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HIGHLIGHTS:

- The entire interview consists of Sister Norma Jeffs'  
recollections of her experiences as a teacher.  
Margaret: ...and when you were born?

Norma: I was born in Vancouver, B.C. in 1918. I'm the  
second eldest of eight children; I'm the only girl. I have  
seven brothers. And I went to St. Patrick's for my grade  
school. And as a young girl I had a feeling that I should be a  
Sister. I rationalized staying out of the convent till I was  
twenty-two, and the Lord kind of chased me and I had two narrow  
escapes with death between November and the first of July. And  
I was in the convent on the second of August of 1940.

Margaret: What, these narrow escapes with death, were you very  
ill?

Norma: In car accidents. So I figured the Lord was really  
after me. I couldn't rationalize any longer. I used an excuse  
-- I was the only girl and my father was dead. He died when my  
youngest brother was four and my oldest brother fifteen. So he

and I quit school and went to work. And that's '32, during the depression years, so that was a valid reason for staying out. And another one was I had gone to the Sisters of St. Joseph and their novitiate was in Toronto, you know. Be a big expense during depression in case I didn't have a vocation, so I used that for a number of years. And then after this I realized that I couldn't run forever from the Lord.

Margaret: Was there anyone at all that you feel might have influenced your vocation when you were younger?

Norma: No, just the Sisters in general. I just had a kind of a calling to give my life to God. My mother was, I guess, my main example. She was a daily communicant and raising seven

boys between the age of four and fifteen by herself. And she always said if she hadn't had the Eucharist she would never have withstood my father's death -- it was a traumatic experience. And she could accept God's will in everything and I think that was... And Monseigneur Forget, a French priest, we prayed every May for the month we went in after school, the whole school, to pray for vocations. During the month of June we prayed to the Sacred Heart for vocations. And usually from St. Patrick's would be about ten or eleven out of the graduating class, go to the priesthood or to the Sisters. So I guess Monseigneur Forget and my mother.

Margaret: When you made up your mind to be caught, why did you choose the Sisters of St. Anne?

Norma: Because there was a novitiate in Victoria and we had moved in Nanaimo by that time. We moved over in '39, my mother and brothers and I. And a Sister friend about... her parents were friends of my mom and dad and I knew her. I went to her profession in July of '40 and I entered in August of '40.

Margaret: Did you select it perhaps because it was a missionary order?

Norma: No, it was just that the mission was handy and I could go home next weekend if I wanted. As my brothers waved me off Friday night and said, "See you Sunday, bag and baggage."

Margaret: So you had no desire then to be a missionary specifically?

Norma: No. No, I just wanted to give my life to God in whatever way he chose.

Margaret: And how long were you at the novitiate in Victoria?

Norma: Two years -- for as long as you novitiate. Made professions September '42 and then went off to Kuper.

Margaret: Directly to Kuper?

Norma: Yes. And I was there a year. And then the next year I went to Mission.

Margaret: Well, if we could stay with Kuper for a while, was this your first experience with the Indian people?

Norma: Yes. And when I was about eighteen I was a dress maker. I had taken a course -- I had my own establishment at one point. And they needed someone to take the sewing classes up in Kakawis, and I had such a fear of the Indians. The only Indians I ever came in contact with were the drunk ones down on Cordova Street in Vancouver, and no way would I go with the Indians. So the Lord sent me there, my first mission, and I loved them. It was, you talk, you know, about a stereotyped image -- that was my idea of all Indians -- drunk. And everyone was the same, I never stopped to think that there may be some good ones as I do today. I know that there are really fine Indian women and men that I work with in Nanaimo. And I found that each child was different. When you first walk in and see all these little dark-eyed, dark-haired children you think, "Oh, I'll never get to know their names. They all look alike." But after a while you see each child as different, in their own little personalities.

Margaret: Well, how many children were at the school when you were there?

Norma: One hundred -- fifty boys and fifty girls. It's a small school.

Margaret: All from the west coast, east coast, rather, I should say?

Norma: Yeah, well around Duncan, Saanich, Kuper itself. And we had one girl from Comox. And basically in that one area.

Margaret: And who was in charge?

Norma: It was the Marris(?) Fathers were the priests and the Marris(?) Brothers. Father Cameron was the principal -- he's dead now. And Brother Eustache is dead, Brother Gilles is dead. And then from there I went to...

Margaret: Well, how many staff were there at Kuper at the time, do you remember?

Norma: Two priests, three brothers and seven Sisters.

Margaret: What are your most vivid recollections of Kuper? What were your first impressions?

Norma: Isolation, cut off from the mainland. And I found the winters very, very long and dreary to look out and see the gray sky and the gray water beating back. And I found it very isolating, a very... I enjoyed the work, but the environment

got me down.

Margaret: Well, how did the children respond to the school?

Norma: I think they had a choice. They were just, you know, like they wanted to have an education, around from Kuper -- that was the natural place to go. And I guess they were used to the islands, although I was too. It was just the idea that I was cut off from the mainland.

Margaret: But the children you felt were more at home.

Norma: Yeah, I think so. Especially those from the island.

Margaret: Did you feel any reluctance on the part of the Indian children to be that, to be educated? Did you find...?

Norma: Oh yes. We had a few runaways. They didn't want to be there, they wanted to go home. And that is a thing of the past. The early years, yes, we always had, could expect runaways.

Margaret: But that was understandable given the freedom that they'd been first...

Norma: Yes. And... Well, I guess I remember -- well, this is going on to Mission now. I remember this one girl, she was about eleven, and she was brought into the school and naturally the first thing the Sisters did was check them for lice, and body lice and put them into a shower. And this poor girl had never seen running water. And when that hot water hit her on the head she just took off into the woods stark naked. We had to go out and find her and bring her back. You think like that, you know, and...

Margaret: Yeah, I suppose everything would be alien to them, really.

Norma: This is it. We were forcing our culture and our religion. But we did it in the name of Christianity, and we've done a lot of harm. And I know most people, you know, that have worked with them admit now what we did was wrong and we're trying to make that up. I don't know whether we ever will. There's negative feelings and there's positive. And I know one young man, he says if it hadn't been for the training he had in a residence he wouldn't be where he is today. He's got a good position with D.I.A. He had lived in Nanaimo and he drove to (name) College every day to complete his grade twelve and then go to (name) College and he got his degree; I don't know, something to do with Social Services. And now he's working for his people through the D.I.A. And he said getting up early, going out to milk the cows every six weeks -- had to be up at four o'clock in the morning -- really trained him for his later life. And he said he wouldn't be where he is today if it hadn't been for his education in the residence. Came from west coast, Christie School, to Kamloops High School -- I'm jumping

around.

Margaret: That's okay.

Norma: And another lady, she's a United Church lady, she feels that if she hadn't gone to a residence she would never have had an education. She was also from the west coast, Ahousat, and they had a day school to grade five or something like that. And then they went off over to Alberni and she got her grade nine or ten, whatever, which she would never have got had she stayed right on the reserve. So you get this positive feedback and naturally you get a lot of negative. And we have to accept what they say as true.

I noticed in my years in the residence in Kuper and Mission and Kamloops in the early... Well, from the beginning of the '40s to the beginning of the '50s, each of them had a farm and the

older boys had a half day school and a half day on the farm. They milked the cows, took care of the pigs, and did the planting in the spring and the harvesting in the fall. And the older girls had a half day in school and they were either in the kitchen cooking, or they were in the sewing room where they did the mending for the boys and girls. And then towards the end of the week they did embroidery, they did knitting, they did beadwork.

And then in -- I think it's '51 -- the government decided that they should have all day school. And then they started having, they put on a grade eight, a grade nine, ten, eleven, twelve. And the children from west coast, Lejac, Williams Lake, came after grade eight to Kamloops or Mission because they both had a high school. And they got their education and graduated. And there was a good number of our graduates where they had supervised study. Small numbers, maybe twenty would be a large class in grade twelve. They had individual attention and the help they needed and they would graduate.

One girl came from a small school when she wasn't finished grade eight, and when she came into grade nine at Kamloops she could hardly do grade five arithmetic. And anyway, with the help of the Sisters tutoring her and coaching her, she finally graduated with a fifty-five average. And then she wanted to be a nurse and we had quite a bit of trouble trying to get her in because of her low grades. Anyway St. Joseph's made an exception and took her in. She graduated with a seventy-four average. And after nursing for, oh, three, four years she wanted to become a public health nurse and she wanted to go to St. Mike's. And they took a look at her high school marks and wouldn't accept her. She finally got in at U.B.C. and she graduated -- she's a public health nurse today. Then when she was nursing in Kamloops she came to see me -- and she had a young brother and sister going to the same day school. And she came around Thanksgiving and she said, "Sister, my brother came

to see me in Kamloops." Quite worried that her young brother and sister at Thanksgiving hadn't started school yet. And I

said, "Well, why don't you go to the Indian Agent in Kamloops or in Merrit and find out." So she went back and he said he couldn't open the school. Well, she said, "Well, give me some books and I can come in and out and help them." And he said he couldn't do that, "You'll have to go and see the supervisor in Kamloops." So she went to see him. And she came back -- she didn't get much satisfaction. I said, "Well, you go back and tell him if he doesn't have a teacher you're writing to Davey," who happened to be the head man in Ottawa at the time, so she did. So she went back in a couple of weeks and they had a teacher who could hardly speak English. And the government felt they were fulfilling an obligation. They couldn't say the school wasn't open but it didn't matter if the teacher... And this is what happened to her when she was going from grade one to eight. They had anybody that they could get in this isolated... not always a top-rate teacher or if a top-rate teacher they didn't have the language, and it was difficult for the children.

Margaret: These are the small schools on the reserves that are open?

Norma: Yes. Some of them have good teachers, but if she hadn't done anything that school would probably have stayed closed all year. And because she was interested in her younger brother and sister... And then the next year she worked on getting them into the residence. See, they won't go to a residence if they have a day school on the reserve.

Margaret: They're not allowed to?

Norma: They're not supposed to, no. But with a little tape-pulling she got them in the next year, because she didn't want them to go through, you know, three or four months without... When white children need ten months of education and they're supposed to get by on, you know, four or five. And you know they're stereotyped, if they're lazy and they're dumb, they're this and they're that. When I was looking through some of the children's folders, I would say one year -- out of fifteen children -- seven were graduating after being in school for eight years. They doubled grade one and two, they doubled grade three and four, they doubled this and this and then they had four years high school; so their grades weren't, you know, they passed. So they're not a dumb people, but they've been stereotyped at being dumb and lazy and they've accepted that role. And that's where they sit, many of them.

Margaret: Do you feel that a lot of this stereotyping has come from the poor quality schooling that they've had, for example, you know, in the...

Norma: I don't know. I imagine a lot of it is coming from the non-Indian who tell the children, "You're dumb," you know, "you're lazy. Your parents are drunkards." And so they fit into that type.

Margaret: When you started working in the residential schools, of course, the children were being taught in English.

Norma: Right.

Margaret: Yeah, and this was causing some problems.

Norma: The first years, yes. We had some come in that couldn't speak English and they were punished. They were not allowed to go out and play at recess or something, as if that they were going to learn to speak English by sitting by themselves in a recreation room and the others were all out. That may be the first three or four years and then after that everyone that came in had some knowledge of English. It wasn't, you know... There was always that language difficulty because the parents in many cases hadn't gone to school so they had picked up their English from their parents who spoke broken English and passed it on. So their concept of a sentence was as long as you had a lot of words strung together that would stop here, that meant, "I have a sentence." And they would write like that. As long as it had a capital and a period and a lot of words strung together that would be a sentence. Start with a capital -- they had to learn that somewhere along the line. But a subject and verb, they didn't have that concept.

Margaret: But were they very bright in picking up English?

Norma: Some were. I think there were some that were really bright children. One girl she finished, she graduated when she was sixteen and she couldn't get into normal school till she was eighteen, so she took her grade thirteen, her first and second year university and she became a teacher.

Margaret: What were her people?

Norma: In the Fraser Valley. And there was another young fellow he went and he passed all his theory but he was quite nervous and he failed in his practicum. So he taught for a couple of years at the school and then he went back and did his practicum and got his certificate.

Margaret: So you had quite a few high school graduates out of the St. Mary's Mission?

Norma: And Kamloops, yes. And I was back at the reunion, or at least at Kamloops -- it was closing -- and they had a reunion of all the, anybody who had ever attended or teachers who had taught...

Margaret: What year was that?

Norma: That was in, oh my, '77.

Margaret: Two years ago?

Norma: I think it's '77. Anyway I went back and I was

amazed at the children, the young... They are mothers now, some of them grandmothers, what they're doing. One girl she's an R.N. in Vancouver and she gave me her address and wants me to call her. The number that are working for their own people at the band office level, as social workers, program directors -- these are all people that have graduated with a grade twelve. And some have gone down to Vancouver to Vocation School taking up secretarial, hairdressing, good number of practical nurses and... Well, there was not too many teachers. Two or three R.N.'s but a greater number would be practical nurses.

Margaret: When you... Can we just go back to Mission for a minute? I would just like to know how you, what difference was there when you came from Kuper? You said, of course, it was isolated, the spot bothered you. Why did you move to Mission? Was it just an obedience that you were moving or did you request a move?

Norma: Yes. No, no I never requested a move any time. I was just sent for a...

Margaret: They had a need for a sewing instructor. Is this what you did at Mission?

Norma: Yes. And I set up the Home Ec. class.

Margaret: What would you say would be the, perhaps the most pointed differences between the two schools, Kuper and Mission? What story was being...?

Norma: Well, the children on, around the valley... I don't know, some say they're brighter. There's something about them that is different from the children over here on the east coast of Vancouver Island. I don't like to say they're really brighter but there is a difference in the mentality. They've had more contacts, I think, with the white people in around Mission than say along here. They have mixed more in the valley. I don't know...

Margaret: But in general organization of the school was there... There were Oblates, of course, at Mission?

Norma: The Oblates were at Mission but they weren't in Kuper.

Margaret: Did this make a difference?

Norma: I would say yes. They... Well, they were missionary men and they came out from France as missionaries. And I don't know where the Marris(?) originated; I think they originated in France too but I'm not sure. The priests, I don't know, there was a kind of a better rapport between the priests and the

sisters at Mission with the Oblates. The Sisters of St. Ann kind of always worked with the Oblates and there just seems to

be more of a rapport. And I think the children sensed that. Not that, you know, we didn't get along but there wasn't, they were a little more reserved, the Marris(?) with their dealings with the Sisters. There was one young brother that was very friendly and he would do anything for the Sisters, where the other men were good, they did their duty but they were more reserved. Where the Oblates were always playing tricks on us. It made life more liveable.

Margaret: What about their relationship or their dealings with the Indians? Did the same situation exist?

Norma: I think they understood them. And, you know, there was something about the Oblates that... The Marris(?) left and the Oblates went into Kuper eventually. Yes, they pulled their men out. They've all gone from the island now. They were scattered, there were about fifteen men in a number of areas. They've all gone back east. But I enjoyed my years in Mission. I was back when they had their 110th anniversary; it was like coming home, you know. All these... some of them were grandmothers. I'd recognize a face and I'd say, "What was your name?" Someone I taught back in the '40s -- this was in 1970 or '71 they had their 110th anniversary. And it was really great to see and see them come back with their children and insisting that their children get an education. They saw the need where their parents didn't. And so therefore the children weren't being pushed or pulled by the church. The parents were pushing them into the schools to... They saw a need for an education where their parents felt they were losing their children when they just went in and took them out practically bodily, you know.

Margaret: Well, so you got lots of resistance initially from parents and...

Norma: Right. And then gradually as they got an education they saw the need, if they want to survive in our world, white man's society, they needed an education. So they insisted, you know, they would send their children.

Margaret: The government, of course, supported the Residential Schools which at St. Mary's Mission there was a difference, wasn't there?

Norma: It was a church school. And it was really hard times just before they moved to the new school. I wasn't there the last year. I was there the second last year and, you know, there wasn't that much money around. We picked our own fruit in the fall; had enough apples to last us till about March and then in spring we'd can tons of rhubarb. It was a real project. The little boys and girls from grade one and two carried the empty bottles over, the older boys were cutting the rhubarb, the older girls stuffed it. And then some other boys were in the steamer and they put it in and took it out and then they passed the chain down to the end of the line.

Margaret: Real production line.

Norma: And then when it cooled the grade three and four carried it all over to the kitchen to be stored. And then the rhubarb finished and we would do plums. Well, that would be in the fall, cherries. We canned, the boys picked the cherries and while picking they pruned, because they threw half of the tree down with a bunch of branch, all the cherries, and we would be underneath the tree and pick. There was a real

community spirit, you know. And that even grew as the years went by and there was more freedom. The first few years the boys and girls did not have anything to do with one another, and that I think basically was the French Sisters and the French priests.

Margaret: Well, that was the European system, of course, to separate the two.

Norma: Yes. And that was felt in the residence until we got some English speaking principals and English speaking Sisters, Superiors and then the things started to change. The boys and girls could talk to one another and they could have dances. The senior boys and girls saw the movie together, and the junior boys and girls saw it together. I saw, you know, the change and it made it more like a family. The boys could come over in the afternoon after school and talk to their girl-friends and that sort of thing. I guess through the years... One old lady came back, she had been in the school back in the turn of the century, and she was so disappointed when they had them do all day school. They weren't learning to do fancy work, they weren't learning to do beadwork, they weren't learning to do knitting; she didn't think they were getting an education. That wasn't her concept of an education. And the boys weren't learning to be farmers and till the ground that's ready. But...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Margaret: Well really, I'd like to know what some of the Indians told you, you know, about the school because their remembrances of it are very important now.

Norma: Well, I don't recall. I just remember this old lady saying that they weren't getting the education. And I really haven't talked to... In Nanaimo there's only a couple that have gone to the residence. They've always gone from the old day school into the public school system. So the people I'm in contact with right now, except for this one lady that's been in a residence... And she's very grateful that she had the opportunity to get an education. She's a fine woman; she's got her little piece of paper saying she's a nurses' school teacher. She went to night school and got it. But she said she would never have had that if it hadn't been for the residence. And as I said before, there are a lot of negative

feelings, because of when these young... Well, they're older people, they look back on their early days and the way they were treated.

Margaret: Well, what is their strongest complaint? You know, where does the biggest complaint lie? Is it in the... probably they feel they lost their culture through the church?

Norma: I would say yes. Like one, this one lady, she's in Nanaimo, she went to Kuper as a young girl back in the '30s. And she was punished if she spoke her own language. She only went to grade three and her mother needed her because she was dying of cancer. And we often talk about it and I have to agree with her that it wasn't right. But I say, "Look, in the name of Christianity, we thought we were doing the best for you people. But we realize today that we should have learned from you and then kind of worked our religion into your culture, as they have tried with this Good Friday service. That's a start. But we learn from our mistakes." And the government too, when they banned potlatches, threw them in jail and now they're giving them money to build longhouses, and... You know, it's not only the church, it's the government, it's all churches.

Margaret: Of course, the government and the churches had to work very closely at that time because really the church was dependent on funding from the government.

Norma: That's right. And we had to go along with what the government wanted. I was always against this total integration -- I believe in integration. When I was asked to go to Kamloops when they built the new residence, which was a dorm, the children were going out to high school at the time and the whole gang had to go, whether they were ready or not. And those that were ready fit right in and had no problem, and those that weren't ready just... One girl came back and she said, "Sister, I'm quitting." She was a slow girl but a beautiful girl, she was going to be a practical nurse. And I said, "Well, why?" She says, "I can't take it." I said, "What can't you take?" She said... she had beautiful long hair and the boys, when she'd be going from class to class, give her a tug and she'd have a headache in the morning, it would last all day. And she was very slow in her movements and if she dropped anything she'd get knocked over while they trampled over her. So that was the end of her education. Now had we had a place for her she would have been a beautiful practical nurse. And the government said, "No, they're all going to be integrated." And I was against that right from the beginning. Some were ready and some weren't. Just their own personalities, they were outgoing, friendly; others were kind of shy and...

I can, this is, you know, talking about discrimination. The girls came back and they said, you know, "Sister, some of the boys are really rude to us. They come whipping down in their cars and call us dirty old squaws and keep on going." And I said, "Oh, I think you're imagining." So one day I was out walking with a group of girls and I was at the end -- these

fellows could have seen me, I was in the black habit. And they came across the line and start yelling filthy things at the girls. So there was a lot of hard feelings that weren't imagined. Sometimes I used to wonder, "Were they imagined?" A girl came back, probably she had left Kamloops and gone to Vancouver to this home and she was going to Vocational School. She came back at Christmas -- and she was a slight girl anyway -- and she'd lost fifteen pounds from September to Christmas. And I said to her, "What's wrong?" And she says, "Oh, you get tired of eating peanut butter and baloney sandwiches." And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" And that was all they were given. And I said, "Well, that's not right." And she said, "If I want to study I have to go outside on the porch and study under a light." And so I said, "Well, you go and speak to Father." And so Father got on the train and went down to see the Agent and the Agent went out to see this woman. And she had taken in twelve children -- six boys and six girls -- squeezed them into two rooms. I've forgotten how much she was getting a month per child. And she was satisfied to leave peanut butter and baloney around, so they were all taken away from her. And there are other incidents of, you know, mistreatment of the Indian child. And they don't forget these things. And they generalize -- all whites -- and then I laugh at them. And they'll say, "Well, Sister, you're not a white." So I'm an Indian. And oh, there's been a lot... If they're resentful today they are resentful with reason.

Margaret: But you, in the residential school situation then, they were shielded from that kind of...

Norma: Right.

Margaret: ...situation.

Norma: Yeah, they were with their own kind and they can, you know... As I say, they had a supervised study every night, and if they needed help somebody -- there was a Sister or somebody was there, their teacher usually.

Margaret: Do you remember at what point and time there were allowed to use their own language again?

Norma: Well, it's only in... Well, around Nanaimo, I guess, in about the last five years they've started teaching in the schools -- the native language.

Margaret: But when you were at Kamloops was it acceptable at that time, for example, for the children to speak their own language?

Norma: They didn't speak their own language. They had lost it by that time. And right now they've got a program on the reserve in Nanaimo where they're trying to get the young adults to learn their language. There's just a few of the older people. You go to a longhouse dance, everything's in their language and everybody around you doesn't understand. Say to

the young people I'm with, "Do you know what they're saying?" "I haven't got a clue, Sister." So they have lost it. With older brothers and sisters going back, speaking the language, this sort of thing. And then more and more are leaving the reserves and going into the cities. There's a big exodus from many reserves and I think this was one of their areas of conflict with the older Indians. The young ones go, get educated, and there's nobody coming back to carry on. Education's good and then in some ways it's not so good. And before the white man came the Indian man showed his son how to build a canoe, make a bow and arrow, how to hunt and fish and provide for his family. And the mother showed the girls how to

dry the fish and the deer and make clothing out of skins and that. And they had their own way of survival. And then when we came along, everything that was sacred, really, to them, we said it wasn't good, "We'll bring them in and educate them."

Margaret: So the residential school actually took over the complete education of the child, social as well as some academic?

Norma: Right. And their religious life.

Margaret: Were they encouraged -- the children in the residential schools -- were they encouraged to marry others from the residential school?

Norma: Yes, there was a lot of mixed marriage. That was one good thing that came out of it. They weren't just inbreeding like in the family sort of thing. They came from different areas of B.C. They got, you know, they'd meet somebody from say from Williams Lake and they're maybe from the west coast. And I know two or three of them that fell in love, got married and...

Margaret: Did you run into any family opposition to that kind of...?

Norma: Not that I know of. The children just got married and moved away. The girl usually moved away and went to where the husband had, was established, he'd have a home. They didn't encourage the man to leave, because he couldn't get a status in another reserve. So it was easy for him to marry a woman and bring her. So there's a real mixture now from, you know, people from different areas of B.C. At one time, like

one tribe just kept to themselves, and they... I guess they were practically marrying cousins and whatever.

Margaret: Well, when the children had been in the school here, say, several months and then they went home for summer vacation, say for example at Mission when you were there. When they came back after that did you find that they lost a lot of what they learned, that they'd reverted and you had start over?

Norma: They started over, yes. With many, with the younger ones especially. And this is where the conflict came with the older ones. As they got older and into high school they were used to some cleanliness -- they could take a shower every night, they had clean clothes. Then they would go home and they'd have to haul water. And some of them that were within walking distance or riding distance would come back to the residence for a shower. And I remember one girl she, I guess she'd gone about grade ten, and she became a housekeeper at a priest's residence. And she came back to Mission and she was so excited -- she had her own room, a great big room to put her clothes. She was about nineteen at the time. She had never known privacy in the home, and in the residence they had great, you know, big open dorms. And they all shared a clothes closet for their good clothes and they had a little stand for their personal things. But, you know, that was, she was so excited about having her own bedroom and a big room for her own clothes, and she could lock it. And I think this tells us a lot, you know. They were so packed together and then illness came, you know, something came into the home, it just went right through. And that's why I think T.B. was so bad among the natives. We gave it to them but...

Margaret: Was it still prevalent when you were in the school at Mission?

Norma: When I was at Mission I saw the closing down of the preventorium. When they left Kakalatza, which was a T.B. hospital for Indians, we got right down to just two patients. Before they would send them back to their homes they came to Mission and there was a preventorium; there was a dorm for about six boys and six girls and they stayed there and the Sister nursed. And then gradually there was just no patients and so that was phased out during my time.

Margaret: How long was that in operation?

Norma: Well, it was in operation when I went there in the '40s and it was phased out in the '50s. So then they closed the Nanaimo Indian Hospital, which was basically for T.B. They closed the one at Prince Rupert, which was basically T.B., and they closed the one at Kakalatza, which is now an education centre. The Indians finally got it and they have, I don't know exactly what it's all about but they have an education centre there, for the higher education for the native people. But, so that was a conquered disease. There's still the, you know, odd case that they develop but...

Margaret: Of course the Sisters of St. Ann have always done a great deal of nursing as well as teaching. That's been very valuable for the Indian peoples in...

Norma: Right. Yeah, they were, we always had a nurse there. We always had a nurse in Kamloops, you know, like the doctor would... And the government supplied a lot of medicine as long as there was an R.N. to hand it out.

Margaret: Did you have any problems with the government, getting money from them? Especially at Mission where, you know, the land belonged to, the buildings belonged to the Oblates.

Norma: Well, yeah. They didn't increase the allowance. They started, I think, with fifty dollars a day, fifty cents a day per child back in nineteen something and I think they were still getting about sixty cents a day per child in the '50s. And it was just very difficult to operate. You know, you had to heat the place, buy car loads of coal. There were three buildings and there was a central furnace so all along you see where the heat, where the thing was, the snow would melt -- that would be nice and green. And there was all that wasted heat. So I don't know how many car loads of coal, they would bring trucks and the boys would shovel it down this big chute and keep it going. And then the old laundry used a lot of coal, and... Yeah, they didn't have the clothing that they had in the other schools. Like they were allowed a lot of money for clothing. And I remember one year we needed sheets and I went to Father and I said... He says, "Well, I've got this money for clothing and we better spend it." But I could not get sheets. So it just so happened that we didn't need that much money spent on clothing but we bought extra clothing and then the next year we put... Mind you, it was the same but we put more money into bedding and towelling and that sort of thing. It was for clothing and then you kind of had... But you couldn't take from one column and put it in another. Like, "use your head" sort of thing. Yes, definitely. So yeah, it was really hard those last couple of years before they moved to the new residence over in Mission.

Margaret: Did you find that the Indian Agents took a different approach? For example, were some of them more helpful than others?

Norma: Well, there were some really fine men. We didn't have that much dealing with them ourselves, it was the

missionaries, it was the principal. And like the children on the reserve, their parents had more to do with the Agent than we would as individuals. But there were some fine men that we heard of. Then others were in it for the money. You know, they got a good pay and they weren't that interested in the children, or the families. They doled out money, but...

Margaret: Did you keep a close relationship between yourselves and the parents of the children, between your Sisters, for example, and the reserves?

Norma: Well I do, right now. I'm in and out of the homes all the time.

Margaret: Not then?

Norma: No. No, children were brought from all up the Fraser Valley, or the P.G.E., they came from Seton, and D'Arcy, and Lillooet, and Pemberton and they just came in a big train load. We met them and brought them out. So we wouldn't see the parents.

Margaret: They weren't encouraged to visit?

Norma: Oh, they could come, but it was a big expense. And when they had the children stay from, like during the Christmas holidays and Easter vacation, a lot of the parents would come down and bring a parcel for their child and stay two or three days and then go back home again. But that would be at... And then once they were able to go home at holidays the parents didn't have to come. The older, like when they were graduating, nearly all the parents turned up for graduation; well-dressed. And the children were kind of worried that some

of them might come drunk. They didn't want, you know, it was a little worry with the children but in general they always came well-dressed and not under the influence. They respected -- I guess the kids would tell them, "Don't drink before you come." And I can't recall any, you know, having drunk parents at their graduation. But they would always be well-dressed for the occasion. You could see there was pride in seeing their children finish grade twelve.

Margaret: Did you have any problem with the drink and the children at all?

Norma: I think just one occasion and the boy was asked to leave. But that's it. No, usually on the reserve they... I mean in the residence we didn't have that problem. But they knew, you know, if they were caught with it that was it. And usually there was, like in the residence in Kamloops, they were just... When we moved into the new residence, as I say, they asked the Sisters and our Provincial said no Sister of St. Ann would take that responsibility. Well then Father advertised and ladies came over and took a look at it and they wouldn't accept.

Margaret: Why?

Norma: Because there was one floor with boys and the next floor with girls and there were fire doors at both ends, which means you're up supervising all night long. And so there was no way anybody wanted it. So our General happened to be and Father caught a hold of her and explained, "We got this million and a half dollar building, all new furniture. We got a brother to take care of the boys and we have no one to take care of the girls. What are we going to do?" It had been

empty since March and so the General said she would have a Sister, so the Provincial picked me.

Margaret: Were you given a choice?

Norma: No, she just sent me. She said, "You've had experience with the Indian children and we figured you'd do a good job." And I'm grateful for the three years I had. I had a chance, it was a challenge, my first meeting with the Bishop was, "Oh, you poor thing." Met the doctor, "Oh, we're going to have a rough time." I thought, "What am I getting myself into?"

Margaret: Did they tell you what you getting into?

Norma: Well, when I got up there. So I did finally get at the far end a lock. But if there were a fire the girls just had to do that and they'd be out, but the boys couldn't walk in. And then at my end there was a Sister sleeping down there and at my end there wasn't; the door just swung open. But one of the rules Father said, "If any boy gets caught in the girls' dorm, that's it, they go home. If any girl gets caught in the boys' dorm, that's it." I think that was basically his only rule. My only rule was, "The bell would ring at seven, breakfast was at seven-thirty. The bus left at eight and you were responsible for being on it. If you miss it and you got a good excuse I'll drive you over. If you miss it, you don't have a good excuse I'll walk... I'll drive behind you and you'll walk the three miles." And in the three years one girl tried getting one of the brothers to pick her up and take her, and the Lord was with me. I saw her sneaking along the building while I was after her. And brother was so happy, he says, "Sister, I didn't want to say no. I knew your rule." So I said, "Start walking." And I watched her go out the... And

I'm sure brother coming back would have picked her up and taken her, but at least she never tried it again. And I had no girl ever missed the bus. They were always there and they did it on their own. And I said, "A bell would ring at ten for silence. If you're still doing your hair, you're in the shower, when you go..." -- There were four girls in each room, you know -- "be considerate of the other girls. Some are going to bed early. You're here for an education. The socializing is a secondary thing. So you have to be, you know, rested if you want to produce anything in the academic field." So they, they were very good. I used to make my last tour about quarter to eleven, count heads, and they'd all be in their beds sound asleep.

Margaret: So the problems just didn't arise there?

Norma: They didn't, no. And I was very, very fortunate. I had a good group of girls and they, after they were together and got to know one another, some of them were, had... Well, they'd been there say in nine and ten -- this was grade eleven and twelve I had the first year -- then I got grade ten came in and then grade nine. But the first year was just ten and eleven and they all went to St. Ann's Academy. And they were all on the academic or the commerce program, because they didn't, in those days, offer Home Ec. or any of the

vocational... So they all had to take the same thing. Well then we had a grade nine and ten that stayed at the school. The government let them have that one year and then the next year grade ten that were, had to go to the public school. And so after, well they knew one another, I said, "All right, now you're going to pick yourself a president and a vice-president, and a council and you're going to run your school. You're going to make the rules. My rule is, 'Bell rings at eleven, or seven and it rings again at ten,' and that's all I'm asking of you. Any other rules you're going to make." So they did, they picked a really fine girl as a president.

Oh, and another rule of mine was, "If you're leaving the building, please, if I'm not in the office leave a note so I'll know where you are in case of a phone call or someone is looking for you." And then if I was going out, because I was the only driver that year, I was out quite often after school, I said, "Let the president know. She would be there, or just leave a note." And I said, "Now, you know, this is the only co-ed dorm in North America." I said, "Everybody's watching to see what's going to happen so let's not disgrace ourselves." And I had no problem. And I said, "If you respect yourselves you'll get the boys' respect, if you don't respect yourselves you won't have theirs either. And if anything happens I'll blame you." I says, "You tell the boys 'hands off'." And one girl I remember come over once and this was a fellow from front of the school -- her boyfriend. Oh, she was so upset. He started pawing her, she told him, "Hands off." And so he got mad, took off. I said, "He'll come back if he's any kind of a friend." He did. So no, we had had no problems in the three years I was with them. Nobody got in trouble. There was, you know, I really enjoyed the experience. And I had one girl, after she had left -- about three years -- she wrote me a letter and she said, "Sister, now I realize what you were trying to do for us, make us into women." Which was a nice compliment. But no, I was going to say I enjoyed those three years. I treated them as young ladies and they responded. They took up the challenge with me.

Margaret: Were you still getting girls and boys from different areas?

Norma: Oh yes, yes.

Margaret: Did this ever present a problem? Say, for example, back in the early days, did you ever have problems of the different groups not integrating?

Norma: Yeah. And I think where it showed up most was at their dances. One group wanted square dances and cowboy music and the others from the coast wanted -- it wouldn't have been rock 'n' roll -- jive music. So during recreation there would be, "Okay, you take turns. One can do a square dance this record, the next..." And that's really where it showed up mostly. Otherwise they got along really well.

Margaret: They didn't tend to group then?

Norma: There were one or two maybe. But there was a group from the west coast and I could relate with them. It was my second year in Kamloops and it was their first. And I remember going to Kamloops -- I had been born in Vancouver, lived around the coast where the trees and the mountains go up to this desert. And this big dry mountain behind the residence and there's sand all over, and it just kind of hit me -- what an arid place to have to live. And it made me feel lonesome for the coast. So the next year these four girls, five girls, came from Kakawis and they were in more mischief! And one day I thought, "I bet they don't even know why they're in mischief, why they're doing what... They're probably lonesome for the coast and the rain." And so I took them aside one day and we talked. And they said, "Yeah, we do miss the rain, and we do miss the green mountains and the water." Then after that when they feel like getting into mischief they'd kind of recall, you know, why they weren't happy. They were lonesome. I said, "You probably, the whole winter, you know, the year you're going to be lonesome." And about April one day they came

running in to me, "Sister, it's raining." Well, by the time I got outside it had stopped. That was our rain for the year -- we had lots of snow. But I think they were learning experiences for myself and then I could understand what these children were going through. Where the first year, I guess, if they were lonesome I didn't realize it because I knew how I felt. I missed the ocean, I missed the trees and the greenery. Coming down at Christmas for retreat, oh, we were so happy to get into Victoria and see some green. After snow from October.

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#### INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
EDUCATION				
-accounts of	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	4-31
EDUCATION				
-and cultural				
suppression	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	10,11
EDUCATION				
-and discrimination	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	18,19
EDUCATION				
-integrated	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	18

#### PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
-------------	-----------	----------	--------	--------

KUPER, B.C.	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	4,5,7,12, 14,17
MISSION, B.C.	IH-BC.81	NORMA JEFFS	183	7,8,12-14, 22-24