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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discusses the abuses of the educational system when she was a child.
- Account of her experiences during the Second World War.

Ranald: This is tape number RT 82.7. This is Ranald Thurgood continuing an interview with Mrs. Elmira McLeod in her apartment in Mississauga, Ontario, on July 28, 1982.

Elmira: ...and I never could stand, and I suppose you don't, was somebody come in your home and they look around and they say, "Why, you live just like white people." And I said, "Don't you ever think it, Jack, because there's a lot of white people I wouldn't want to live like." So he's making a speech when he went to some university in London there, Jack did sent him up there for a term. And in the end, when it was over, he had to make a speech -- what he liked and don't like. And that's what he told them, you know. But I did say to one girl in here, not long ago -- she's a white girl, was in one day. And I think they do, they try to believe in our beliefs a little bit too much, some of them. I said to her, "Well, you've got to get it through your head we've got a lot to thank white people for. We're welcome to the good schools, to the hospitals, we get free O.H.I.P. And maybe carry a taxi card."

And I named several things, you know. "Oh no," she said, "you're wrong. Don't you believe that." She's just gone so... Indian beliefs, you know what I mean, believing in (inaudible). See, we get a status card and you can show it in the stores and we don't pay any tax. And I don't know whether they bum the government for it, bum the government for it or not. I said, "There's so much given to them on the reserve that it makes them lazy." And she says, "Don't you ever say that, it's coming to them." Well, I said, "A certain amount might be coming to them, but they've got to help themselves, too."

Ranald: What kind of strengths do you feel that you developed from your life on the reserve, and the kind of life you parents were from?

Elmira: I don't know. I guess we learned a lot of Indian traditions and that. But we never learned to talk the Indian language. The reason I didn't learn, there's two different languages in my home; my mother spoke one, and my father spoke one. Well I can understand and speak a lot of Ojibway, my husband would teach it to me. We weren't allowed to think Indian, or talk Indian at our school. Indian was almost a dirty word. Where my husband was, he was in an institution, an industrial, I don't know what you'd call them, but there was a school up in Spanish River. And if he talked Indian he went to bed without supper, maybe without breakfast too. And him and his brother used to get in bed together and talk and talk. One lady told me, one woman stood up for them in Spanish. Well she was... she's very young, she was in her forties then. And she says it was a good place. Well, I said, "Remember laws came in when you were there." The same with Muncey where we used to send our Protestant children. They were very badly punished but when we found it out the laws were changed, and they had to treat you like a human. But I said, "Remember, my husband was there, that was years and years ago." I said, "You'd wonder why they kept their religion, they were beaten and starved." All them schools had farms; little boys farmed a half a day, and they went to school a half a day and they took trades like steam engines, and running electric gasoline motors... And we had dairy, we had a lot of cows, and chickens. We'd take crates and crates of eggs, and cream cans, half full of cream, and eggs, and the garden -- the boys would do raspberries, strawberries. And you know there's never any left in the school. We never knew where it went.

Ranald: What did they eat?

Elmira: The teachers took it. Well, they got... I was told by one Indian man that porridge -- they'd get porridge and skim milk, and the porridge was made by little girls, and it was just goo, you know, it wasn't... And they said the bread was made right in the school. And you only got butter once a day and all that cream out there. So they finally caught up with it and a dietician got in there. So you had to have orange in the morning or orange juice, and properly cooked food, toast,

butter. Everything that was necessary, they had to have it after that. Well, unless there was a convention. I used to belong to that Auxiliary, you know -- there was an auxiliary on every reserve, they called it Homemakers. And, "Mrs. Muncey," I said, "do you know anything about a school where they send children from the reserves?" She said, "This is it right here, this new school." We were having a meeting in the school. Built right on the ground of the old school. So she said, "Come outside, I'll take you for a walk." She could show me little initials on the trees, you know. And the Grand River, no, the River Thames, is right there. They had little steps made with sticks. You know, they were getting old and washed down to the river. And I said, "Where's the barn?" So we took a walk to the barn and she said, "There's two silos but they're caving in." Now they're not using them. She told me the little boys grew enough corn to fill them. The corn threshers came in and filled the silos with corn for their cows. But where did all that cream go to? Nobody knows. And they never canned any berries for the school.

Ranald: Is this at Muncey or at Spanish River?

Elmira: Yeah, Muncey. Spanish River was the same -- I don't know whether they farmed up there or not. And it all changed up at Muncey, because they got good teachers and, like I said, they got dieticians in, a dietician.

Ranald: When did it change?

Elmira: I had two cousins up there and it was one of them that wrote a letter out. This is a funny story. She says the cook in there told her to take that cat, her and a boy, and throw it in the river... it was stealing all the time. So she said they took the cat and they didn't throw it in the river, they let it go. And she said, "That's about all we had to pet was the cat." So she got her fingers wrapped for not killing the cat. So she wrote a letter down and the council went up -- she got the letter out some way or another, it wasn't sent straight, anyways. The chief and council went in there when nobody knew they were coming. There was a girl in there sick with T.B., they just let her lay there. They took her out of there and sent her off someplace and she got better.

Ranald: Was this when you were a child?

Elmira: No, no, I can remember. So they closed them up and the Children's Aid took over.

Ranald: So where was this at?

Elmira: It would just be a school (inaudible). I suppose that Indian Affairs supported them. I remember they told me they killed a whole cow; they cut it up, you know. And this one in Brantford, they call it the Mohawk School, there's one there. Well, now you can go in there, it's called the Woodlands...

Ranald: Institute?

Elmira: No, it's not an institute anymore. There's a library in there, and I think they use the old kitchen, and the dining room for the rent-outs and that. But you see, and there's an Indian village there, and then you can go in the little continuation(?). No there's little, schools was made, you know. In certain classes we'd go and sit in there and see a little movie. I liked to go up and see Tom Longboat, of course he's born in there. We'd have supper down in the basement, just cook our own food, like a little piece of venison. And I said, "I feel so weird down here. I think back to them little children, they had such a hard life." I said, "If these walls could talk they'd scream." And the woman says, "I know what you mean." She said, "I went to this school. And if you ran away, tried to get home, you were badly punished, as if you ran away from jail." George Stephens(?) can tell you about those schools, he went to one. I think there's a write-up in one (inaudible).

Ranald: George Stephens(?), is he a storyteller?

Elmira: He was kind of the storyteller. Well, he was at that affair for Mr. Buller, the feast for...

Ranald: Yes, I went.

Elmira: George Stephens(?) spoke there, the same as Jack spoke. One of these books, I'll find it, this is one of John's. But some of those children died there and the parents never ever knew they died in those schools. I've known little boys to run away from Chapleau, I know of them. And they froze before they got where they wanted to go, or they got lost and they were found froze. They weren't dressed warm enough to leave the school, but they just took off and left. So some of our older people have had such a hard time. But you can be

thankful that maybe you have a little bit of something now, you know. My husband said there's a little cemetery up there in the, it's at Spanish too, with little unmarked graves of the boys died and little girls, just buried there.

Ranald: And they'd get buried in Spanish?

Elmira: Oh yes, when they was in there those kids died and... They're all priests in there, you know, they're brothers. I said, "They must have been brothers that done something and they were put in there and they were so hateful," I says. Father Mayhew is up there. You know, he worked in that school, but he's a very sympathetic man, you know. He's the priest that was in there for a while with my husband -- he just died -- he used to go and see him in Cape Croker all the time. I used to take them fruit and some canning, I did canning, and I'd always take him some. Father Labelle, he was up in that school, but Mel said he was very kind. It was the brothers that were terrible. One woman in Toronto told me that if the

kids talked Indian then they were made to sit under the table and eat potato peelings. Now, that lady is dead. That's when this younger woman spoke up and said, "I was there, and it's better than the schools." I said, "Yes, but when her kids went to school," I says "that happened." I know one man, he had to stay on his knees, and every time he lifted his arms like that he got it with a pointer(?) till he just collapsed. Well, when he come out of there he told that priest, "Don't you ever get on the outside of this land. I'm going to watch for you and if I get you, I won't kill you but I'm going to kick you. I'll kick you till you're nearly dead and leave you." He says, "I wouldn't, I don't want to hang for you," he says, "you're not worth it." And he said he would but I guess that man is dead. But that man is still living. So we never had... those were children that were orphans. Their father and mother... mother

maybe was dead, no one to look after them, maybe the father was dead. Or they were separated, so they picked them up and sent them over there, you see.

Ranald: How did your husband come to be there?

Elmira: Somebody might hear the tape. But some, I guess, were just so poor in Spanish it was a little different. If you were a very, very poor person, your kids could go in there to get educated, you see. But my husband and his next brother to him and the set of twins went there. I think that building is burnt, I think it burnt last year -- these people were living in it, you see -- there was no more school but they made it into apartments. I think one of these gas stoves blew up. I kind of hated to see it blow up. Years ago I thought that would have been a good thing for us senior citizens, you know. But fix it up with a furnace, you see. My husband said he used to go picking blueberries, and I never seen any blueberries. We never got any blueberries from here, or...

This is all in the past, you know, that would never be allowed today. This here, not too many years back, I was going to Toronto on the go-train and I was sitting beside a nice, a nice young man and he was across from me, and he gave me a newspaper, and he did this (Elmira taps a book with her finger), and says, "You read this." And I think this is in Sault Ste. Marie, but it was some reserve near the Sault, I'm sure it was the Sault. And them little babies died in the hospital. And they held, what is it, an autopsy, or postmortems, where they cut them and, you know... And them little babies were sent back to the reserve in a Loblaw's box, grocery box. And they were dirty -- they didn't clean them up after, and their little intestines were in plastic bags in the

box. That could have been put back and sewed in. And I got a paper and I took it down to Roger. I think, I'm wondering what kind of newspaper was that? Maybe it was from the Sun. When it first came out, it was small. And Roger took it and he said, "I'm going to do something about that."

Ranald: Was Roger a (inaudible)?

Elmira: (Inaudible) and I haven't heard. But this priest up there said their homes were so small that he was going to try and get a place to take bodies like a home for waifs, or whatever, in this big building, their homes was so small. So I don't think I ever read anything because now I would do something about that, but at that time I was... Even Jack, I think I'd have had Jack go and scream his head off. Jack was a little fellow and...

Ranald: What kind of philosophy about that have you tried to learn?

Elmira: Well, I, you mean...

Ranald: What kind of guidelines do you try and live by, as an Indian(?)

Elmira: I think I just believe in ordinary every day life. And I assume you and your family... I like to mix with people, and I like to talk to people. And I like to have a big house full of people, which I can't very well do now, but I do have family come here. I used to enjoy these public (inaudible) they used to do down there, I was always involved with them, you know. And I liked these little conventions every year. It seemed I got out for a few days, somebody cooked and brought my

meals to the table. And I like to see people live. We've always lived, I was always a good housekeeper -- I can't do too good right now but I do the best I can. And I like people to live a clean life. I am down on alcohol very much. My husband drank a lot. I suppose they'd say he drank to death. But none of them, it would take quite a few of them to die and to die the way he did. My husband never owed anybody one cent. And I like... We're not fancy eaters, you know, what do you call us, potatoes and meat -- meat and potatoes, vegetables? Like now we have more raw fruit because it's plentiful.

Ranald: If you had a chance to say something to younger people, young native people, what would you tell them?

Elmira: I don't really know what I'd tell them. There's a lot of things that I'd like to tell them. They... some of them aren't... Some of them are kind of... I don't know how to put that. But I guess that each one has got to live one way, the way they want to. When I was young we were more, we were told to obey our parents and we did. We were afraid, I think. But when we got able to work we used to help our parents. My mother always had work and always had a dollar or two in her purse. If I couldn't see her, I'd mail it to her when I got my wages. We always used to get her a hundred of sugar in the springtime. She could can foods and...

And we used to feel good to one another. There are things I

would like them to know about. (Inaudible) They all have mothers and fathers. I never had, with my sons, I never had a problem with them. But all the stuff -- when they were going to school they weren't doing much, like into dope and that stuff. The schools were safe then. And thank goodness the hippies was all done when Jack started to grow up -- Flower Children -- he might have just walked out of the home too, and went with them. But I think they just had to do those things or they would have never got... or done what they wanted to do.

We never used to have very much drinking on the reserve when I was a little girl. If we saw some of the neighbors were drinking we'd go peeking around to see what... I think I saw my father drunk about four, five times. Usually when he went away in the woods, camping, he came home feeling happy, you know, and my mother would really go after him. Because they couldn't get it and they couldn't... but they always got it if they wanted it. There was always a friend who would bring it to you. We used to have a man there who drove the mail from Cobourg to Alderville and to Roseneath. He'd bring in these big gallons of wine. They'd meet him a way out somewheres on the highway. And he'd stop there, and stop and give it to them. And they will never tell -- you could kill them, they wouldn't tell where they got that.

But it wasn't the same as now for young people. But you know, the young people have a hard world to live in. We didn't have that kind of a world to live in. I'd just say, "Let's go camping for a week." And we'd just (inaudible) and away we'd go. Somebody would come and pick us up, and nothing to worry about. My mother used to make little baskets -- she had a lot of friends in Peterborough -- and they'd save this here (inaudible) and maybe give them a basket, whatever they want. And they'd give her all these boxes of clothing. She'd come home and she was a very good person to sew. She'd lift them up and clean them, wash them and make a good dress. She'd get a coat and rip the seams and iron it and you got a nice new coat. I never had a brand new coat out of a store until I earned one. And we always looked nice. That's the way people got along, maybe somebody would come in and get my mother to do a coat for her, they'd bring in an old coat for her kids, you know. My mother used to sew and dress the bride. I think she cuffed hundreds of pair of pants that the boys would bring home. There was always a way to get along, she never had much to do,

things seemed to be slower. Now, there isn't enough days in a week for young people to do the things they want to do. If they're working they only get a week or two holidays, where ours was one long holiday until we went working too, you know. In the wintertime we'd go house to house playing cards, maybe they were well enough off they might have a, make some kind of a big cake, you know, like that. We'd have a dance in our own homes, you know.

But it's, I'd say, (inaudible) I won't say it's any worse, it could be better. We have more freedom now. I guess we're just

as free as anyone else today now. But when I think back -- maybe it's because I'm older, but summer seemed a long season, and it took a long time to play before school comes back in again. But of course nowadays... when we're all working I used to say, "If you don't work, one day you'll starve, you got to keep working."

I remember when they wouldn't let us smoke, they didn't want the young people to smoke. I used to take tobacco, my father's tobacco, and we'd roll cigarettes. I don't know whether we were scared because it was expensive to buy tobacco, or the reason they wouldn't let us have a cigarette. I can remember when they wouldn't let us have tea. I think maybe they wanted to save the tea for themselves, they needed it worse than we did. I can get along without tea now from day to day.

I never got my hair cut till I was about maybe twelve years old; my hair was long like the girls are now, you know, the long hair down their backs. And everybody's getting their hair cut. My sister got hers cut and I was kind of embarrassed. I thought I looked terrible with long hair. But anyway my mother

put my hair back like that, she tied a nice red ribbon in my hair and I thought that was so nice. But it just goes along with the times. Those girls with long hair now will probably, they'll probably get it cut too some day. But I wouldn't say anything to anybody that I don't like their hair, or... The only thing I would say that I don't like is common law. I don't like them shacking up. Because there's going to be children, it's the children. Because very few of them will last too long, a few years and...

Ranald: Well, thank you very much.

Elmira: I had... Pardon?

Ranald: Go ahead.

Elmira: Are you finished now or are you coming back again?

Ranald: Oh, I think we've probably pretty well talked out there unless, you know, unless there's something maybe you would like to talk about.

Elmira: Well, no. Unless I think of something I can tell you. You call Alvin and, it's not very interesting, I don't think, on tape.

Ranald: Okay, so this tape will go into the library here, and you agree that it can be used by the public without restriction?

Elmira: There's nothing one that (inaudible) one word I said something. Is that shut off?

Ranald: No.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Ranald: Tape number RT 82.7 side B. This is Ranald Thurgood beginning a new interview with Mrs. Elmira McLeod in her apartment in Mississauga on August 12, 1982.

Ranald: Okay, Mrs. McLeod, you were just telling me a couple of stories about yourself and your mother. I wonder if you could repeat those stories. There's the one about teasing the fellow who lived near you, and the other about working in the bush.

Elmira: I was going to tell you one about... we never had birthday parties, or never had birthday cakes. I don't only mean my family, I don't think other families... some might have a cake, but my father used to give us .25 and we'd go to the store and get all the candy we could, some of them was three for 1, four, you know, and come home and we'd divide it. And when Herbert(?), my sister's birthday come around she done the same thing. But nowadays it seems everybody needs a birthday and a birthday cake, which is really... it is nice, you know. I always a cake for my boys till they told me they were, they didn't want any more birthday cakes. But I always had one for my husband because I think he missed out on that, too.

Ranald: When did people start celebrating birthdays, or having parties?

Elmira: I don't know that... I had a few birthday parties for John until it got to be fighting, you know, and then I thought that's time to quit. "I give you that, well I brought you that, I'll take it back." And, you know. So I said, "We won't have any more." And Jack, he went to a few birthday parties too, it generally ends up like that, you know. I never celebrated for Morley, Morley was kind of a hard time little boy and during... it was all wartime, you know, and I don't think anybody had birthday parties wartime. But anyway they grew up, but...

Ranald: How was it a hard time during the War?

Elmira: Well, there was a lot of things that you just couldn't buy. A lot of things that you were asked not to spend money on. You know, you couldn't go to the store and buy a pound of butter if you... everything was rationed. Once or twice a month you'd get about a, divide a pound a tea into about four, you'd get one of that... little wee tiny package; and sugar, about two cups of sugar, something like that. And I never used sugar and I could go without tea, so my mother was lucky, she wanted sugar in her tea; and I could go without tea for weeks, and she'd have tea. A lot of people kept putting

their tea in their teapot all day using, never throwing it out, using it over and over. And the meat, it was rationed too. You'd get tokens, like a little ring, keep them on a pin or something and he'd maybe weigh your meat and he'd say, "So many tokens for a pound." If you used all your tokens you couldn't get any more good meat for a while, you'd have to take baloney or something, and they might tell you \$2. and two tokens or four tokens. I wish I would have kept some of that stuff till now, you know, like the old tokens and... Everybody carried an identification, you could be asked any place, and you'd pull

that out of your pocket in a little plastic case. And I wish I would have kept that. It wasn't too long ago I threw it out of an old box, and I could have given it to John now, you know.

Ranald: Did people buy the tokens? Did that actually pay for your meat, or was that just telling how much meat you were allowed?

Elmira: How much meat they were allowed. And then there was... You couldn't buy butter, once in a while they'd tell you they had butter -- it wasn't rationed or anything but they just didn't have it to sell you. And lard, if you wanted to make a pie you couldn't get Crisco or... So my mother and I went to Smith Falls one time to visit her brother, and it was quite close to Montreal, Quebec, you know. And you could get cans of salmon there, cans of... it was in... cans of ketchup. All the people up this way couldn't get ketchup. Maybe you could get it on the black market if you had money. And several things you could buy, it was all Alouette, Alouette brand, you know. So I got a whole lot of salmon, and a lot of ketchup, some for my sister and some for ourselves. And we got honey, we could get Alouette shortening. My suitcase was heavy just with stuff, so when I got home somebody said, "Shame on you, you're hoarding." I said, "Rich people hoard, why can't I hoard?" I said, "You go in some of them homes, there's hundred weight of sugar, rice, tea." So I don't know whether they were contributing to the war effort or not. You see our butter and bacon went to the army to feed, like, Petawawa and Camp Borden and... to feed all our army boys, so you didn't mind it. You didn't mind it, going without here as long as something good was coming out of it.

Ranald: Do you have any idea why you could get those things in Smith Falls if they couldn't get them in this area?

Elmira: Come from Quebec.

Ranald: Did Quebec have different regulations?

Elmira: I don't know, I was just wondering if they weren't contributing to the war effort like other part of Canada was. We had to vote up here for them to be conscripted, you know. They didn't want to go overseas but they wanted to enjoy all that... And if you had cousins, brothers, or that you, didn't fight too hard for anything. And they asked us not to decorate

at Christmas, our Christmas trees; so some of us just did it Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and took them down.

Ranald: Why did they not want you to decorate?

Elmira: Well, it's extra electricity I guess, all that...

Ranald: Oh, it's electric lights.

Elmira: And then I guess you don't know whether, whoever you got over there is laying dead or alive and you're celebrating here, you see. Two or three ways to take it, but a lot of... That was just... I think we were healthy going without a lot of that food. But my mother, she had to have tea, so I'd say, "Oh, don't worry, ma, you can have my tea." But when the berry pickers come I said, "They're going to be knocking on your door for a little bit of tea -- don't you give it to them." "How can I say no?" "Well," I said, "you'll go without." I said, "Call them, in give them some of your old brew there you got on the stove, and give them a cup of tea." Sure enough, they'd

knock and want our tea, you know. And sugar, you got canning sugar. Everyone was allowed ten pounds in the middle of the summer, they called it canning sugar. We'd take it anyway. You got coupons, you see, and you run out of coupons, you'd have to wait till the next issue of coupons. You'd go to the town hall and get a book of coupons but... just every few months. Nice to have a lot of sugar, we would give it to my aunt or anybody. We didn't can, but we took our sugar anyway and let someone else have it. I don't think coffee was rationed, you would get all the coffee you need. Go to the meat counter and look in the meat counter, there'd be weiners, and baloney, and... There was no meat at all, it had to go there too, you know, feed the Canadian Army. I guess some went overseas, a lot of food went over there too. But I never could understand about that Alouette... had a lot of salmon, which I love you know, canned red salmon, bring that up, a lot of that. And that's what they told me, "You're hoarding." I think you ate a lot of chicken. You know, if a farmer couldn't sell his, take his meat to slaughter unless he got a permit, because... in fear of black market. He might kill his beasts, or pigs, or hogs and sell it to his, anybody wanted to buy it. And had to register them and... it was quite a thing, you know. I guess you missed out on that, like Jack. I used to tell him about, stand and watch the long parades, you know, in Toronto... or they'd come from Niagara on the Lake and go through this highway, I guess going up to Long Branch and wherever there was army camps. Rows... tanks and all that stuff and then the soldiers walking. We'd stand there and watch them go by.

Ranald: Can you remember when the War was first declared?

Elmira: Oh yeah.

Ranald: What were your feelings about it?

Elmira: Well, at first, I don't know, I was a teenager I guess. Girls started to get all excited over boys in uniform, you know, and anybody in uniform looks so nice. And then after a while you began to see they're going to go away and maybe never come back. Then you become... to get closer to them, and try give them gifts, and a lot of letter writing to do, and collecting nice things to put into boxes. My mother had about four boys to send a box about every three months or so, she'd send that many boxes.

And then you couldn't get chocolate bars very easy, you could, but here and there, you know. And we used to send a few chocolate bars, hard candy, or cans of stew, it was cans of steak, and we'd get cans of that, cigarettes. One of my cousins wrote over and he said, could we send him an onion, he was so hungry for an onion sandwich. So I knew these farmers, and they were cleaning onions, and there was a very huge Spanish onion. He said, "That's not true, you can have that," he said, "it's not a true onion, it's a freak. There would be water in the middle." I said, "Would it last till it gets to England?" He said, "Sure." He says, "Your parcel will go very fast if it's not, if it isn't taken before they get there, the boat don't sink." So we wrapped that up and dipped it in wax after we wrapped it with, and sent it right away. And you tied your boxes and you sewed them in cotton, and then you addressed them. He wrote back and he said, "I tried to have that onion with a glass of beer and some English bread." I don't know what that is, but it must be a nice bread. And he said, "The minute I cut into it the room was full." (laughs) So he said, "I did get a sandwich out of it." So my mother said maybe onion salt might be nice for him.

And I remember my mother sending some sardines to one of them, and he wrote back and said, "Aunt Kate, thanks for the sardines, but we get so much fish over here!" (laughs) However, he said, you know there's a lot of homes in England they adopted, you'd called it a home, so he said, "My home, I gave it to the people in there, Canadian sardines." My husband had an old people like that every Christmas when he got home he'd send them, through Eatons, a fruit cake and a little round cheese, not a big you know, but they packed it and sent it. But after a while we never got any more thank you notes, we figured... He done that for about twenty, twenty-five years, I guess. Finally we never heard any more, so we figured they were gone, because we always got a note, Christmas card. And they always made him happy saying they opened it Christmas Eve and they had it on Christmas Eve. My husband was in that battle of Caen, that's where he was wounded. But he never talked too much of it, but his leg was all shrapnel wounds, just like cutting, you know, and put your finger in places, and then he had, he was hit in the jaw -- his teeth were knocked out. Maybe I shouldn't be talking about this on the tape.

Ranald: It's okay with me if you don't want to.

Elmira: No, I mean it's kind of boring, isn't it?

Ranald: No, no, it's quite interesting.

Emira: And he was only wired here, he came home and his face was sunk in so he had to go to Sunnybrook -- that's when it was a soldier's hospital, what they call Sunnybrook Hospital. And they took a piece off of here first, I think, on his hip, and grafted it on there and he came home...

Ranald: And just hang it onto his face?

Elmira: Yeah, on the side of his face. He looked nice, it was all covered, it was what they call plastic surgery. So he was eating one time and that crumpled away. I just told him, "Don't eat anymore, I'll get the ambulance." The ambulance came fast and took him back and there was just pins in there, had them in there in a bottle. And they took a piece then off his shin and that died with that nicely patch. But they had to keep his teeth fixed all the time. So one time he got boozing and lost his teeth. I suppose he took sick and took them out and they weren't going to make him anymore teeth. They said, "That's about three sets." So I called up, I says, "My husband was supposed to have his teeth looked after as long as he lives, so why do you hesitate?" "Well," he said, "we can't be making him teeth all the time. If he can show us his old teeth, we'll make him teeth." I said, "You'll have to make him teeth. Did you read his papers, discharge papers?" And I said, "If you don't, I know a man you put gold caps on his teeth and he wasn't even wounded, he's on veteran's allowance." And I said, "You put gold caps on them." He said, "Now, now, don't you talk that way." I said, "Do you want to know his name?" "Yes, you just tell me his name. I said, "My brother-in-law, he's got gold caps on his teeth. Nice beautiful gold teeth." "Well," he says, "tell your husband to come in, we'll fix his teeth." So he went in and he said, "You've got an awful protective wife there, haven't you?" "Well," he said, "she's not afraid to say anything. Don't mind her." You see, that fellow had no right to these gold caps. But I told Bill, Bill says, "I was going to will them to you, but I'm not to do it now." He says, "you are going to put them in your teeth."

Ranald: Who's Bill, the brother-in-law?

Elmira: Yeah. He just laughed. I said, "Mel would have beautiful teeth, maybe, if he weren't hit with..." And then he had shrapnel up in his head, and they told us it was too close to the brain to touch. It was on his discharge papers, so we had x-rays taken one day and you could see that, it was just like your thumb nail, you know, that size. So we watched him very closely. They said that would either drop... if it ever hit his brain, he'd maybe live for years just sitting there like a vegetable. And then they may be able to -- if it drops -- take it out. So one time, two, three times a week, or every day his nose would bleed, just the blood would come and he

wouldn't go to a doctor. So I called in our local doctor and he came in and had him, then I told him about the shrapnel. So right away he send him out to Sunnybrook. And so they told me in Sunnybrook that that shrapnel had fell and every time it touched an artery there it would make it bleed. So they says, "He'll be all right, we'll take that out." So I went up, he was operated on that day, and I went in that night and I dreaded it. I thought I'd see his head all bandaged, but they got it through here.

Ranald: Through his chin?

Elmira: Through his jaws, with the forceps. That's in there too, just a rusty piece of iron like that, we kept that. So he wasn't... he'd seen his bad times, you know.

Ranald: When did they remove it?

Elmira: Jack was able to go in and see him, so you got to be over twelve years old. I think he told me he carried that seventeen years, or something.

Ranald: So it would be around 1960 then?

Elmira: Something like that.

Ranald: How else were things different during wartime, like the mood of the country, or ways you had to live?

Elmira: Everybody was excited all the time and the munitions were busy. There was a great big munition plant down here in Long Branch, they called it the Small Arms. And they brought the railroad, they brought the street cars right up that far, so the women coming off of work were getting harassment from outside, you know, army fellows hanging around, and they could jump right in the street cars there and go home. After the War they took the street cars down again and they just at the, where they turn there, you know, at the turn. And just at the... where they there, you know, at the turn. And wherever you went there was war in the air, there was men in uniform... And lots of boozing, you know, when they could get it. I worked over here in an old hotel. It was full of men that worked in munitions, and starch works, and... That old fellow must have sold beer, and I never bought a case of beer in my life. So he says, "Mira, I'm going to go get you a permit. Go down with these people and bring home a case of beer, and I'll give you half a day. As soon as you get your work done, you can take off tomorrow." So I went down and they filled out my permit, he paid for it. And you're only allowed two cases a month, I think, and he had all the staff buying beer for him. (laughs) Going by the window, they sold beer up, you know, when you take it off the window, like out of the shelf there, and walk out... you paid for it there and got it here. And there was a boy come in and he says to me, "Are you ready,

Mira?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, come on. We're waiting for you." So he picked up this beer, and another one,

and I picked up a beer, and we walked out. And an old fellow, "What a committee," he said. And this Roy turned around and he says, "Did you bring your case of beer?" I said, "Yeah, I paid for it." Well, he says, "I had your beer." I said, "Oh God." That old man threw in the car as fast he could and took off. So they all told him, kidded me about that, Mira stole a case of beer. (laughs) So the old man gave us a case of coke -- for the girls, you know. But I often said I stole a case of beer. I didn't know I did really, you know, and... He was so happy to get that. So every two weeks I'd go down and get him... take all the girls and the cooks and the boys down, and get him a case of beer. And I said, "You drink a lot of beer don't you, Pop?" He never took a drink in his life, I don't think. He says, "My wife drinks it." He says, "My wife drinks it."

And then, there was never too much celebrating, you know, because a lot of parents with sons over there. Everything was fund raising, war bonds. Winston Churchill came over here for war bonds, paraded through, you know, in the back of a car, standing up, giving that little sign.

Ranald: Two fingers?

Elmira: Yeah. "V" for Victory. And they brought the little Dionne Quintuplets, you know, they brought them through with the open car, and it said, "Support the War, buy war bonds." Everybody bought war bonds.

Ranald: Where was this, in Toronto?

Elmira: Yeah, any place you'd buy them, go in a bank and...

Ranald: Where was the parade?

Elmira: Through Toronto, through Queen Street there and... I think they closed the exhibition a few years too, because you need the money for other things, you know. Everybody worked, the girls, they called farmerettes, come out for the farms, out in the city, out of the city in the summertime, worked on farms. And you didn't know what news you were going to hear the next day. You wake up and the next day Poland was gone, and they're now in Holland, and all them places, you know, coming closer. We just lived in fear. And then another thing they had blackout practices. This great big siren would go and you could hear it for miles, and everybody had to be quiet in the house and turn your lights off, and that made you sit there and think heavy, you know. Or if there's little kids in the house, you sat and talked to them, and maybe we had popcorn, keep them busy. And then the siren would go and everything would light up. And it was patrolled by men, policed by men, and if they got you on the road with a car they backed you off the road. One man, we all run in a store over here, we were fooling around. He said, "No use running inside. If they're going to drop a bomb they'll get you inside or outside." He just had us scared to death, you know. And he said, "If

there's anybody living near this oil refinery are safer than..." He says, "Don't you worry, the Germans know where that refinery is, they'll never blast it." And he says, "If they do blast it, don't try to run away. You'll never make it." (laughs) That was that British-American Oil Refinery down on Clarkson Road. And that... he used to really scare me, you know. My mother says, "Don't be going in there and running the fields and sit down." She says, "He just scares you." But

I guess he was right. He says, "Hitler knows where every refinery is, he'll never touch them." He says, "He wants them when he comes over here." I said, "When he comes over? What are you talking about?" He says, "Elmira, you might just as well get a gun, or a poison pill when you see him coming, (laughing) either shoot or..." But it is a weird, weary feeling, you know. And the women were going in to mass in the mornings, saying mass for the boys overseas. Then you'd read about that horrible Dieppe, you know, and that was where a lot of Canadians were lost. Lot of Canadians were lost where my husband was, too. That was around... He came home I think it was D-Day or something like that, but there was an invasion there of the... an awful lot of Canadians lost there, but I forget what the name was. And then when Pearl Harbour went, it made you think then, you know. I don't know whether many Canadians were killed there but they were just slaughtered.

Ranald: Did you trust the news at the time? Did you feel like you were getting accurate reporting of what was going on?

Elmira: Oh, I guess so. There's an old reporter used to... commentator used to come on there, Gabriel Heater -- he really scared the life out of you. He'd tell how far they're coming, and a lot of propaganda too, I guess. I used to think I might wake up some morning and somebody looking in my window, or the enemy looking in my window -- it can really get you. I wouldn't want to live through that again. Then we used to go down to the Union Station and we'd watch to see, we knew when there was some of them coming home, see if there was anybody you knew. So I didn't go down very often, they were coming off of there with canes, carried off almost, and the sight was too much.

Ranald: When did you hear about the end of the War?

Elmira: Believe it or not I was working in the field, planting onions or something, and the school kids come running down the hill shouting, "The War is over!" And everybody walked off the farms and try to keep people out of the cities and things, because it would be too crowded. And a lot of happy people, you know. And then that night the drinking, you know, everything was free, just open a beverage room doors and line up and get your drinks, everybody treating each other and...

I seen a girl slapped, get a slap on the street car one day. We were going into Toronto and -- we used to ride in from Long

Branch on street cars, and she said, "I'm making so damn much money, I hope this War goes on for..." I don't know how many more years, she said, four years more or something, "and I'll have it made." And a man got up and slapped her. He said, "I've four sons over there, don't forget that." He says, "And I want to see them home here before four more years. She smartened up and apologized. She said, "I was only shooting off my mouth." But it can hit some of them I suppose. And you go along, it said, "Speak English." All on, wherever you'd go... bus stations, or, "Speak English," or, "Remember what you say. The walls have ears." You might say something and somebody hears tell of it, especially if your working in them war plants, you know.

Ranald: How did people react to people who didn't speak English?

Elmira: Well, I don't know. I seen two ladies in the Unemployment Office one time really go at it. One of them

tried to say, she said, "Do you know who's going to win the war?" She says, "United States." Somebody else has an eagle on their symbol, would it be Russia or Germany?

Ranald: The Germans do.

Elmira: She says, "Germany and the States, they both got the same, they got an eagle," she says. "So we're going to be under, all of us are going to be under the United States and Germany." And the other lady says, "I'm smaller than you are," she says, "or I'd double you in half." She says, "Where's your husband and sons? And you talk that way." And then everybody piled onto this other lady that was saying about the eagles. And I think two, three of them grabbed her and opened the door and pushed her out. I was just sitting there with a company and a woman, you know, I wasn't looking for a job. I thought, "What a place!" This is in Hamilton. But if you just sit still you hear a lot of things. And I don't know why that woman wanted to talk like that in a crowd.

Ranald: How did the women feel about men who weren't soldiers?

Elmira: Well, you know, they called them zombies and... But there wasn't that many that didn't go; if you were turned down, you know, you didn't go. Well, you were expected... nobody was supposed to be idle. You were expected then to go in the war plants or on farms and produce food, because it took food to feed the soldiers, too, you know, and buy all them uniforms. I forget how much money it cost to equip every soldier. It was seven... I won't say it, I don't know. If you went to the Ex you seen the whole thing, every soldier had the price... they were selling war bonds there, too, you know. I bought war

bonds for Morley, myself. You could pay, you could buy stamps too, and stick them in a book, but we sold them a few years after.

Ranald: You didn't get involved with your husband until after the War, did you?

Elmira: No, I just knew him, but after the War we got... We were both quite old and we thought we better get married and we did. I never regretted it; he was a good husband and a good father.

Ranald: Did you have contact with him during the War? Did you write to him or anything?

Elmira: No, I just knew of him, you know. The boys that we looked after were from our reserve, every reserve looked after their own. We'd go to the stores and ask for something and they maybe gave you a case of chocolate bars, or something, like, to stick in those boxes. Christmas time the ladies made pounds of fruit cake and you would go in the store and ask for raisins and currants...

Ranald: And they would donate that?

Elmira: Donate that, and we'd make, cut... and the boxes was on the table and you got... Well, mom and I done that up here for boys we knew, and down home they looked after everybody. We didn't have, lose as many lives in this Second War. In the First War we lost a lot of men. I think it was fought differently. That's that monument in Alderville, that's for the First War.

Ranald: Did you become more prosperous during the Second World War?

Elmira: Not me, no. I always had to work.

Ranald: Were jobs easier to get or pay better, or anything like that?

Elmira: Well, not too much better, not like now. I think I'd work five and a half days in a greenhouse and I'd get a little envelope with \$22. in it. That was a lot of money, though, you know. We got a free house with everything in it, you know, and little houses and...

Ranald: Who provided that?

Elmira: The man you worked for.

Ranald: How many hours a day did you work?

Elmira: Eight hours, eight hours come in after the War, everybody worked eight hours. It was all flowers I looked after. I was there seven years so I must have been used good. And my mother worked in there too.

Ranald: How old was she when she stopped working?

Elmira: My mother? Oh, she stopped working maybe -- she wasn't working when John was born. And she'd stay home and do the work and I'd still go and work and raise this little boy, and he thought more of her than he did me.

Ranald: Which is that, Morley?

Elmira: No, John. Morley is my nephew. You know, one time we used to look after each other's children. You'd actually take your brother's child or anybody's. If he wanted to come after it okay, and if he didn't, he just stayed around you and you'd go at it and keep him as your own. We took Morley for a weekend and nobody ever took him back. And we had to work hard and keep a little place together for... we were afraid we'd lose our little boy. My mother sent him through high school and...

Ranald: Were there any kind of inspectors or anybody that checked on him to see...

Elmira: Oh no, he was going to school, and well looked after... He was clean, and he was a nice little boy.

Ranald: What type of a person was your mother? What was she like?

Elmira: My mother was a good person, she liked to do things for people. (A noise) That seems to bounce off of the rocker every little while. She was a very good person and a hard worker, and a lot of the boys used to call her Aunt, you know. She never sent them away hungry, or if they wanted a dollar, she'd lend them a dollar. My husband thought an awful lot of her. She didn't die until 1965, I think, she died.

Ranald: How old was she then?

Elmira: She was, I don't know now. She was born 1887, I think.

Ranald: Be about seventy-eight at the time.

Elmira: Hard work don't kill anybody I guess, her and I worked so hard. I'm the last one of my family, outside of nieces and nephews, cousins. Yeah, I'm the last one.

Ranald: What type of skills did you learn from her?

Elmira: From my mother? Well, I learned how to do buckskin work, tan deer hides, weave baskets, find sweetgrass and work with sweetgrass.

Ranald: Making baskets?

Elmira: Yes. But I never took up sewing, I wish I did. My sister could sew, very good dressmaker, but I just wasn't

interested. When I was going to school I took up this work, crocheting, from the missionaries' wives. They taught us all different stitches and -- that will be an afghan when I finish it. There's a little girl getting married and I'm making one for her. And I just learned it and I left it. And after everybody grew up and retired, then I took up crocheting again. And my sister could make beautiful things, she never worked as hard as me. She got married and stayed home. So my neices says, "We can't get over Elmira's crocheting." "Well," I said, "I never had time till now and years ago I took it up." I was never too interested but I'm very happy I can do that now, because I have to have something to do. I make things for the Ladies' Auxiliary downtown, and the seniors... When they have a bazaar they sell them. But this is my friend here in Clarkson, her daughter is getting married.

Ranald: Did your mother teach you cooking?

Elmira: Oh yes. She lived with me all these years and she made pies, she made cake, when we wanted a nice cake made. And when I had to live alone I couldn't make a cake, but the cake mixes saved my life -- I could make a cake mix. I still don't make a very good pie. But my sister's pies were... she was a really good piemaker. As I say, I worked outside or inside, and she stayed home and... No, I never learned to cook, I could do the meat, potatoes, and vegetables but...

Ranald: When you cook now do you tend to use recipes, or cook from memory?

Elmira: Oh, I can cook from memory. We eat a little different like I, a lot of fruit and stuff like that. I can make a pie, but I wouldn't put it alongside of my sister's delicious pie. I should have made a lemon pie today, I got a friend coming out that really loves lemon pie, and I generally make it...

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