrative easily, so I've preserved it here as a footnote.

GORDON: The old flour shed. Well, the old-timers know what that is. They used to be able to back the truck in there to unload the flour and store it in there. They had little tables up the side off the ground. And then they'd have tin around the legs so the mice couldn't crawl up. Later they made it into suites.

LILLIAN: Dirksens lived there. There was a single gal lived in there, too. She used to live in Napean, Ontario. She lived down there near Bob Rices.

GORDON: Oh yeah, she worked in the mailroom. She writes you at Christmas or something. She came and worked in the office for a while. I remember helping the guy that brought the furniture there—it was a furniture moving truck. They had a harness that they put on their back and he had big trunks there, and he'd sit on the trunk and strap this thing on, and so I thought I'd better try that thing. I guess once you get used to it it's alright, but I had more trouble with it more than when I was holding it at the front.

who is a doctor in Saskatoon. The oldest one was Elmer. The Hindmarsh home was my home away from home because they were close in Assiniboia.

Jean Barsness (Jean Reimer) was one of my neighbours. Jean and her sister Joan lived right next to me as a high school student that year we were in the high school dorm. That's where I really got to know them.

I was in the office when we got word that Gil Reimer had been killed,³⁴ and I sent a telegram to them using the verse in Deuteronomy, "underneath are the everlasting arms," and she said when she opened it up and she read the reference, Bette-Jean said, "Oh, I know that! It says God's arms are under us." It was quite neat. She's been very special ever since.

The students just loved Jean to bits, and she was able to direct so many kids into mission work or into Christian work, whatever. She was an excellent teacher, just an excellent person. And now she's finding it hard to let go, because everybody wants her to do this and that and the other, and she's on the go so much. I don't know how she can keep going at the pace she goes. Whenever she goes to speak at any group, whether it's men or women, it's her testimony and her messages and her grasp of the Word of God, it's just deep.

I stood up for Henry and Ev Budd when they were married. They were in St. Catherines.

We knew Terry Wolverton's parents really well, Bud & Marge. We got to know them through the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. Years ago Wycliffe Bible Translators used to have their Summer Institute of Linguistics at Briercrest. Bud and

³⁴ Gil and Jean Reimer were missionaries in Panama. After Gil was killed, Jean was invited to teach missions at Briercrest, so she and her two children moved to Caronport.

Marge were there for SIL. They were married then and had their oldest child, Kit. I think they went to London after. I knew Marge from Hamilton. So it's kind of interesting the way it all worked out.

Women's Identity and Roles

I was the plumber's wife. There's still a man out here in Abbotsford, and he never knows me until Gordon comes: "Oh, now I know who you are." You were sort of your husband's mate, and that was who you were known as, more or less. There was Mrs. Wipf, and then Mrs. Barsness who had just a great deal of influence on women getting out into the ministry. They had a tremendous ministry there at the school. Marilyn Baron was another one who had a real influence. She was a dean in the high school, and she was just a super dean. The girls just loved her to bits. Dale Dirksen's stepmother [Elaine Wolf] did a good job, too, there as a single woman. But I think most of the wives were known by their husbands—Mr. Edwards' wife, Mr. Penner's wife, Mrs. Fender was the dean's wife. They didn't seem to have any particular role. Well, they looked after their family. They weren't encouraged until after, then they started hiring the ladies for different jobs.

Selma Penner was very typical. I would say both her and Irene Fender were typical Mennonite wives. Just quiet supporters of their husbands, and didn't really have too much to say, until their husbands were gone and then their personalities came out. But they weren't so quiet that they were put down, they just were there supporting their husbands.

The school wouldn't let you work as a wife there for a while. Later, Esther was in the Alumni office. I think she got me in there to help, because she had too much work to do, writing receipts and answering letters. I think it was her that asked me if I would help.

The kids used to come into our homes once or twice a year. They would divide the whole student body up and send them to homes on a Friday night for a time of fellowship and food, and we got to know a lot of the kids that way, but then when the kids got a little more affluent and they had their own cars then they did their own thing, get into town and have a sundae or have a piece of pie or something. Coming to our homes wasn't the same novelty that it was when the school was smaller. So that was discontinued, which was too bad, because in a lot of cases if you didn't work you didn't get to know the students unless you had them in your home. And unless you had a contact you really didn't get to know them.

When we were first married we were in the hanger, and then we moved up where the guest rooms were, and we lived in there in that old shed type of a building. It was right by the store.³⁵ And the kids used to come in our front door and out the back door, or out the front door, whatever it was, from the store. They'd come in for coffee and we got to know a lot of the kids that way. One or two would know us and they'd bring somebody else with them and they'd bring somebody else and then they'd bring somebody else. When we lived there we had a lot of kids that just came and went. Then we moved and we got out of the traffic line, and that didn't happen any more.

I think in a different way the families had influence on the students, but when they're more independent and they can get out and do their own thing, they don't have

³⁵ The store is now the recording studio.

that same contact with the staff homes. Now there are more wives working, and so they get to have some association with the students. I know our Laurel got to know a number of kids; well, their house is open house anyhow.

I think there is more in-school-ministry and the wives have a bigger part now. Well, there was a different type of influence. It was just in our homes, where now it's outside. If you want you can take them down to the service station,³⁶ which we didn't have. You can take them out for a meal, you can do things like that, which the wives are too busy to do it in their homes, perhaps, and maybe in a sense they don't get to see the family life. So there's pros and cons to it, I think.

Provision and Security

At the time when they wouldn't let you work as a wife, I think it was just the mentality then that the wives were to be in the home, which isn't as prevalent now as it was then. I think that was basically it, that you had your family to look after. I do think, in a sense, the children do suffer when both parents are working full-time, but now with the economy like it is you almost have to.

We made \$110 a month when we were first married and made \$50 when we were single, but we got free lodging. We got 30% at the store, and we got a lot of our vegetables from the root cellar and the garden. When we started to pay income tax on all our benefits, our salary was raised and the rent taken off our salary.

It was amazing the way things happened after we got compensation. It was Ted Bergren, Doug's dad, that got a lot of these things going. Just after they got compensation one of the men fell and hit his head and was in a coma for a week or two and died, but

³⁶ Now known as the Pilgrim Centre.

they had the compensation, so his wife wasn't left without anything. Another one was the Group Insurance, I think it was. One of our men, one of the teachers had cancer and died, and they had an insurance premium or whatever they call it, so that the family got assistance.

There was no pension in the early days. When they did get started on a pension, those that had worked previously didn't have that much when they retired. Mr. Archibald gave the school a farm and they sold it and put the money into a pension fund for those who had worked way back. For those that were still working then, they added a little, but the ones that started early got the bulk of that, so it gave everybody a pension fund. Then the rest have worked on it from then. It was just amazing the way the Lord worked things out.

Before the new trans-Canada highway went through, we used to be snowbound, or you'd have to wait. Gordon used to have to go out to Caron and meet the buses, especially at conference time when people were coming or when the students were coming, and he'd go out to Caron. The bus stop was not in the town, it was sort of on a road at the edge of town. If he happened to shut his eyes for a minute, because sometimes it was in the middle of the night, he'd never know whether the bus had gone through or not. I don't think he ever missed anybody, but it was always that thought, "Oh dear, did the bus go through and I was asleep?" And many a time it was just so heavy with snow and blizzards and everything. Well, they put in the new highway. They were going to put it on the other side of Caron, but they put it where we are, so it's right on our doorstep.

It's just so many things that the Lord worked out, and it just made it so different. The bus stops right at the door now. And the mail is brought *in*. It didn't used to be; you

used to have to go down to the train station and get the mail from the train. You had to be there, and if you missed it, it went to Moose Jaw and you had to go into Moose Jaw to get it.

I'm just very thankful for the opportunity of serving at Briercrest. We never ever felt that we were sacrificing. People would talk about this big sacrifice you're making, but we never ever felt that. We felt it was a privilege to serve the Lord there. Our needs were met and they're still being met.

It was—well, really thrilling the way the Lord led us into building a house there on Cedar Crescent. We put orange carpet in that house. At the time that was all the thing, but our kids didn't like it! They talked about it later. I don't recall when we first moved in, but they talked about it later. When we moved then we were able to sell it at a price that enabled us to move out here and we were able to get this and buy some new furniture. We bought our living room suite, but the table and chairs and our bedroom suite was all we brought with us. And with the money from selling the house we were able to pay for this place and buy furniture, because this was only \$40,000. The fellow that built these places built them for Christian workers and pastors and missionaries that wouldn't have a lot of money to buy. It's a society and when we came in we put that \$40,000 in. And you don't sell it, you just get that \$40,000 back; you don't make anything on it. But we only pay \$100 a month for maintenance fees, and that includes our heat and everything. Isn't that great? That's another thing the Lord did for us.

If you're over 65 your taxes are \$100 a year. People say, how can you afford to live out there? We can't afford to not to live here. It's not just Christians in here. You know, there are others in here, but that's what he had in mind. You can't advertise it that way, but word of mouth gets around. It's for 55 or over. Some of the people in here still work.

We just felt that God had once again provided. We had people when we first started working at Briercreech, saying, “Well, what are you gonna do when you retire? Where’s your security? Where’s this, where’s that?” You know. But we figured if the Lord wanted us there he’d look after that, and he has!

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Preface

Initially I had conceived this chapter as a comparison of themes from the women's narratives with themes from Henry Hildebrand's memoirs. In fact, I had written the entire chapter, eighteen pages long, but it felt like I was trying too hard to prove a point. So I went back to chapter four, listed twelve major themes, and began colour-coding the narratives accordingly: (1) the ideal wife/marriage/weddings, (2) buildings/facilities, (3) homes/homemaking, (4) domestic arts: sewing, knitting, food preparation, cleaning, (5) work/women's work: paid and unpaid, (6) children: bearing and rearing, (7) voice: speaking out/keeping silent, (8) education, (9) worldly goods/money, (10) faith/beliefs/fundamentalism, (11) leadership: political and community, (12) relationships/friendships.

With this approach, I began to see how the women's stories could speak independently and that they need to be understood on their own terms before setting them alongside accounts of "The Men God Uses In Building Briercrest Bible Institute."¹ This is not to exclude men; we have already established that men's voices have been

¹ Subtitle to Bernard and Marjorie Palmer's fictionalized book, *Beacon on the Prairies* (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Bible Institute, 1970).

predominant in telling the story of Briercrest and women's voices need to be brought forward. Comparison is a later project.

With the perspective that scholarship is a spiritual discipline, I then took each woman to the Lord in prayer and let Him speak to me about her. After "meditating" on each woman's story, I arranged this chapter chronologically to parallel chapter 4, chose five themes (marriage, children, work, worldly goods, and voice), and explicated at least three for each woman. I note the theme's significance in the woman's life and touch on two or three examples from her narrative. Secondary and other primary sources are tantalizing, even useful, but I deliberately limit them to emphasize the women's voices. I also purposed to avoid "preaching" about my pet themes in making recommendations and drawing conclusions. Though I do bring myself to the conversation, I come first and foremost as a listener, so must withhold my biases and restrain my own voice, training the ears of my heart and mind to listen again and again to the women's voices in the autobiographical texts I co-created, thus helping others to listen as well.

Jean Rhode Mahn (nee Whittaker)

Worldly goods

Jean Mahn's narrative leaves the reader with an impression of materialism, but it is actually the story of reversed fortunes. Given membership in the United Church, influenced by her father's sympathy towards Catholics, "saved" through Lloyd Hunter, founder of the Canadian Sunday School Mission,² and involved in the founding of the "fundamentalist" college, Jean went on to a life of and in education, achieving a Master's degree and holding teaching and administrative positions in several American post-

² Palmer, *Miracle*, 20-21.

secondary schools. All the things she suffered and sacrificed by someone else's choosing were returned to her and multiplied. Her father could have been a millionaire, but gave it all away to the school; later in life she would associate with millionaires, even naming one as a best friend. Denied a bicycle in her teens, she flew on the Concord in her seventies. From cleaning up the Yale Hotel in the 1930s and working into her 50s to support herself and supplement her parents' pension, to marrying for the first time at 53 to a husband who "did not want me to work." From giving up her bed for countless guests in her teens, to being "able to stay at the Waldorf Astoria any time, any weekend" because of her first husband's job. Both husbands took care of her and helped to provide for her parents. Jean Mahn's life is a great reversal: closed and "governed" at first, but ever expanding, giving her "so much to be thankful for."

Jean seems to view her parents as victims, lamenting that "they literally gave their all and died poor in this world's goods." Three other times she comments on this: (1) "My mother died poor by material standards but rich in soul"; (2) "My mother . . . sacrificed many of life's material pleasures to see the growth [of the college]"; and (3) "The more I think about that the more I feel it was a sad, sad situation for my father to give all his money and then not have enough to live on, or to educate my brother and me."

Jean Whittaker's father sank his "fortune" into the school and, unfortunately, it was not the parents' sacrifice alone but the children's as well. "When I think what my father gave up," she says, adding, "what I gave up" (emphasis hers), she makes clear the injustices of her past. Her father experienced business success during the Great Depression and "would have been a millionaire if he hadn't given it all to the Bible school." Speaking as a woman, twice married to men of status and means (a Wall Street lawyer and a university faculty member), Mrs. Mahn highlights the good friends who

have surrounded her and the “privileges” she has had, including extensive travel, beautiful homes, and close association with multi-millionaires. Her contrast between the life she has led and the sacrifices of Briercrest is dramatic and intentional.

Jean Whittaker clearly longed for more of her father’s generosity to be directed at her. “As his daughter, I know he gave his farms, his businesses, his insurance policies, his bank accounts, all his financial resources—and I’ll give you this, too: he used to say, ‘We save to give.’” She adds, “I remember wanting a bicycle so much as I learned to ride on a neighbour’s bike, but the Bible school came first. It was only in reading Mr. Hildebrand’s book that I learned that my father gave him a 1927 Chevrolet.”

Hildebrand does include the car in his memoirs. He married Inger in August of 1937 and he writes,

Back in Winnipeg, we packed our belongings into a 1927 Chevrolet that Mr. Whittaker had donated to the cause. This car served us well and took us over the dusty roads to Regina and Briercrest. The year 1937 was the driest year of the great depression, and Inger had her first look at the dust-bowl of Saskatchewan.³

The car was probably not Hildebrand’s to keep for himself. With the early school functioning much like a commune, personal ownership of large items was rare and use was shared, as Esther Edwards remembers,

We used the school cars to get to Moose Jaw. We didn’t have a car of our own. How could you afford a car on a hundred dollars a month? . . . We had to pay to rent them, too: two dollars every time we took it to Moose Jaw, if we wanted to go to the doctor or something.

Thus, it is likely that the 1927 Chev was merely loaned or even rented for the Manitoba trip. Even so, the expense of “donating” a car (whether by gift, loan, or rental) would be significant compared with buying a bicycle for one’s daughter. However, a bicycle could

³ Henry Hildebrand, *In His Loving Service*, 74-75.

have seemed frivolous and unnecessary, particularly during the Great Depression when money was tight.⁴

Marriage

Unlike the other participants in this study, Jean Whittaker neither came to nor stayed in Briercrest because of a husband. In fact, she did not marry until she was 53 and has been twice-widowed. At least two other men had proposed before that—one boyfriend from Wheaton and another from Eastern.

Jean had always tried to follow her father's advice: "Anytime you go to a strange city, be sure to take a bus trip if you can,' which I did." This is how she met her second husband, "Bob Mahn, the man I married twenty years later." She met her first husband through similar happenstance: "a stranger . . . very kindly invited me to share his taxi when I was stranded due to a snowstorm at La Guardia airport. [At Le Moal Restaurant in New York City], Henry David, a Jewish gentleman related to the Gimbels, introduced me to his lawyer, Tom Rhode, whom I later married." Clearly Jean has basked in the companionship and privileges that came with both of her marriages, though she did remain quite independent, refusing to cancel a lunch date when Bob Mahn came from the States to visit her in Moose Jaw, then putting off marriage to him until after a pre-planned trip on the Concord to the British Isles.

In spite of marrying so late in life, Jean's husbands occupy a prominent place in her narrative. During her single years, Jean did some things she had always dreamed off, like learning to dance, but it was after she married that she really began to have "an exciting

⁴ Bruce Guenther, "Populism, Politics and Christianity in Western Canada," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (2000): 93-112 [cited 08 March 2007]. Available at http://www.mbseminary.edu/files/download/guenther2.pdf?file_id=12815190.

life.” Near the end of her interview, Jean told me, “I have a lot to be thankful for, that I had such good friends and I don’t suppose anyone’s had the privileges that I’ve had in my later life.” Indeed, few people do experience such dramatic shift in a lifetime.

Esther Edwards

Work and Marriage

Esther began at Briercrest as a single student and stopped working after getting married: “We women went to Bible school before we were married, then we stayed home and looked after our babies and our husbands.” However, staying home after marriage was not a choice. Esther notes that the school “didn’t want married women to work” citing Mrs. Hildebrand as the model,

and so everybody was to follow her lead. Once my husband said to me after something I had done . . . , “Now Mrs. Hildebrand would never do that, would she?” I said, “Homer, if you want Mrs. Hildebrand, you go and get her! I’m not Mrs. Hildebrand!”

Immediately, Esther qualifies this comparison:

But Inger Hildebrand was a real lady, you know. Everything she did was just absolutely perfect. She set the table perfectly and she cooked divinely. You couldn’t ever find fault with anything. Her children were perfect. That’s what made it hard for the rest of us, I think. All except Paul. He wasn’t perfect. (*laughs*) But he turned out okay. He’s the principal of one of the schools in Regina. . . .

Esther may have felt that Inger set a nearly impossible standard in homemaking and child-rearing, yet Esther’s tone during the interview was playful and she adds, “Inger was really one of my best friends!” so we know the comments are made out of affection.

Though Esther may not have worked for the school at first, she certainly worked hard. She and Selma worked for Bob McLeod, painting houses and the insides of the chapel and the motel. Esther worked for Whittaker at one point, which was quite

memorable for her: “I thought I’d never live through the day. . . . Luckily after that first day they called me over to the office. I did something else, so I got out of that work.”

Esther spent time in the high school as a typing teacher, and taught a private typing class in evenings. Later she became the Alumni Secretary, “just part time—for about a year just before we left for Regina in 1967. I worked for 40 cents an hour. . . . I answered all the letters and receipted all the donations. Lillian Diggins was alumni secretary after me.”

Worldly Goods

While the school was closed to married women working, Esther took a job in Moose Jaw for a year in the early 1960s, “because the kids wanted a horse.” Ironically, Esther had to rent a school car to do this.

Esther’s memories of her homes at Briercrest and Caronport are very vivid and unfavourable. Their first home in Briercrest was an “awful apartment with an awful lot of work to do on painting and scrubbing and sanding floors and building cupboards, so that took a lot of time.” With the school’s move to Caronport in 1946, “it was to fix up another apartment all over again. We were living in an officers’ quarters, but it wasn’t very wonderful.” The staff lived in army-built H-huts where, instead of apartments, families were given “rooms” and all families shared common bathrooms. Later, the Edwards were able build a house but Esther recalls that as a disastrous experience: “They used us for guinea pigs, I think! . . . Oh, I did so many things with that house, I just get sick every time I think of it. . . . Oh it was a terrible summer.”

In 1967, Homer and Esther “moved to Regina, where my husband was pastor of a Baptist church.” Her relief is evident when Esther notes, “They were very good to us.

Built us a big parsonage, 2000 square feet. Used to take Donna and me all Saturday morning to clean it.”

Selma Penner

Work

As mentioned above, Selma and Esther worked together painting for Bob McLeod. Esther remembers, “He said he has to pay Selma more because she works harder and faster, which was true.” Selma cleaned dormitories in the summer and also worked in the school kitchen and at the lunch counter (restaurant):

and I took Claire along [to the school kitchen]. She was maybe two, and she would sleep under one of the open shelves there. I had to come in at lunch for her lunch and for her nap. I also worked at the lunch counter quite a bit. And I would go to three farms and do day work. All in one day.

No wonder Bob McLeod felt compelled to pay Selma more than Esther!

Selma’s husband Harry appears equally industrious. He worked with Homer establishing the dairy. Later he went into printing in the school print shop, he made corsages for weddings, and he did much of the landscaping at Caronport, planting many of the trees.

Selma reminded Esther that they cooked together at Arlington Beach, noting, “We had to take the food with us.” Apparently the Beach was such a challenge that Esther exclaimed, “Don’t even talk about it. It just makes me ill every time I think about it.”

Marriage and Children

Selma Penner came to Caronport with her husband, Harry, in the fall of 1945, with one son, Jordan. Four more children were born to them at Caronport: Vangie, Lionel,

Trevor, and Claire. With five children, this topic really got Selma talking. She tells a cute story about Vangie's response to Claire's birth:

When Claire was born Vangie met Dr. Hildebrand and she said, "Oh just another stupid brother." Somebody had told her it was a boy. Anyway it was a girl. Then she told Claire, "You know mother was thirty when you were born. You could have been a mongoloid."

This inspired a conversation about ages for child-bearing, with Esther noting that she was thirty when her daughter was born and Joy Brygmann was thirty-six when her first child was born. However, these appear to be exceptions; it was more common for mothers to be younger when starting their families.

In response to Esther's story about Caronport kids being banned from the dorms, Selma comments, "Our kids were called Port Brats," of which her Jordan was the first. While the women agree that Caronport is a good place for kids to grow up, they also recognized that it had limited opportunities. "There was no church," says Selma, "they just had to go to church with the students and go to Sunday School. They had no young people's group that they could really be a part of." Port kids typically went to the gym or the rink for entertainment.

Irene Fender

Marriage and Children

Like Selma, Irene went to Caronport because of her husband, and not because of previous ties as a student. Also like Selma, Irene appeared to be a "typical Mennonite wife." Regarding the invitation to move to Caronport, Bernard and Marjorie Palmer depict Irene as very involved in the decision. Irene contradicts this saying, "I thought, well, the decision would have to be his. The best thing to do was to go and talk to him about it." Though "Walter really was a farmer," the invitation to Caronport seemed like

“an answer to our prayers concerning our children going to school.” Walter worked as Dean of Men for twenty-five years, often joking that at work he was Dean of Men, but at home he was Dean of Women, because they had three daughters.

Irene recalls her time at Caronport very fondly. She admits it was not always easy, yet neither too hard. “I enjoyed it so much. I just loved it, just being a mother there . . . and just being part of the staff, the ladies, and things like that. Anyway, it was a good life. A very good life. I enjoyed it.” She was fulfilled with the ordinary roles assigned to women.

Work

Irene confirmed the school’s position on not hiring married women.

Mr. Hildebrand was against that, I think. If you look back at the yearbooks, I don’t think you’ll see any married women. . . . I don’t think they hired married women as such until they would have them come on staff if their husbands were there first. A lot of the staff were married men and that’s how married women came in. There were some of the married women that thought, “Well, why can’t we do something?” But I know for a long time Mr. Hildebrand wanted the women to stay home and tend to their families. He liked to see the mothers with the children in the home. That was their first responsibility. And that was important in that time, too.

Staying home with her family was Irene’s priority, “until I started working at that lunch counter.” This was not her initiative: she was invited to work there. “It got so busy down there that they needed help.” In addition to waitressing, she served as manager for a couple of years.

I really didn’t work full-time until my youngest daughter Margie was in grade eight. When they asked me to manage it I said, “Well, I wouldn’t mind managing it, but I still have a daughter at home,” and I wanted her to feel free to be with me whenever she wanted to. And every day she’d come down to the lunch counter, be there for a little while, and then she’d go home. As long as she saw mom, I guess. But I was usually home in time for supper. Yeah, I made the meals.

So family and household were the priorities, and even when working full-time, Irene maintained her prescribed womanly roles.

Lillian Diggins

Marriage

Regarding a woman's identity, Lillian notes that a married woman was typically defined by her husband. "I was the plumber's wife. . . . You were sort of your husband's mate, and that was who you were known as, more or less. . . . I think most of the wives were known by their husbands. . . . They didn't seem to have any particular role. Well, they looked after their family." Lillian is an alumna of the school and had worked there in her own right, but after marrying, her husband's role overshadowed those accomplishments.

Lillian and Gordon met at Briercrest and were able to have an open courtship, in contrast to Esther and Homer Edwards about thirteen years earlier. Gordon's first year at school was momentous as the first that students were allowed to go on a date!

The Diggins lived in the hangar when they were first married. It had apartments along the east and west sides, but "no washrooms in the apartments." Instead, residents used common washrooms "on the other side of the skating rink," with big barrels and cats and bats along the path.

Work

Like Esther, Lillian also stopped working soon after getting married, though she continued working for approximately one year after marrying. She comments, "The school wouldn't let you work as a wife there for a while" and "I think Dr. Hildebrand kept his staff longer when they did get married." Throughout her marriage, Lillian worked,

but initially it was home-based, such as censoring books for the bookstore or marking papers. She comments further on the restrictions on wives,

I think it was just the mentality then that the wives were to be in the home, which isn't as prevalent now as it was then. I think that was basically it, that you had your family to look after. I do think, in a sense, the children do suffer when both parents are working full-time, but now with the economy like it is you almost have to.

Once her youngest, Paul, was in school, she worked in the office part-time, arranging her hours to be available to her children. She worked in the high school for a few years, but eventually Esther got Lillian in to help at the Alumni office, where Lillian spent most of her working years. "They used to call me 'Miss Alumni'," she says, "because I was always looking for lots of alumni." It seems like an ideal situation, to be able to pursue work that one loves and still be able to care well for one's family.

Lillian speaks in more detail than the other participants about the work of other women. Joy Brygmann was a teacher in the elementary school. Jean Barsness was a teacher in the college; "The students just loved Jean to bits." Loretta (Hindmarsh) Edwards "was a real hell-fire preacher" who went with her husband as missionaries to Aruba. Grace Bergren was "a very sweet lady" who "worked at the lunch counter," which surprised everyone "because she seemed so quiet."

Worldly Goods: Provision

The word "provision" suits Lillian's tone. She and Gordon express immense gratitude for the Lord's provision throughout the years: adequate salaries, discounts, donated vegetables, homes. She marvels at the timing of the school introducing a compensation plan, and admires how the school set up pensions for the people who had worked at the school before the pension plan. The trans-Canada highway and the post-

office right in Caronport are two other significant developments. She also recounts how the Lord has provided for them in recent years.

We had people when we first started working at Briercrest, saying, “Well, what are you gonna do when you retire? Where’s your security? Where’s this, where’s that?” You know. But we figured if the Lord wanted us there he’d look after that, and he has!

The present and past are bound up together. Living fairly simply, Lillian and Gordon regularly notice the hand of God in their lives.

Voice

While I have listed “voice” as a theme, it is not a category that might occur to the women who participated in this project. By “voice” I mean a person’s capacity to speak out for herself or for others. In this way, voice also involves the awareness of one’s agency in the world, the ability to effect change. Three of the women have particularly strong voices: Jean, Esther, and Lillian.

Jean Mahn’s narrative is probably the most vivid, yielding copious themes (though not necessarily the best writing). I met with her nearly eight months after the first set of interviews, so was more prepared and more seasoned by then. Also, rather than just two to four hours over coffee or a meal, we had nearly 24 hours together as I stayed overnight in her home, met her caregivers and a friend, and toured her town.

Jean is very interested in historical records, referring often to her late husband Bob’s archival work at the University of Ohio. She used our time very intentionally to provide me with as much material as possible to support my research: letters, newspaper clippings, other writings, and pictures. It was as if she had been waiting for an autobiographer to help set the record straight.

As a teenager, Jean felt stifled by the “fundamentalist” mindset of Briercrest where “your thinking was pretty well governed; you had to think a certain way and I could never do that. I used to keep a diary but I’ve thrown most of those away.” She says, “I’d never talk to Mrs. Sanderson and Mrs. Hillson about my thinking because I just knew it would be a problem, and you learn what you have to do to have friends” and admits, “I didn’t dream about the Bible school. I just wanted to get an education.” Rather than voice her opinions at the time, she found a way to leave: Wheaton College.

While Jean describes her parents as “very open” in the midst of strong prejudices against Catholics and the United Church, she also suggests that they did not feel free to voice certain other things. For example, after a hurtful public encounter with Henry Hildebrand regarding money, Whittaker “resigned the next morning but didn’t say why.” Jean allows that her father “didn’t want to hurt Hildebrand or the school,” but insists that

now it’s got to be known. Making it known would be a real tribute, because it’s so far in the past. Hildebrand deserves a lot of credit for bringing the school to the excellent place it is, but early publications state that Hildebrand was the president from the beginning and he was not.⁵

Until his death, her father

always lauded the school, never once spoke anything but good. My parents lived on the old age pension and what I could send them. That can’t help but make you sad, especially when Hildebrand was given all the credit, and I felt he didn’t deserve it, but my father just wouldn’t speak up.

Jean suspects that her mother “was more hurt” by suffering and sacrifice because she was a woman. “She kept it to herself, but I could just tell. She did express herself somewhat, but I knew that it wasn’t easy for her, because of the things that she sort of expected as a

⁵ During our interview, Jean actually commissioned me to publish this historical revision, saying, “It should be known. And it would be good if you could do that, Colleen.”

wife of an MLA.” Whittaker had been an MLA for five years, 1929-1934, as well as a successful merchant. There certainly would have been disparity between the circumstances of founding a Bible Institute and the prestige and comfort of being the wife of an MLA and successful businessman. If he hadn’t disappointed his wife’s expectations, he certainly had disappointed the expectations of his teen-age daughter. Looking back, Jean expresses profound sadness over her early life. Transcribing the interview, I sensed I was hearing a 17-year-old’s voice in an 87-year-old body. At 17, Jean *Whittaker* was resigned to her lot in life. At 87, Jean *Mahn* was breaking silences.

Esther’s temperament is lively, talkative and surprisingly direct. This makes two moments in her narrative seem uncharacteristic. Once, while her family was living in an H-hut, the school

sent a fellow up there they just took off the street! Homer was away (he was away most of the summer with the quartet or a music group and I was alone). I was scared stiff! I didn’t have any locks on the doors. I should have gone over to that office and blasted them, but I didn’t. And I managed to live without being molested.

Why did Esther not complain or at least mention this to someone? In hindsight she might have “blasted them,” but at the time she was young and, as she says, “scared stiff!”

The other curious incident involved her daughter and an unreasonable teacher.

To this day Donna says, “Why didn’t you go after him?” . . . Well, I told Donna the reason why I didn’t go after the teacher was because there was a lady on ‘Port that was on the phone to the teacher with any little thing, complaining, and I said didn’t want to be like her. So I said I just thought we’d just take it and shut up.

It seems strange that such a feisty woman would “shut up” rather than speak up on behalf of her own children. However, the silence seemed to go both ways: “Don’t ask me why they didn’t want Port kids visiting dorm kids. I don’t know. Nobody gave a reason.” Don’t ask, don’t tell seems to have been a standard approach to difficulties.

In editing Esther and Selma's transcript, I often combined their comments for better flow. Unfortunately, it appears that I may have given too much of the voice to Esther and not enough to Selma. Esther had recommended interviewing her together with Selma, because Selma is quiet and she wasn't sure how much Selma would have to say. Lillian Diggins observes,

Selma Penner was very typical. I would say both her and Irene Fender were typical Mennonite wives. Just quiet supporters of their husbands, and didn't really have too much to say, until their husbands were gone and then their personalities came out. But they weren't so quiet that they were put down, they just were there supporting their husbands.

Despite this perception, Selma and Esther played off each other during the interview, with Selma contributing a strong voice and a vibrant memory. Apparently, the presence of a life-long friend relaxed Selma's inhibitions.

Like Selma, Irene's voice seemed quite strong in our interview. Books were excellent prompts for her memory. We started with a passage from *Beacon on the Prairie*. At the end of our time together, she pulled out most of her yearbooks, browsing through many and musing aloud about old friends and colleagues.

Irene speaks of advising her husband on his work as Dean of Men: "I said to him once, 'Always give the kids a second chance.' And I think that stuck with him for a long time, because he wasn't impossible with the kids, you know." In comparing Walter with his female counterpart, Irene believes Erna Neufeld was too strict, but struggles with expressing it.

I don't know—I don't want to be critical—but she was hard on the girls we figured, her rules in the dorm, and things like that. I want to be careful what I say. But she sure hung in there for a good many years. She was there a long time.

While honest, this is a cautious assessment, ending positively, admiring Erna's tenacity.

Clearly, Irene values gentle communication, while using her voice for influence.

Was it a problem for Selma and Irene to quietly support their husbands, with more outgoing personalities emerging only after their husbands were gone? The answer depends on one's historical-religious context and perspective. It is tempting to project the present on the past, projections that are not necessarily feminist,⁶ but contain assumptions about opportunities, roles, and responsibilities that Western women in the early 21st century take for granted. However, in the first half of the 20th century, especially around the time of Briercrest's founding, as Esther Edwards put it, "that's the way it was." Why contest something that just *is*?

Lillian introduced a fascinating component that did not appear in the other conversations: preaching. For several years, every Briercrest student had to preach.

You had to tell a story first year,⁷ second year you had to preach in class, and third year you had to preach in chapel. I would think it would have been pretty close to the '60s before they stopped. I imagine they wouldn't have enough time to get everybody in.⁸ It wasn't just the men that had to preach, we had to, too.

Lillian can still remember her topic: "the donkey that the Lord rode. And submissiveness and being willing to let God use you." Lillian mentions Loretta Edwards (nee Hindmarsh) as "a real hell-fire preacher," even linking this with a story about a kerosene fridge exploding during one of her sermons, an ironic if not intentional juxtaposition. Loretta's voice seems to be exceptional.

⁶ Kim Glombisky and Derina Holtzhausen, "Pioneering women' and 'founding mothers': women's history and projecting feminism onto the past," *Women and Language* (Fall 2005, v28 i2 p12(11)).

⁷ GORDON: And then somewhere on the line you gave your testimony over the radio. Well, the boys did, anyway. LILLIAN: I don't remember that.

⁸ GORDON: I think even just after our day some of the fellows didn't have to preach because they run [sic.] out of time. In those days there were a lot of missionaries came, and they used to take a lot of the chapel services, too.

Lillian recalls the first women's meeting she attended after getting married. Appointed secretary, she was confused about their names. When she admitted this, the older women admonished that she would just have to get to know them on a first-name basis. Here is an example of voice changing as a woman enters a new season of life—drawn into a new circle and new ways of speaking with other women.

In naming memorable women, Lillian says, “I spent many hours in Esther Edwards’ kitchen talking to her.” This sentence evokes a warm and homey feeling, highlighting the hospitality for which Esther was famous, providing a picture of an older woman teaching a younger woman as per Titus 2, and, more simply, the company of women conversing over a cup of coffee or tea. The voices featured here may often have been soft and supportive, rather than assertive and public, yet they all display strength of character.

Reflection on the Method

The serendipity of this project's beginnings amazes me. It started with a longing to understand the history of Briercrest women, an opportunity to meet some of the original women, and an encouraging friend who pushed me to start. Ready or not, here I come! Of course I could have channeled the research in popular directions if it had not been accepted as academically appropriate, but doing it as a thesis was the perfect incubator for my research skills. It was a relief to discover that intuition and opportunism are recognized as valid qualitative research tools.⁹ Closely related is responsiveness, the researcher's ability to follow the interviewee's flow rather than rigidly directing the discussion.¹⁰ As I grew in knowledge about the craft of oral history, I learned ways to

⁹ Marshall and Rossman, 43 and 78.

¹⁰ See page 35 in this thesis.

prepare for and deepen the research. Even so, intuition, opportunism, and responsiveness remain key, especially when working with elderly conversation partners.

I have emerged with a sense of wonder at being entrusted with precious memories, living connections to history that enriches the particular story of Briercrest and the wider stories of women in Saskatchewan and Canada. I have not merely gathered facts, I have explored depths of meaning. David Goa sees fact-finding as a false aim for our qualitative work, with seeking to understand meaning as our true goal. He disparages oral history as a method that neutralizes the researcher and advocates “the art of conversation” as “a way of understanding the meaning of an event for the person with whom we are talking. Oral history pretended to do what documents do, and thus destroyed the purpose of conversation.”¹¹

In reading Goa’s manuscript after completing this thesis, I recognize an affinity with his perspective. I never want a clinical approach to my interviewees. In fact, I do not want interviewees at all; I want relationships with conversation partners.

This dialogue is not an interview. We are not trying to enter in order to view. Rather we are opening up a conversation in order to understand both the fields of meaning of the other and our own fields of meaning. The lead in this conversation is always in the hands of our companion.¹²

Dr. Hildebrand was the lead in our conversation, but he did not approach it with transparency. It would have been better to take Po Bronson’s approach:

When communication slows down – when the data rate slows down – we can feel more. In fact, it was my practice to go over the same material repeatedly, often forcing a source to retell the story five to eight times, until he had lost track of his

¹¹ Goa, 44.

¹² Ibid., 105.

codified “safe” version and was spilling out untapped remembrances that made him feel it all again.¹³

But Bronson’s approach takes time. In collecting future oral histories, I will plan for more time in person with the participants, divided over two or more days if possible. I would also spend more time afterwards just listening to the audio-recorded interview and following up by phone.

I would also follow Bronson’s example by allowing myself an integral place in the stories, rather than trying to remove myself from them. David Goa writes of losing “the hermetic self,”¹⁴ that idea that individuals are isolated islands, sealed off from and inaccessible to one another. We need to recognize how much we touch and influence one another. In trying to live the myth of objectivity, I wonder if I’ve made my women say things they would not actually have said. In the future I can let my own voice remain in the conversation, in the interplay of our beings.

Some people have suggested that I retained too much content from the interviews in the women’s narratives, too much talk about the women’s children or too much about Jean Mahn’s life beyond Briercrest. If I had been writing for a popular audience or a periodical, there would be too much content. However, for the academic record I intentionally kept in most of the content, rearranging for flow, and adjusting some repetition and style. I wanted the narratives to show the range and frequency of the women’s concerns. Dialogue about children demonstrates how all-consuming this was in the lives of women expected to stay home with their young. Jean’s recollections about husbands and travel stand conspicuously against her early life and her parents’ lives.

¹³ Po Bronson, “The Cook’s Story” in *Why Do I Love These People?* [cited 20 August 2007] Available at <http://www.pobronson.com/The%20Cooks%20Story.pdf>. Page 5.

¹⁴ Goa, 46.

Never mind comparisons to previously written texts: the internal dialogue for each woman is complex enough.

There are some technicalities that could present problems for future research. While the oral history conversation is quite a simple way to gather stories, my approach to the ethical considerations was anything but simple. I am wiser now. I will get permission with a signature at the first interview, and will do so in a way that honours my conversation partner yet gives me as much latitude as possible for using the transcript.

Finally, I leave this project less with a sense of being finished and more with a sense of vocation for sharing these stories and for continuing to listen and tell other stories. I have already mentioned feeling responsible to the narrators and to the community we all share. If these stories can benefit anyone, then they must be told. If not by me, then who?

Recommendations

The obvious extension of this thesis is to collect more oral histories, particularly from women, but also from men. These narratives alone direct us to potential participants; if not the original women, then their children. For example, Selma recommended Carol Brygmann, commenting, “Her mother and dad were on Port as long as we were.”

The narratives in this thesis could certainly bear further thematic analysis.

Current and future narratives would be enriched by historiographical research with documents and artifacts. I love Irene Fender’s comment: “Well, there’s just so much to remember. I’m sure that they’ve got a copy of each yearbook at Caronport. They *should*

have if they don't. It's history! You could spend hours and hours looking at those again." Such research could help to harmonize narratives and resolve discrepancies between them.

It would be fascinating and instructive to compare the memories of the women with the memories of the men. That is already possible with these narratives, though it would be richer after more interviews. Considering the fairly sharp distinction between the men's and women's spheres, I suspect that men's memories would be more administrative and institutional, while women's memories might be more domestic. For example, Dr. Hildebrand writes this of Joy Brygmann:

Joy, Odd's wife, was the perfect complement. She was of a cheerful countenance and served in her own right as a teacher in different classes and as principal of our grade school. She had earned her Professional Teacher's Certificate at the Saskatoon Campus of the University of Saskatchewan.¹⁵

Hildebrand mentions Joy's maiden name much later in a roll call of women who came as singles to work for the school and later married.¹⁶ Lillian recalls Joy as "a nice person," "an excellent teacher," and "a very bubbly person," but she also feels that Joy "kind of had her favourites in the elementary school," recounting Joy's relationship with Lillian's daughter Kathy. Esther and Selma readily provide Joy's maiden name, Brown, and discuss her age when she had her daughters (36 and 38). They inform us that Joy was Dean of Women before she married and only mention that "later on she taught in the grade school," not noting her service as principal.

Beyond Briercrest itself, a researcher could compare accounts and experiences of women from the early days of other Christian colleges. For example, in founding Moody

¹⁵ H. Hildebrand, 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

Bible Institute, Emma Dryer's involvement¹⁷ has striking parallels to that of Annie Hillson and Isabel Whittaker. One could also consider Dorothy Miller and Ruth Dearing¹⁸ of Prairie Bible Institute.

These are a handful of possible directions for subsequent research.

Conclusions

The point of this thesis has been to collect oral histories and develop personal narratives. While these narratives are not ready for popular publication, they do make early women of Briercrest accessible to a new audience beyond their families. It is outside the scope of this study to produce a definitive account; rather, this project is a preliminary exploration into the lives of women in Briercrest College and Seminary's early days. While this chapter has introduced some analysis, thorough investigation (collecting documents and artifacts as well as stories) must wait for another project.

The main question driving this thesis is, "What were the experiences of women in the early days of Briercrest?"¹⁹ The narratives in this thesis include discussions of sewing, cleaning, home renovation, food preparation, weddings, child bearing, and childcare. While previous accounts by men of Briercrest allude to such themes, they do not provide the same behind-the-scenes insight.

¹⁷ Cynthia L. Ogorek, "Emma Dryer," in *Women Building Chicago, 1790-1990* (2001) [cited 21 October 2004]. Available from <http://centerofknownhistory.tripod.com/portfolio/dryer.html>.

¹⁸ James Enns and Ruth Dearing, "Prairie Bible Institute," in *Women of Aspenland: Images from Central Alberta* [database online][cited 24 July 2007]. Available from http://www.albertasource.ca/aspenland/eng/society/article_prairie_bible.html.

¹⁹ Most of the narrators are over 80 years old, telling about their experiences from particular perspectives. If I were writing for publication in a journal or magazine with a non-academic audience (e.g., *Folklore*, *Faith Today*, *Christian Week*, *Passport*, etc.) I would be much more selective.

This is only a beginning for a new appreciation of Briercrest's origins. The stories here bring a new perspective along with some new information. Even with further similar research, many stories will never be heard—from women or from men. Perhaps in these narratives, these stories, someone will “recognize that in many ways it is also” theirs.²⁰ Certainly, in just these four narratives by five women, we can see the hand of God. To know these stories is to be enriched. To lose them would deprive us of heritage.

However, knowledge of our heritage is more than a sentimental or even enriching exercise: it can be “an act of survival.” Julia Kasdorf ponders this.

Given the importance of history, it is understandable that women must address and even revise narratives from the past if we are to clear a public space for our own stories. We must engage in “revision,” defined by Adrienne . . . as “the act of looking back, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” The old texts include the received scripts for a woman's life, stories of lives that came before hers, and the narratives that structure the reality of an entire community. Sometimes these texts come by way of scholarly research, but more often they are retrieved from conversation and the author's memory. The desire to revise these stories is not fueled by mere academic interest, Rich reminds us: “more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.” Begun as an individual's task, the work of revision saves the lives of both author and community, because it increases the possible strategies for living and interpreting experience, although for exactly these reasons such work can be unsettling to the common order and may be perceived as a threat to family and community values.²¹

Receive, revise, retrieve, revise, re-envision—all as an act of survival.

Though I am not studying or working at Caronport right now, being an alumna and a former employee of all three schools (high school, college, seminary), I still speak as an insider. As such, I have a hunch (call it an educated guess or woman's intuition), that the research begun in this thesis could be both critical and unsettling for the future of Briercrest College and Seminary as we consider the place of women there. Hasia Diner

²⁰ Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 30.

²¹ Kasdorf, 317-318.

sees her insider role as “the right and obligation to shake people out of the cloak of comfort and self-congratulation that tends to envelop them in [public] settings.”²² This feels daunting, yet it is a responsibility that I will own. Briercrest is not what it used to be and cannot go back, yet it must examine the past for “possible strategies for living and interpreting experience.”²³ In documenting conversations with women from Briercrest’s early days, I can participate and even lead in that examination. While I am sometimes mystified by the community practices of early Briercrest, I can also appreciate the value of having the women “at home,” that is, occupying largely domestic realms such as caring for husbands and children, practicing hospitality, and attending to wider community life. Early Briercrest sought a particular balance between school and community, a balance which appears to have been crucial in the establishment not only of a school but of an entire town.

This thesis gives rise not only to interesting academic possibilities, it points to vital practical concerns as well. While perhaps not valuing the same social structures as our forebears, contemporary Briercrest must take seriously the intersection between schools and community, between the single industry, education, and its town. Caronport exists because of the college, therefore, both academic and civic leaders must reckon with the symbiotic relationship between village and schools as demonstrated by history from the women’s perspectives and, if anyone will listen, as can be heard in women’s voices today.

There is a Chinese proverb that says “women hold up half the sky.” While men are increasingly active in home life and have privileges like paternity leave, responsibilities

²² Hasia R. Diner, “Insights and Blind Spots: Writing History from Inside and Outside,” in *Strangers at Home*, eds. Schmidt, Kimberly D., Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 36.

²³ Kasdorf, 318.

for home and community still tend to rest on women due to sheer biology: the bearing and raising of children keeps women home more frequently and longer than most men. Caronport is not unique in this, but transience exacerbates any difficulties in coping with it. How can the town and the schools maintain relationship with one another while appropriately dividing the work between them? Is it possible to depend on and/or revive volunteerism in a town with more and more double-income families? How can the institution think creatively about making room for women as well as men in classrooms, offices, and kitchens, while also providing the flexibility needed to care for homes and families?²⁴ How will the town and the schools facilitate balance in the life of a community where women, especially stay-at-home moms, have shrinking material options?²⁵ How will the leaders grapple with approximately half of the student body being young women who have reduced access to female role models and mentors? These are just a few questions that can be asked—and answered—through listening to women past and present.

Is this thesis revisionist history? Perhaps. I admit trying to revise Briercrest's official history by raising women's voices, balancing the institutional perspective with a more communal view. Is this thesis feminist history? Not necessarily, though if "feminist" means acknowledging and enjoying certain rights and freedoms that women can assume today, then I would own a "small f." I am calling for an emancipation of women's voices

²⁴ Rachel Nikkel (now Runnalls), "Will You Hire Me? A Report on the Status of Women Faculty at Briercrest Bible College and Seminary" (course essay for *Men and Women in Ministry Together*, CM723 (Caronport, SK: Briercrest Seminary, 6 August 2003)). Two ways to allow for women's involvement in teaching and administration are job sharing and providing resources such as office space and admin building keys for adjunct faculty.

²⁵ Fraser lists the following material categories: "social status, access to health and welfare services, income, housing, work (paid and unpaid), and involvement with counseling," 195.

from the past, and for the ear of an audience of both women and men, lay people and leaders, students and teachers. I am calling a search for social structures that foster healthy, stable community.

Whether or not more narratives are formally collected, I hope and pray that this thesis will challenge and inspire all who read it to become better listeners, to pay attention to the stories of their elders and the voices of women, so to keep in touch with “collective memory”²⁶ and be equipped with means for understanding the past, living in the present, and moving into the future.²⁷

²⁶ Sandino.

²⁷ Kasdorf, 317.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE PARTICIPANT LETTER

Esther Edwards
6108-221 Primrose St
Abbotsford, BC V2S 2Y9
604-851-4085

February 20, 2007

Dear Mrs. Edwards,

Thank you for inviting me to your home for an interview on November 2nd, 2004. I have interviewed five women for my thesis to complete the Master of Arts degree at Briercrest Seminary. The thesis topic is "Oral Histories of Women From The Early Days Of Briercrest Bible Institute." I have finished transcribing your interview and have written a "personal narrative" based on the interview. Both are enclosed here. I believe that your participation in this thesis leaves a legacy for the men and women who will follow you in all aspects of education at Briercrest. Thank you so much for participating.

In order to use your interview and life narrative for my thesis, I need your help with the following:

- 1) Please review the personal narrative and interview transcript. As you read, please indicate **any information you would like to rewrite, omit or add.**
- 2) After you have made the corrections, please **return the narrative and transcript to me**, using the Express-Post envelope provided, no later than March 5th if possible. I will make the appropriate changes, perhaps consulting you by phone in the process. *Note: if time is an issue, please do the personal narrative first, sending it separately, if necessary.*
- 3) Please **sign the release form.** If you have serious reservations about any of the information in your transcript or narrative, you can ask to see the desired corrections before signing the release form. If you ask for revisions, we will repeat steps 1 and 2 above.

If you have any pictures that might be useful for my project, I would be delighted to use them. If so, please send them with a brief written description and/or list of any people in the pictures. I will return them to you no later than April 15th, 2007.

When my thesis is finished, I will send the final copy of your transcript and life narrative to you. You will receive these no later than April 15th, 2007.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me (306-883-3293). Lillian Diggins is also prepared to offer assistance (604-854-6840).

Blessings,

Colleen Taylor

Box 339 Spiritwood, SK S0J 2M0 (306) 883-3293 poetess@sasktel.net

APPENDIX B: STATEMENTS OF RELEASE

On the following five pages are scanned copies of each Statement of Release (or Statement of Consent) for my narrators: Jean Rhode Mahn, Esther Edwards, Selma Penner, Irene Fender, and Lillian Diggins.

[Statement of Release. Image omitted for online version.]

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Interviews

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