Ralph Burton Interview #1 – February 25, 2008

HR – Helen Raptis (interviewer)
RB – Ralph Burton (interviewee)

HR: Interview with Ralph Burton. February 25, 2008. [pause] That's fine, okay.

RB: I don't think, I don't think I'll be delving into any great federal secrets or anything like that. [laughter]

HR: Okay. Ralph, I was just wondering if maybe you could start by telling me where you grew up and when you were born, a little bit about your own background and schooling just to set, set the context.

RB: Okay, fine. Well I was, I was born in 1920 and lived my first 21 years of my life pretty well in between White Rock, a small town here on the coast, and then we lived Vancouver for a very short while and also New Westminster for a short while, maybe 2 or 3 years altogether. This is during the height of the Depression in 1929 to 1932. And from there I—we moved back into White Rock again after that time and started high school in, in Cloverdale where we travelled from White Rock to Cloverdale which is a distance of about 9 or 10 miles, maybe, by school bus. So we did that for 4 years and then after my high school graduation in Surrey and Cloverdale we —I worked all summer with my dad in the plumbing business and managed to save part of working. A man's wages in those days was 40 cents an hour, 8 hours a day and when you worked for my dad you worked 8 hours a day, believe me. He was a workaholic really. And so he would pay me $3.20 a day but he'd teach me the better and finer things of life I guess. He charged me a $1.20 a day room and board. So I cleared 200—at least $2.00 a day. And at the end of the summer I had actually worked for 55 days and I managed to buy a motorcycle to enable me to travel from White Rock to New Westminster to go to high school to complete my first year of university, senior matric. and I bought the motorcycle for a $110, so you can get an idea the 55 times 2 is how much I spent on myself for entertainment during the summer time. However, I then used to drive it backwards and forwards which in those days was about 20, 20 odd miles into New Westminster from White Rock and, and it was quite an enlightening deal going into the senior matric as we called it in those days. From senior matric after I graduated in 1938 and from there I went to normal school in Vancouver and by that time my dad was doing a little better in his plumbing business and was able to pay for my room and board at $5.00 a week to go into normal school.

HR: Just before we go into normal school is there anything you remember about your high school Ralph that particularly inspired you to be a teacher or any memorable teachers?

RB: No, I can't, I can't say actually that there was anything that inspired me to be a teacher except the fact that having worked with my dad in the plumbing business and I don't whether it

was the fact that I like clean hands or what it was, but I mean plumbing is a dirty hand business. [laughter] I say this very facetiously but anyway I figured well, I might as well work with my brains then work with my hands, so that's why I figured that maybe going into teaching would be a, a proposition where I would be able to eventually get a degree at university. But in those days you always figured that you had to go the summer school routine after you were teaching for a year and you had 2 years that you had to go to summer school to get permanent teacher's certificate. And, and then from then on you could start night school classes at UBC and it would take you another 5 or 6 years to complete the next 3 years at university to get a BA degree. However, that coupled with the summer sessions that you would probably be taking. However, the (inaudible) of course, but as far as in high school we had a minimum of facilities as far as sports was concerned. And in those days I was doing a fair amount of athletics. I played, played lacrosse and I played basketball and different things and the high school courses did not permit—I mean the facilities were not there. We didn't have a gymnasium we just had a big shed that we sort of tried to play basketball in. But outside of that the grounds were not very good; they were all flooded over most of the year with water and so on. So actually high school was pretty much of a dead period as far as sports was concerned for me, in high school. But always keep things going as far as the summer time, we used to have swimming club in White Rock that I belonged too and did a little bit of swimming competitions and so on. Winter time we did have a basketball place that we played—not really a gym it was actually a dance hall in White Rock where we used to play basketball in the evenings and also during the winter there was badminton and so on. But far as schooling was concerned the principal in the high school in those days was an English, I wouldn't say gentleman. He was an English graduate and had graduated from University of BC with a BA and a teacher's diploma, I guess, and he ran it more or less like an English boy's school. You paid attention. I mean I recall some of the fellows when they were—any misdemeanours such as smoking on the school grounds and they were caught well, he would take them in, he didn't strap their hands in those days, he had a big length belting that he used and he would lay them across the desk and wail the heck of their tail ends. So the fellows only got caught on the grounds once smoking.

HR: Wow!

RB: [laughter] And they didn't sit down very well or very hard when they—after their session with the principal. Anyway the—as far the—I mean it was just a school where you—we got to school around a quarter to 9:00 in the morning after catching the bus from White Rock at 8:00 am. we would get to school ground at quarter to 9:00 and be in the school and you were in there until noon hour. You had your one hour for lunch and then you were back in school again for 1:00 till 3:00 and when you caught the bus at 3:15 to go home and got home roughly around 4 o'clock, back to White Rock that is. So, I mean, it was a pretty academic type of school, I mean, you only had a choice of, when you first got into Grade 9, whether you were going to take French or whether you were going to take Latin. People who had visions of becoming physicians in those days they took the Latin and, and the rest of us took French and then, and then you get to branch out a little bit not too much as far as the science was concerned, you had your choice of

chemistry, and biology, and physics. So whichever one you ever had an idea—you wanted to—coupling up of those particular subjects was what you, you took. And everybody automatically went and had to write the government exams in June for senior—junior matriculation. And everybody was pretty well forced into to taking it. There was no anything else except that there was no commercial courses, typing or anything of that nature, and no shorthand courses for the girls at all. I mean, it was just strictly, purely academic all the way through as far as all the education as far as high school in those days so it was very restrictive.

HR: Just a lot of work and no...

RB: Well then of course because you—they didn't have too much time for any extracurricular activities after school because everybody came, the majority of people, in fact I would say 90 percent of the people, came by bus and the buses just took off and you went home. And so anything after that—I mean, you still had about on the average at least 2 to 3 hours homework at night to be done for the next, next day and so on. So they kept you busy academically let's put it that way. Now...

HR: So, so in '38 you went over to the normal school?

RB: After in 1938 I went to the normal school I had—on a personal note I had made an application for the Royal Air Force because I was interested in flying and I had hoped I might be able to become a pilot in the Royal Air Force, that was the English Air Force, of course. And that sort of fell through; they had a very stringent sort of an examination; it wasn't a physical that I missed, or something, but I had a feeling that the ophthalmologist should test my eyes and I had a deficiency in colour blindness and one thing and another that perhaps I was colour blind and, and I couldn't be a pilot. The funny part about it was that what they call the Ishihara colour blind test that they used to use and I don't know if you have ever seen it yourself, but they have all these coloured dots and so on; the funny part about it is that when I went to the Royal Air Force I passed it quite easily, when I went for the test for my medical for the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1930—let's see 1940 that I made application. And, but anyway I wound up in normal school, and I was a little late getting started because—about 2 weeks. And then we went, went through the normal school routine which for somebody who was sort of athletically inclined it was not the greatest bit of education as far as I was concerned because I think Amy and I mentioned this before that they had a great many things, but it was practically all theory work which worked fine as long as you had a big class and a single class and so on. But the majority of people, and they should have trained us more for it, was—you went out into one room schools where you're teaching anything from Grades 1 to 8 and trying to divide your time up and that when we got out of normal school. But in fact, you know, they would turn around and say, "Well, you know, you try to get a discussion going and you do this and do that." Well, but to have a Grade 1 youngster and have a discussion is a little difficult with an exchange of many ideas. [laughter] It doesn't, it doesn't work that way.

HR: So it was okay for people going to the cities into the graded schools, I guess.

RB: Yeah, there was a few people that got out of our, out of normal school but of course the usual thing was for the school board to turn around and say well—even in a rural area like Surrey there used to a whole series of single room schools. And I would say that White Rock as a town had one of the graded schools, let's put it that way, Grades 1-8 and, you know, classes that consisted of Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3 and so on. And they had the population where they could have, you know, groups of 30 or 40 kids, 30 kids I guess. And Cloverdale was the same way, but the rest of the schools were all pretty well either one or two room schools and they would be divided up into Grades 1-4 and then, 5-8. And if it was a two room school naturally they would have two room—two teachers. But this is what happened with me I, I taught up in the interior, I think I mentioned that previously as far as my history is concerned. I wound up in a school called Kettle Valley which was up in—about 35 miles east of Osoyoos.

HR: And that, that's an elementary school Ralph?

RB: Oh yeah it was an elementary school, yeah, I had 10 students. I had Grades 1-4 and there was about five kids. One kid in Grade 1, two kids in Grade 2, one kid in Grade 3 and one kid in Grade 4. I hope that adds up to five. And anyway, I had two kids, two kids in Grade 7 and three kids in Grade 8 and of course it was quite a session there. But I was a little bit out of my league as far as things were concerned up there. I wasn't meant, I think, to be way out in the boondocks like that. I used to drive over to Osoyoos for something to do and I played basketball for the Osoyoos basketball team at that time. And then my mother was quite adamant about the fact that I hadn't been given a school here in Surrey where we have lived, at that time, for about 20 years. So she was going after the School trustee from White Rock and she every time she saw him, which was about at least twice a week or three times a week, she would give him heck that I hadn't been given a school and so finally it turns out that—I don't know if I recall telling you this before but on Hallowe'en night in what they call the Green Timber school the two kids went back to the school on Hallowe'en night with a shotgun and blew the lock off the door and then went inside and made a complete mess of the school. It was just a one room school naturally and.

HR: And that, that was in White Rock?

RB: No, no it was Green Timbers School. It was up close to the Fraser Highway as they call it now and Green Timbers there—actually it's not too far, you remember when you came here? It's not too far up from where we are living in Surrey; it's on the, you might loosely call it, the North Western section of Surrey.

HR: Okay.

RB: And anyway, they tore all the library books apart, they broke up the gramophone and they took the big ink bottle which held about a quart of ink and they spread it all over everything.

There was a stove that was in the middle of the room, that was the heating for the school and it had a big stove pipe that ran from the stove up and along the—through and out the back of the school for a chimney effect. And they knocked down all the pipes and of course they're all full of soot and they had that all over everything. And then of course they drew some very explicit pictures and diagrams and suggestions for the teacher on the, on the blackboard and told her, you know, what she could go—do and where she could go and things like this. But in other words they really made a mess out of the whole school and of course when the teacher came in the next morning it was—it didn't require a, as my favourite expression goes, it didn't require a mounted policeman with a seeing eye dog to figure out who was involved because there was only one school desk left standing with the books still in it. It was one of these boys and he hadn't messed up his desk. So as soon as they clamped onto that, I mean they just got the kids in and they took —he was quite willing to tell who his accomplice was so they wound up, and they wound up getting—had to appear in court and they wound up getting 3 months a piece in the what they called a boy's industrial school in those days, which was a boy's reformatory. So that was the—the problem was that the teacher was a very, very small little gal, in fact, I would say that the girls in Grade 7 were probably bigger than she was, and taller. And so she had a very tough time with discipline with the kids, I mean they just—she just didn't impress them at all because the majority of cases all the girls in Grade 7 and 8 were bigger than she was and the boys of course were looking down on her as well. So they suggested that she go to another school and I wound up going in more or less as a disciplinarian and, of course, as, you know, I may be a little bit bigger than Grade 7 or 8 kids so... [laughter]

HR: When did you go Ralph? Was it just after Hallowe'en?

RB: No, they left her there until December and then I went in on the first of January. When school started back in January I went in and they left her there, as I say, until December and then, and then I went and took over in January and was there until June. And I guess I did a few little things. I mean, the boys in the school were very unhappy because they was no manual training at all so I went over to the high school which was a short way over and made arrangements with the manual training instructor to have these boys go over on Friday mornings. And boy they were happy as clams to go over there and be able to do little bit of nailing and sawing, and planing and one thing or another—making something anyway for about 6 months, so they were happy as clams. And then I wound up with the end of the year—regardless of what the school inspector had to say about me the PTA group of the school had a letter sent into the school board suggesting that since their kids had made more progress in the 6 months that I had been there, that they wanted me to stay on because the kids were doing extremely well under my excellent tuition. [laughter] I laugh at that, I didn't do anything.

HR: What, what grades were they? What grades did you have?

RB: I had Grades 1, 2 , 3 , and 4, and Grades—oh I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm looking at the wrong list. At Green Timbers I had Grades 1-8, there was right through. I don't know, there was maybe

a couple of kids in Grade 1, one or two in Grade 2, it's just, it's just a very small splattering of kids. There was about, I guess, 30 kids altogether. And so anyways, the school board in their wisdom figured I was doing pretty good so the next year they made me Principal of, of a two room school which was a little closer to my home in a way. And I was—I had charge of the Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 and the other teacher had Grades 1 to...

HR: One to four.

RB: One to four yes. So, of course, during the war years they—the men teachers—have a frog in my throat there and I was...

HR: Do you want to have a glass of water or something?

RB: No, no, no it's okay I just have to clear my throat, that's all.

HR: What school was it Ralph?

RB: The name of the school was the Kensington Prairie School and it was an elementary school naturally. But that, let's see, from 1940, the fall of '40, through until to the spring of '41. But as I told you I had an application in to the Royal Canadian Air Force and early in the—in 1941 I was called up and was sworn in at the airforce and left a little early actually. I left in the early part of May to go back for training in the airforce. So I should point out too that I had senior, as they call it, the senior grades for about 4 months, I guess. And then they took the primary teacher and took her out and sent to another school because they were short of teachers. As I say the men teachers were leaving and so I wound up getting the primary kids again for a matter of 2 or 3 months. I had the whole school again of ungraded kids from 1-8. But it was not too difficult, in a sense, because I had everybody all in one room of course by this time. And the odd thing I think about was the fact that around Christmas time I guess I had attempted to put on some kind of Christmas party for the kids to raise some money to do something. I decided I would try for a turkey raffle and I got somebody to donate a cake and whatever it was, and we had two or three prizes that we were going to raffle off and I made up the little raffle tickets and one book for each kid and so on. Naturally I assumed that—I think there was the gigantic price of 10 cents a ticket and three for a quarter and so on and there was an odd ticket on the end of it so that the kids got a free ticket for selling the book. Anyway I sent them home with the kids and man, the next morning I got a mother screaming at the door. And she just went up one side and down the other, "Trying to teach my kids to gamble," and oh my God and man, she just raised particular hell because I had tried to teach these kids to gamble by selling raffle tickets.

HR: Oh goodness.

RB: Yes, so anyway, I—so well, "Okay I'll take the book of tickets back and your children though," I don't know if she had two kids or not but she said, "Well if you want a donation, I'll

give a donation." I said, "Well that will be very nice. You can give the equivalent of the two books of tickets: you owe me $2 or something." You know, I managed to get some money out of her anyway, but boy she was real adamant about the fact that, you know, I was teaching these kids to gamble because they were selling raffle tickets.

HR: Wow.

RB: So outside of that you asked for a few more things here.

HR: Yeah do you, do you recall doing anything with the kids toward the war effort? Do you recall them saving up scrap metal or paper or anything like that?

RB: Yeah, we had—in those days there was a big deal that the silver paper was supposed to be a big deal. And you're too young to remember, but people used to roll their own cigarettes in those days. And in fact more cigarettes were rolled than there were than the tailor-made cigarettes. And so the packages of the fine cut tobacco, as they called it, and also the pipe tobacco used to have red foil on the outside of the inner wrapping. They had sort of a—an oiled paper with this lead foil on. So the kids used to take it off of there, they'd get from their fathers and anybody else they could and roll it up into balls we used to save the rolls of lead paper for the war effort to send it in. They were supposed to be, they were supposed to be using it for something, I suppose the idea basically was that they were making the lead for bullets out of it, I don't know that—I never did find out what they did with it eventually. But we used to turn it into the school board and then everybody—they took care of it.

HR: So you would take it over to the school board? Or who?

RB: Yeah we—you know, there wasn't that much of it. I mean the idea was that they were supposed to be making a big run of about supposedly the size of a soft ball. But it took an awful lot of paper, of this lead paper, to make it that large of a ball but, you know, they'd would wind up about the roll about the size of a golf ball not—rather than a soft ball. [laughter] Yeah that's about the only other thing. Now as far as other—about the only other thing as far as this last school that I had, I think I mentioned to you, or maybe I did, about the—I was in, I'd say, in the air force and took my pilot's training, actually, out at Boundary Bay and during my course of flying I was—I used to fly around over top of the school, this last school. And there is this very interesting little story I like to tell about the, the one boy who had been in about Grade 5. He went home and he was living with his grandmother and he told his grandmother that he had seen me flying around in this airplane and well she just went ballistic over this and went up one side and down the other. She said, "You cannot tell lies like that, Peter." So anyways, she, she happened to know my mother and of course they weren't too far away from my hometown in White Rock. And so she was walking around White Rock one day and bumped into my mother and she said, "I don't know what I am going to with that grandson of mine." I can't even recall why she was raising him other than the fact maybe the kid's mother and father were not around,

let's put it that way. And she said, "That kid," shes said, "he was lying," she said, "he turned around and told me the other day that he had seen Ralph flying a plane around." And my mother said, "Oh yeah, that's a good possibility he's flying out of—over from Boundary Bay and he could quite easily." "Oh," she said, "my poor—oh he was telling the truth." And she went home and she apologized to her grandson up and down about the fact that he was probably right and she was so glad and made him his favourite supper and favourite cake and all the rest of it to apologize for this, this little error that she thought he had made but actually hadn't. I don't know if you have anything else you want to ask about there, but...

HR: When you were teaching Ralph, do you remember feeling like that you had enough resources to cover the curriculum? Did you have the books you needed and...

RB: Well, they, they, they supplied all the books in those days; all the textbooks were all supplied to the kids. And, of course, you know, when you're 18, 19, 19 years old, 20 years old and not very experienced—I mean, I wouldn't know whether I had enough or not, you know, and whether—all the schools had some kind of a library but, I mean, it wasn't a reference library in a sense of being able to—I can't recall whether or not, for example, they had the Encyclopedia Britannica in the library but most of them were just sort of fiction books that they had there, as I recall. And—but all the textbooks, I mean, there was all pretty well a standardized system, I mean, I think particularly so the writing program that they had. This H.B. MacLean, here again I guess maybe you don't recall that or know that but H.B. MacLean had this system that he had developed of muscular movement as he called it. When we were going through normal school Mr. H.B. MacLean was the—in the school, in the normal school teaching all the would be teachers how to write. And he had everything all graded, I mean, you got a certificate if you could print the way kids did in Grade 1 and he had a manual for Grade 1 kids for printing. And Grade 2 they had this manual that they—that was supplied by the school board to the schools. And Grade 3 you got into writing instead of printing, and Grade 4 and so on. Then as the kid progressed, I mean, they were entitled to get these various certificates if they achieved a certain amount of expertise in it. And when we went through normal school he would have us send in these various examples of our writing, samples of our writing. And then he would come back maybe the next day and be handing out these certificates to us of the various levels that he considered we had achieved. So, so you went through and you got maybe a Grade 6 level and then maybe you had a Grade 8 level and then advanced Grade 8 level and then a high school level. And eventually advanced high school, although the kids in the high school weren't sending these in; they didn't have the writing courses still going on. But they had all the series of little exercises that you did. We used to call them making—you made circles, for making the letter "O" and you'd get so many circles of that and then the next one and the next one all the way and you'd try to get them all exactly the same. And then there was an up and down one that you did and you did so many strokes up and down in a line and...

HR: So you, you did this with your children, with the kids in the school?

RB: Well, the kids did this in school, yeah. And you had to, you had to show them basically what you did, you drew the lines of the, of the paper on the blackboard and then you showed them the exercises that you wanted them to do and then they were to follow it. And then they—but what I remember was we used to make—had to do a smokestack and the—otherwise you're drawing these circles around and around and around all just advancing very, very, slowly. So by the time you finished you had this smokestack looking thing, you know, smoke, chimney pipe, I guess, would be the thing you might call it, stove pipe. And so it—as I say, I was in some ways, I guess, maybe I was relatively—well, my hand coordination was pretty good. Anyway the highest certificate was a teacher's certificate which he didn't automatically hand out. You had to achieve this certain expertise as far as his writing was concerned and somewhere along the line he made a mistake and gave me one so I, [laughter] I was one of the few men in the class of normal school that got one. So anyway I was, I was quite proud of myself and even now I can even almost read my own writing, so... [laughter]

HR: Do you remember ever having to ask for help with your lessons or to consult with anyone like the inspector or anything like that?

RB: The inspector was somebody that you were—sat in deathly fear of waiting for him to come around. We had a Mr. Calvert was the man that was the inspector for Surrey. An excellent fellow, but everybody was—we always worried about the inspector's visitation. And he would show up and probably spend a day with you in the classroom. The only thing I knew about him was the fact that he was quite hep on the fact that the children should know music. I don't know whether he was particularly musically inclined, but he liked to make music and he liked the kids to have music and so I had heard this ans so I had the kids all primed up on it. And when he finally showed up in the late spring of when I was in the Green Timbers school, up in the first school I got in Surrey, he finally showed up and he listened to me ramble on my teaching for a matter of a couple of hours. I guess, so an hour until the recess time in the morning and then finally he said, "You're doing quite well but would you mind if I took over?" And I said, "No I don't mind," and actually I, I wasn't going to argue with him. So he said, "Would it be alright if I ask about music?" And I said, "Oh sure that'll be fine." Of course, I say I had these kids all primed up and what they were suppose to know. My, my—the classic thing was for him to be asking about the different instruments; "What were the string instruments?" Well, the kids were smart enough to say, you know, banjo, violin and guitar and one thing or another. And then he wanted to know about any of the horn instruments so they got that. And then he wanted to know about woodwind instruments so some bright young kid, I hadn't, hadn't realized he was going to do it, and he waved his hand like crazy and Calvin had a big smile on his face and he said, "Now what would be a woodwind instrument?" I think he said, "A mouth organ." So [laughter] the kids stunned him, now he just stopped he didn't know exactly what that—well, he thought about it for a while and he said, "Well you know, I guess, by golly that a mouth organ is a wood, wood—at least a reed instrument anyway." Yeah a woodwind—so it was, my report from him was not horribly outstanding. I mean, he said I was fairly good at most things but some things, I guess, I was alright but fairly good was, I would say, was not a great recommendation or report. But anyway,

the fact that the parent-teachers thought I had done so well with their kids that—I think that made more of an impression upon the school board than the, the, fact that he had turned in this average report, I would say, as far as my teaching ability.

HR: It's interesting for me because I have read some of those old reports, you can get them at the archives. And they're consistently satisfactory. I think that they, they were hesitant to say anything more than, than satisfactory.

RB: That's right. That's basically about what it amounts to. I say, with this—of course the, they were just—I'd say the war was on and they were starting to lose teachers. I mean the thing about it is they couldn't turn around and turn in a very negative report. Although he, this Calvert, had, had turned in a bad report on one teacher and the school board actually fired him because they figured that he wasn't—and the strange part about it is it was Amy's husband.

HR: Oh really?

RB: Yeah.

HR: Tim?

RB: Yeah he was a very—Amy's husband is a very intelligent man. He finally went through and got his PhD in physics. And—but he for some reason or another he just didn't seem to hit it off with this, this Calvert. And Calvert really came on him like a ton of bricks and recommended the school board get rid of him and the school board did and Tim wound up going up into the Peace River and that's where he met Amy when he was teaching up there.

HR: Wow!

RB: Yeah, but, but as far as intelligence is concerned, I mean, he had hands down over everybody else in Surrey I would say, because he was a very intelligent fellow and he has—since he retired he went back to Ottawa and worked for the National Research Council back there. Actually, he had achieved worldwide recognition in his particular field that he was in. He was known all over the world. He used to go to all—to China and lecture over there and Japan and over to Europe many times and lectured—or presented papers over there, I should say, at these different scientific conventions. So he—and then after he retired he started concentrating and he invented several instruments that they still use in oceanography and one thing or another. So the man was smart but he may have not been a particularly good teacher. In fact, he admitted that to Amy. He said, "You know, I was never the teacher you were, Amy." He, he really, as I say, was a very intelligent man but in the wrong profession, let's put it that way.

HR: So he was probably more cut out for university level.

RB: I didn't quite hear that, dear.

HR: Perhaps he was more cut out to for working with older people at the university level.

RB: Yes, that's right, exactly so. In fact while he was going to UBC and working toward his doctorate degree he was actually lecturing in physics at that time. He was sort of like a lecturer, he wasn't a professor or anything like that, but he was being hired by the university to lecture on, I would probably say, in Physics 101 or something, Physics 100. He was teaching that at UBC while he was going through for his PhD. But of course lecturing at UBC is a different thing than lecturing, you know, or trying to get Grade 1, 2, and 3 kids to learn something. At UBC they presented and you, you absorbed if you wanted to.

HR: Where, where were you living, Ralph, when you—were you living at home when you...

RB: Oh yeah I was living at home while I was teaching, at least when I moved back to Surrey. The 3 or 4 months prior to that, I mean, when I was up in Kettle Valley, naturally, I was boarding out up there. And then when I came home I was living in White Rock until I, I joined the air force and after I joined the air force I—let's see a year and an half or so into the air force and I, I got my wings and I got married about 10 days later. And then from there I went to Trenton and became—took the instructor's course back there and became an instructor. So...

HR: During the war you were a flying instructor?

RB: I was a flying instructor during the war, yes. In fact, I, I like to more or less brag a lot that when I finished the instructor's course back in Trenton they wanted me to stay there to become an instructor instructor. So I guess I must have been able to—I could do things fairly well, I guess, as far as instructing was concerned. I wound up with one of highest instructing ratings in —that the air force put out. So there again we used to have while flying—they used to send around groups of instructors from Trenton, they would come from the various training schools. And they would re-categorize you, as they say. I gradually worked up, as I say, to the highest rating—one of the highest rankings for a category for instructing. But...

HR: Do you think that any of that had to do with your experiences working with kids or your normal school?

RB: No, no. I mean it was just a matter of having a relatively good memory and being able to go ahead and do things, I would say by rote. I mean, when you would teach, when were teaching, I mean, you had to keep up with everything that was going on in the school at that particular time and you—every lesson was a different thing, Helen. But when you're flying, teaching flying, I mean, you repeat the same thing. I mean, you may—you had a group of students, you'd have four students while you were flying and you would take one up and you would go through a whole routine of things that he had to learn when you first started. And then you'd advance with

each one and you would do this, repeat this, four times say with each group. And then, you know, carry them right through to the time that in about 4 months time, that they would get their wings and they would leave and you would start the whole routine over. Teaching another group again to the same process but you were repeating the same set of patterns, we called it, to each student for each particular exercise that they had to do. When you, for example, when you were going to take off you had to teach them how to make sure they cut the aircraft straight down the runway and so on and then after they take off what they do. All these different things, I mean it followed the same pattern. So once you got it embedded in your mind, I mean, you did it purely mechanically unless you turned around and started adding some little bits of personal things that you put into it and you could vary it a little bit. And if you did this while you were teaching the students, I mean it made it a little bit more interesting for them and some, some fellows did it but some of them they just, you know, maintained the same line of patter or even less than they did before. So I don't say that, necessarily, the teaching had much to do with it but the air force seemed to think, "Well okay, you were a school teacher, therefore you can teach kids to fly," sort of thing which,which I guess it was to a point because there were a tremendous number of us who were former school teachers. But at the same time it didn't mean—I know that one—we had two teachers in our—one flight that I was in when I was flying in Saskatoon and both of these fellows were lousy instructors as far as the air force was concerned. They wound up being more or less put down when they had the, the re-categorization tests and they were soon shipped off to other places. So they weren't necessarily good instructors, but that's...

HR: But I guess it is more precise than working with kids; it's more, more predictable.

RB: Well, you have to keep in mind, you know, I guess, the old story; you had to motivate these kids to learn, you know, and this is what they had, you know. As far as the teaching at normal school well you had to motivate these kids to get them sort of really get excited about the learning that particular thing. Well it's all fine, I mean, but when you only got one kid it's pretty hard to motivate him in any, any competitive way. Now in the air force, I mean, all of these kids that were coming around—I say kids I mean, you know, 18 and 19 year olds that were just signing up and just out of high school. And they wanted to fly and they would do anything. And I was the same way and I, I was in daily and tried, I told you, I to get into the Royal Air Force to start with and then when I got into the Royal Canadian Air Force, I mean, we were all—you know, we flew all the time even when we sitting on the ground we were flying [laughter] if you can appreciate that.

HR: You were very motivated, yeah.

RB: Yeah, you had—you were self-motivated for the air force because if you didn't learn it properly well, there was good possibilities that you wouldn't be around to carry on, you know, in the next day. If you made a mistake, I mean, sometimes it is a little fatal when you come, come in from two or three thousand feet you're heading nose down you don't go back and try that again, that sort of thing, you know.

HR: Yeah, I see. So with your little kids do you remember any particular things that you did to motivate them? Like, what, what were some of things that struck you? Were they hard, were they hard to motivate or were they...

RB: You know, I don't know whether it was the kids that I had or—I wouldn't say that, you know, all of the classes that I had or both—well I would say three schools that I had; the Grade 7 and 8's had to do most of their work by themselves, you know, you could—you had to spend so much time, and I would say over two thirds to three quarters of time you had to spend with the primary kids, Grades 1-4 and 5, I mean the 1 to 4 basically. You had to spend so much time trying to get them to learn everything, even to understand what you were trying to say in a way. As I say, maybe I was pretty lousy understanding what the kids needed. But at the same time I cannot think of any of them who you would put in the classification of being highly intelligent, let's put it that way. Whether or it not it was where they were living or whether—I don't know. I just—I can't say that in all the schools that I ever had any that—who would slate up in the genius bracket. I know what you're thinking, genius, but, I mean. You know, a lot of them did very well, the Grade 7 and 8 kids did well when they got to high school because they had to do so much studying in the, in the ungraded classroom by themselves that when they got to high school, I mean, it was pretty easy for them. You get in—they get into a class of 30 kids, I mean, they, they were used to studying by themselves that to have one teacher and one subject in high school that, I mean, it was amazing, you know, this is easy.

HR: Yes, that, that's interesting, I never thought about that before.

RB: Yes, I always found that the kids, at least I would assume, that the kids that had been in one room schools in Surrey, when they got to high school, were so used to doing all of their—a lot of their homework one thing or another and doing all their studying at night. And you have to realize that Surrey was, in those days, was relatively undeveloped. I mean, there was an awful lot a lot of bush and they—just the odd house here and there and people were living on acreages, as it were. You didn't have kids, you know, next door to one another that were able to leave from the school. I mean, they spread out just like the spokes on a, on a wheel of a bicycle, I mean, when they left the school they went in, you know, I wouldn't say 360 different directions. But, I mean, they went—you know, they weren't close together so that they could compare notes or one thing and another. I left the school and the only, the only time I ever had any contact back with any of the students was the Grade 8—one of the Grade 8 girls who naturally went onto high school the next year. That summer they, they knew I wasn't coming back. This Grade 8 girl who I guess was around about 14, or maybe possibility 15 at the time, wrote me a love letter during the summer time. [laughter] The funny part about it is carrying on for a great number of years later, we got up into—when I got living in Princeton my wife and I went into the senior citizen's group they have in Princeton and we joined up. And we used to go in and when we were doing our shopping we'd drop into the seniors place and have coffee and maybe a bowl of soup or something that they had at lunch time. But anyway, I was having a cup of coffee the one day and this woman who was the—and you have to keep in mind that you had to be a senior citizen to

join this group there, came over and sat down. And I knew that she was the secretary of the organization but I didn't know—I knew her name but that was the extent of it. But she sat down and she said, "Pardon me, but," she said, "do you know somebody by the name of Burton?" And I said, "Yeah I know somebody by the name of Burton." She said, "Well do you know somebody by the name of Ralph Burton?" And I said, "Yeah I know somebody by the name of Ralph Burton." She said, "Dr. Ralph Burton?" And I said, "Yeah, I know somebody by the name of Dr. Ralph Burton." And she laughed. She said, "Well I know who you are, because you used to be my Grade 6 teacher in Green Timbers School."

HR: Wow, and was that her? That was...

RB: Yeah this was the girl. She was—she had been—no, no not the girl that I was talking about. But no, no.

HR: The girl who wrote the love letter?

RB: No, no. No, no this was her sister.

HR: Oh her sister.

RB: Her younger sister. The one in Grade 8 was the, the one that wrote the letters. This girl was in Grade 8—Grade 6 I should say. And the reason she remembered it was that to—we had to try and make these kids to behave. You know, the Grades 6, 7s, and 8s were all on one side of the room. The, the primary group were on the right hand side of the room and, you know, it was—they were always chit chatting backwards and forwards and for me to try and teach the young ones while they were chit chatting, I mean, it was a little bit hard for me to concentrate so on and so on. I decided on a system for the sake of trying to keep these kids in line. I got—everybody would start off in a week—at the start of the week with 100%, 100 points. But every time that they, they did something wrong we would have a meeting and then we would decide how many points they were going to lose depending on the severity of the infraction, let's put it that way. So anyway, everybody—they had the chart up on the wall and if you, if you were talking and you shouldn't be talking, well then you lost 5 demerits. And if you did something else and so on, and if you shouted, or you whistled, or you chewed gum in school then—that was a big—another big no no chewing gum, of course in those days. And anything that they did that they shouldn't have done and the kids would decide upon how many points that they were going to lose. So at the end of the week the person who lost the fewest number of points was declared the winner. Well just about that time I was playing lacrosse in New Westminster for the Salmonbellies Lacrosse and I used to get free tickets for the game. So as a prize for having the fewest number of points lost I would take them into a lacrosse game. And I had my brother who was around 14 or 15 at the time, he would be the escort for the kid whoever it was. And I would, I don't know, donate 25 cents to the, to the two of them that they could buy a bag of peanuts and have a bottle of pop or something at a nickel a piece, you know. I mean it was a big, big spender, you know, in those

days. Anyway, my brother would take care of this kid until I got out finished with the game and then I would drive them back home and so on. And this girl reminded me that she was the first one that I had ever been taken to, to the lacrosse game.

HR: Oh goodness.

RB: This one that was the, the secretary in the senior citizen's in Princeton. She asked, "You don't remember?" I said, "Well I remember taking the one other boy," which was very embarrassing. Another embarrassing situation.

[continued]

RB: This other boy wound up winning another week and I took him in on a Thursday night game, I guess it was. And that morning for some reason—we always had a report every fourth day, in a sense. As soon as school started we used to have a report on world wide activities mostly, of course, at that time the war was on, getting going. There would be a report in the morning paper for the—what was going on in the world, let's put it that way—current events, sort of thing. So anyway, this kid for some reason or another, the one that I had taken to the game the night before on a Thursday, got up it was his turn to report. And so anyway, he got up and started reading from the sports page and it just so happened that I had scored five goals or something and was the star of the game. But anyway, the big write up was, as the expression goes, a full page write up on the game and of course it was all talking about this lanky school teacher who had been leading for the Salmonbellies. And a blow by blow description of the game and all the goals that I had scored and it was rather embarrassing but at the same time I felt—[laughter] well certainly not earth-shattering news anyway. But anyway, I didn't want to interfere with him because he thought he was really doing something really great. And of course the rest of the kids hadn't seen or heard of it because in those days the morning paper wasn't a thing that everybody got, but apparently this family did. So it was sort of, sort of neat for me and that's one of other things that I remember about the teaching here as far as the Green Timbers School is concerned. And then as far as the other school I can't recall very much. And you were mentioning—asking about whether or not we got any help from anyone. The school—the inspectors I would never—I would say would never help you an awful lot. I mean they would criticize, but in fact, you know, they wouldn't say, well, give any kind of a lecture on what you should do. I mean they would just make this report and that would be it. We did have the School Teachers Association used to meet in Cloverdale but that, that wasn't every month and it was only probably once every 2 or 3 months they would have and they would usually have somebody come out. I can recall one of the—actually he was a psychologist from the normal school, came out and gave an address to the—to us one time and we were happy to see him. Of course, we had just, more or less, left normal school and he was—I guess we were still fresh in his memory the year before. So we did have him come out but that's about the only time that I can say that you got very much help from anybody else because, I mean, the schools are spread out quite a long way away. And a lot of the teachers didn't have their own transportation to get to the school and

most of them went by school bus. You know they would get—hitch a ride on the school bus to get to the school where they were going, where they were teaching.

HR: Ralph I hate to interrupt you there but I have a meeting that I have to attend at 11:30.

RB: Okay. You're cutting off.

HR: Yes. Thank-you so much Ralph. I have learned an awful lot from talking to you and I can't wait to talk to you on Thursday.

RB: [laughter] Okay, fine.

HR: Give my best to Amy please.

RB: Okay, well, she's out with the Galloping Grannies right now, so I don't know.

HR: Okay.

RB: Alright, fine. Bye-bye now.

HR: Take care. Bye-bye.

Ralph Burton Interview #2 – February 28, 2008

HR: Ralph Burton follow up interview, February 28.

RB: Yes, very good. Okay.

HR: Good, okay. Well yesterday there were a few things—or the other day there were a few things we had talked about I was wondering if I could ask a little bit more about. And then if there is anything else you'd like to add that we haven't talked about that would be great too.

RB: I think I mentioned—at least I'll just think back about it. I think I more or less left off when I was talking about the inspector and one thing or another and giving out music lessons to the kids and...

HR: That's right.

RB: And he was, he was quite astounded when he asked what kind of instrument was a reed instrument and the kid came out with, with a mouth organ.

HR: Boy, your memory is good. That's exactly where we left off.

RB: Okay, I didn't make a notation about it. But another incident regarding a, an inspector when I was—the first school I was in was up in the interior, I think I mentioned that to you, a place called Kettle Valley.

HR: Right.

RB: And there were only 10 kids in the school.

HR: And Ralph can I ask you where you boarded there? Where was it you boarded in Kettle Valley?

RB: Well for the first few weeks I boarded with the secretary of the school board and his wife and they had two children. One—both high school graduates, so they had a boy and a girl. But I stayed with them for about 3 weeks and for then some reason or another they were going to—the wife was going to go down to Victoria for an extended visit or something. So I changed my boarding house and I moved over with a family in a farm house which I think was one of the best things I ever did. She was a fantastic cook and of course the school teacher was, you know, a paying proposition as far as room and board was concerned. So this area where we were had no electricity as I think I mentioned to you but it—and of course the Depression was, say, just being overcome—coming to the end. And the war starting up, of course everything was starting to go ahead. But it was a means for them to get a few dollars in which they—I don't know what they

actually lived on other than that because there was the man and a wife, the name was Mr. and Mrs. Johns. But her father lived with them and his name was Henderson, Old Dad Henderson they called him. [laughter] He was a real going concern that old guy, he was over 80 years of age at that time and he, he looked younger than his son-in-law.

HR: Oh, wow.

RB: Yes. He was always going out and they—the fishing was illegal in the Kettle Valley River that was right there. And—but he'd go over and he had sort of a set line set out in the river so that. Go back and when nobody was around, of course there wasn't very many people in the area anyway, but he'd go back and check on this line to see if there were any fish on it, one thing or another. Although, you weren't suppose to be fishing, let's put it that way. And, and then they had a dance one night in the area, oh I guess it was round about October. And of course in those places up in there at that time people came for literally miles, when I say miles I mean 80, 90 miles to this dance which was at the Rock Creek Community Centre which was just up the road about 4 or 5 miles from where I was. Oh my God, I mean, this old boy is out there and he, he started with a little bottle of booze whatever it was. And of course they didn't have it inside the hall but all the men would be nipping outside and having a drink side of the bottle and then coming back in. And of course as, as the evening wore on more and more of the liquor was consumed and the more rowdy it became inside. And yeah, it is something to be in a hall like that. It's the first time I'd ever been where they just had coal oil lamps all the way around the hall, hanging on the walls. And...

HR: What kind of lamps?

RB: Coal oil lamps.

HR: Coal oil, oh.

RB: Yeah, they used coal oil and they—the oil lamps, they had a glass base and you had oil in it and a wick that came up and then there a glass, what do you call them, sort of like a glass cover around the outside to stop the wind from blowing the light out, the candle. And you lit these things and the wick—I'll have to show you. I, I have a couple of them, in fact my cabin that I got —first of all I'm up in where I have my home up in Princeton I have couple of things still left over. I am trying to think of the name they had for the—ah, it doesn't make any different. We used these glass things, of course, then they have the lamps—the incandescent—not—I'll get around to it pretty soon. But they run on gas, like, and have a mantle in them they're little wee tiny.

HR: The kerosene—not the kerosene lamps?

RB: No, not kerosene. No these run on, they run on white gas and they had the little mantles, as they called them, made out of silk, that was it. And you would pump them up and, and they cast a real great light, you got about 300 watts out of these things and they were very good. But anyway, they, they had a couple of these around but then they—talk about this dance and there was a, a three piece band and I think there was a, if I remember, a piano player and I think there was a drummer and somebody playing a violin. But they, they were, you know, quite, people were quite happy to have any kind of noise at all because around that area the only people who had radios, they had to use battery operated type of radio and of course you had to have an aerial that was about 50 feet high and 50 feet long to be able to get any kind of reception. And people would just—they turn these things on in the evening and get the news, and of course the war was just on the go at that time, and they would turn on the radio and listen to the news and then turn it off again because the batteries would be running out as far as the, the power was concerned. And you had to keep charging up the batteries up. Anyway, the—that was one of the incidents—but as I mentioned about this old fellow that (inaudible). The lady I boarded with, of course, she was quite a very, very, friendly person. I enjoyed it and every time she would be baking her own bread, of course, and then they'd make these rolls. And, of course, I really enjoyed them because they were big puffed up and as I say she was very, very good in the cooking. But she would be giving me all the choice pieces of meat and all the rest whenever they were serving a roast or anything like that. And, of course, I always had a serviette and it was always beside my plate nevertheless the family hadn't. But I used to get a kick out—I'd get a kick out of this old dad Henderson; her father, actually. And I would imagine she is a woman about 50-55 years of age, going back to that but...

HR: So she gave you special treatment?

RB: Oh yeah I got special treatment. I got hot water brought into me in the mornings in my bedroom and oh yeah, I was treated like a little king I'll tell you. But one—her youngest daughter was one of the students in Grade 8 in school too so—but I was going to mention about old dad Henderson; he didn't have a serviette beside his plate. So every—so whenever he sat down the first thing I noticed—I'd take a look at him. Here he'd be dragging his handkerchief out of his pocket and draping it across his lap just the same way as I had my serviette thing, but that I was—it was sort of cute in a lot of ways. Then—one other thing that I was going to mention about this first school is that—about the school inspector. Well, they, they had a new one that was for the area. I don't know how far he had to cover, somewhere between Trail and almost right clean over to the, to the Okanagan Valley. But I don't know exactly how many schools or if I had the areas exactly right. But he came in one day, knocked on the door and came in and I didn't know who he was or anything about him and he said, "I'm so and so and I am the school inspector." And I thought—of course, I was about ready to, you know, get down on my hands and knees and bow and scrape and say, "How are you your majesty?" But anyway, he said, well he said, "I'm just here to, you know, make your acquaintance and tell you I'll be back before the end of the year to sort of check on what you're doing and give you a rating and all that." Oh that was fine. He took off and he was reasonably decent, spoke quite well and I was fine and I was

happy. And he took off well, I guess, down the road to two or three other teachers who were down in the next little town. And so I sat on pins and needles, of course, expecting everyday all the through the month of November that he would be showing up again. And that past and he didn't show and then on the, I guess, on about the 4th of December the, the secretary of the school board came over and oh he said, "We got to clean out the school." I said, "Clean out the school?" "Yeah, we've got to get ready for the Christmas concert." Of course, I had sort of been half way warned about this and had some kind of a, a play on the go and, you know, tried to sing songs. But it is pretty tough to sing Christmas carols when only one kid out of ten can, can hold a tune. Nearly all the rest were all monotones. I mean, when you hear "Old King Wenceslas" all in one note, I mean that—you've heard of that song there they have called a "Johnny One Note." Well, these kids were all about the same except the one girl she could hold a tune alright. But—so anyway, we we're trying to practice it. But to carry on my little story, so on the—about the 4th of December he came in he said, "Well we have to take out all the desks," and I said,"Gosh I'm, I'm expecting the school inspector around here anytime now because he hasn't shown up so far." "Well," he said, "that's okay you send him over to see me." I said, "This is 2 weeks that the kids have in here," and he said, "that's their pre Christmas holiday." I said, "Well gosh it's a holiday for you but," "Oh yes," he said, "they have to get all practiced up for their concert because this is a big deal for the area." So it wound up that they took all the desks out and they stored them in the shed they had on the school grounds, and they brought in from the same shed the stage. Well I would say that maybe the school was, I don't know, maybe 10, 15 feet wide and maybe, maybe about 30 feet long. So, I mean, it wasn't a very big school. Big enough for about 10 or 12 desks and that was about it. So they put this stage up and it had this sliding curtain and everything else to go on it. And it was maybe about 5 or 6 feet deep, and then they moved the piano down from one of the other houses. And so the people that owned the piano they, they were the—people had the post outage—the telephone exchange office. Anyway, they came down and they would rehearse with me on the—playing the piano, playing the Christmas carols and the kids were all trying to sing them and they would be in the background sort of helping out. So we put on this concert. Well by the way I must say that every day I get over there fully expecting to see this inspector to come walking in and from all accounts I heard from other people he was a real hard nose when it came to everything. But anyway he—I was just getting scared more and more uptight every day went by and he didn't show up, and he didn't show up and so finally it came the big day of concert which was about the 18th of December by this time, the last day of school, it was a Friday night I think. Anyway, they, they had the Christmas Concert previously—the week previously they had had the concert over in this Rock Creek School and actually in the community hall over there which was much bigger than the school. Of course everybody came for the dance also showed up for this concert because it was about the only big bit of entertainment throughout the whole district for the, for the wintertime. So anyway, then they went to see that and unfortunately the teacher in the other school she had been a little bit smarter than I was and I got this book of plays and she said, "Well here I've got my copy, here you can have this one and then, you know, go ahead and make up a—get a play going for you." Well, it turned out that we both picked the same play, so... [laughter]

HR: Oh, no!

RB: So all these people saw these kids performing one week at the, at the Rock Creek School and then the next week they came over and, and they all crowded into the school where I was and the kids here and going through the same play again. But the (inaudible) entertainment (inaudible) entertainment thing—the kids put on the entertainment from, I guess, from about oh say roughly about 7:30 until about 8:30. And then they had a little bit of an intermission and the kids were all happy as a clam and so on. And then the adults around the area had got together and they put on a concert for the kids. Which was really something because, I mean, again being a deal where they all got together again, you know, for the whole area for about once every year in a way. And of course this was a, a night when they probably hadn't seen anybody else for about a year. So they all sat down after the concert was finished they had Santa Claus come in and doled out the kids' Christmas presents which they had all ordered back in, oh, October I guess. The secretary had come to me the one day and said, "Well, get the kids to write their Christmas letters," and I said, "Well, I don't follow you." "Oh," he said, "We always give them presents," and he said, "they, they all follow the routine, just get them to get their Christmas letters in," And he said, "We'll take care of them. You bring them down to me and I'll take care of them." So it was nice to see all of these letters come to these kids the next day. I said, "Don't forget to write your Christmas letter and we'll have them ready for tomorrow when we come to school." Okay so here we are: "Dear Santa Claus, I will be at the Christmas concert on December the 18th and I hope you'll be there. And I would like—if you would kindly bring me such and such, maybe a pair of skis or something was one of them and you'll find it on page 32 of the Christmas edition of, of the Sears Roebuck catalogue. And it costs so much and so much, the number is this, the number is that." And they would all have it all written up. Of course these people up there all did all their shopping pretty well through the catalogues, either Sears, and well maybe Eaton's catalogues, I guess was the big one in those days. Anyway, it was sort of neat and they of course, when Santa Claus arrived he had all these presents that they had ordered and the kids were happy as clams. So that was one of the things about the first school and then I say, I told you the other day about the fact in the next school I tried to raise some money and had this woman come up and gave me particular heck because I had made out these raffle tickets, and...

HR: Oh, yes.

RB: And, and she figured I was trying to teach kids how to gamble and so on and so. But that was the one thing. Now there was something else I have written down here that I was just going to mention to you. You were asking board—where I had boarded and one thing or another. When I was away from home, of course, we had—the standard rate was $30 dollars a month for room and board and then they did the laundry for you at the same time.

HR: Oh, wow.

RB: [laughter] Yeah, and so I don't know if there is anything else along that line that you wanted to talk about but...

HR: There was a story that you told me, Ralph, the last time we spoke when I was in Vancouver about your—going for the interview, your job interview and needing a jacket when you were at normal school.

RB: Oh yeah, when it was—actually now that, that particular story was the fact that I would—had gone to school all—you have to realize that I had one suit, one suit was all I had. And I used to—that was my going out suit so as the expression goes "going to church on Sunday suit." And I didn't, I didn't wear it in the school all the time and I was wearing a sweater and the principal of the high school had—pardon me, the normal school called me in one day and he said, "Mr. Burton, I hope you realize that you are going to be going out on this practicum, this teaching routine for about a month here," and he said, "I'm afraid," he said, "you're going to have to do a little bit more than wear—just wear that sweater." He said, "You'll have to try to wear a suit or a jacket or something like that." So I was able to—through my dad's contact with the Department of Veteran Affairs, I got up to the Shaunessey Hospital and his friend up there called me and so he said, "I've got some—a lot of stuff here, you can try it on." So I tried on a couple of jackets and I had the jackets and he dug out a pair pants and one thing and another. So I got sort of a combination jacket and pants set up and was able to wear those when I went out on my practice teaching but it was some—a little bit of a squeeze as far as everything was concerned, as far as appearances sake.

HR: So you had to teach with a jacket on?

RB: Oh yes, we had to, had to have a suit or jacket in those days. You didn't walk in with—the way they do now. They seem to walk in with sweat suits and any kind of thing, anything is—shorts and everything else that goes on seems to me, I mean, from what I've seen some the teachers going to schools. And I always say I think the women are far better dressed than the men. But they take things pretty, pretty loosely now as far as the appearance of the teachers as far as I am concerned. And I had a feeling too, Helen, as far as teachers are concerned now they—I think they have a difficult time actually getting new teachers, maybe I'm wrong. But I had a, a patient of mine come in who came in who had his Bachelor of Education Degree. He was a football player as a matter of fact, he played football for the Calgary team and the year that they won the Grey Cup he had been the outstanding player, and was voted the—got what they called the Most Valuable Player award for the Grey Cup game and...

HR: Oh, wow.

RB: Yeah, so he had, he had his his degree of course from an American university but he had been living in Calgary and, and he could—I think he had a teacher's diploma of course. And came on to me and I said, "Well what are doing for a living now?" He says, "I'm delivering

mail." I said (inaudible), he said, "Yeah," he said, "I went out teaching—so I got a job teaching." He said, "I went out," and he said, "I lasted one month because," but he said, "the way the kids," he said, "behave and their attitude and everything else," he said, "I figured if, if I didn't quit," he said, "I certainly would have clobbered one of these kids, you know, to try to make them stay in line." Because he said, "It was—their whole attitude was so, you know, different." Now this is in Vancouver and I don't know what school he was in but of course there are so many schools that are, you know, pretty loose as far as the kids in their attendance and how they behave in school and everything else. So he said, "No," he said, "I am a lot happier just delivering mail right now than I would be if I was teaching." But, but he had been a professional football player, of course he was a rough and ready sort of fellow. But I mean at the same time he figured he would never be able to keep the kids in line even though he had, you know, a reputation and one thing or another he was...

HR: Was that at, at high school or elementary that he was?

RB: I have a feeling that it was high school.

HR: High school. Yes, it is very tough, very tough.

RB: Yeah, but so I—the—now, that was way, way ahead of things as far as I'm concerned but the list of things that you ask about here. I don't know if you want to get back on the time.

HR: Yeah.

RB: I'm down, I'm down to about item 14 it says about the physical up keep of the school. Now, in this—as far as the school up in the interior they had one of the Grade 8 boys—he had the job of getting over to the school early in the morning and lighting the fire and the stove which was right in the middle of the room and that was the only heat that they had. Of course, there was no basement in the school it was just sort of a bungalow type of school and it was just right on the ground. There was just one room and a pipe went through the ceiling and out. A little different than the other school that I got into later on where the kids had—I told you had made a mess out of school and they broke down the stove pipe and put the soot all over.

HR: Right, in Surrey.

RB: Yeah that was in Surrey, but this was before that. As far as one in Surrey as far as the maintenance of the school, the cleaning, there was a man in the first school that I had this Green Timbers School I was telling you about. They had one of the local people who came in and would start the fire and, of course, during the day well we'd just throw in a piece of wood in the stove every so often and keep it going ourselves. And then at night they would come over and sweep out the school and keep it clean and ready for the next day. But the—and then when I moved to—the next year I went down to this other school which I will give you little bit on that

one that is going on right at this time. But it had its own furnace room underneath, it had a full basement underneath and it was a one story building with a full basement above ground, let's put it that way. So that there was an area underneath—in the basement where the kids could play if it was a bad day or if it was raining and all the rest of it they could stay in more or less in the dry. But that particular school is Kensington Prairie School. There is just a big movement on right at this time to—by a group of people who did go to the school at one time and they are trying to keep it as a heritage building. And they are having a big go around with the school board plus the Surrey City Council and just this last couple of days there has been some kind of a deal cooked up between the school board and the city of Surrey and they're trading some ground, some acreage backwards and forwards. And the City will now own this school that now became—has been classified as a heritage building. So it was—that's just right in the works now, so I have just been sitting back and watching that as well.

HR: What was the name of it again, Ralph?

RB: It was called the Kensington Prairie School, it was an elementary school, of course. And in fact I think it was even written up in the Province paper; I saw one little article about it just the other day. Now, at that particular school since it had a basement and so on and it did have a furnace room and the—there was a man just off the edge of the school grounds that had a house there that—and he used to come over and take care of the furnace and keep the fire going and also do the janitorial work at night and clean the school out, sweep it out. You know, and kept it clean.

HR: Okay. Now...

RB: Now—sorry, go ahead.

HR: I was going to say, now in terms of hardship it was the war. But do you remember doing any drills with the children or any—do you remember blackouts or anything like that?

RB: Oh no there was nothing like that at the time. You have to keep in mind that this is right at the first year of the war and they hadn't gotten around to this blackout business or one thing or another. Though the, the major blackout we had that probably you wouldn't know anything about but they had, they had practiced these things for a little while and then all of sudden, boom. The one night they started in real early with the black out and they made sure every light was out. But what they didn't tell anybody was that they had an American army convoy come up from Fort Lewis, Washington which is just south of, south of Seattle. And they moved literally 1000 troops through into Vancouver and the Queen Mary had been—had come in under in darkness and it landed, or at least docked in Vancouver. And they loaded all these American soldiers on to it and, and it was out, gone before daylight. And all during that time they had a complete blackout so that—people could hear these trucks rumbling up the highway but that was the—that was all they ever did here. But they didn't realize until later on that all these American troops had been

loaded onto Queen Mary,and they were taken over I'm not—into the South Pacific somewhere, whether or not they first went to Australia and then north from there into the islands of the archipelago in the south seas there, I don't know. But anyway, that was one of the stories we got out of it later on because of these black outs.

HR: Do you, do you remember what year that was?

RB: No I cannot tell you. I—The story came out and it was just like—when I was flying out of Pat Bay which is, as you know, just up the road there from you, we were, you know, flying all around there all the time. What we didn't know was that at Pat Bay they tell us that there was a Japanese submarine had been sitting there all, all during the war.

HR: Oh really.

RB: Yeah I guess maybe that's a story maybe you haven't heard either. But they, they had a Japanese—of course, the reason they were able to do that was because the Butchart Gardens had all these Japanese gardeners. And I don't know whether they were all sent out up to the interior, you know, they evacuated all the Japanese families and one thing or another regardless of how long they had been in Canada. But that was how they got there in the first place and got the contact how to get in and get off the, the submarine. But we understand that the submarine sat there for most of the war.

HR: Oh I didn't know that. You see how much I learn from you, Ralph. Last but not least, from my end of things do you have any advice for anyone entering teaching today?

RB: [laughter] Well, first of all seeing what's been going on in the, in the—I figure that teaching is a tough job. You know, the trouble is that the kids don't have the respect nowadays, I believe, for the teachers that we had—that they gave us when we were teaching. And I don't know, it's—I see it with my daughter who is 16 and a half years younger than her brother. My son went through school and, I mean, he always—he went in Vancouver and the big schools and one thing or another. And the teachers always got a lot of respect and there was none of this, you know, the hassle and the discipline and one thing or another in the Vancouver schools the way they, they do now. I think that the teachers now have a real tough time, trying—because they can't do anything to the kids. I mean if they even look cross-eyed at them, you know, the old, "Oh my god your harassing me," or whatever. And I think that discipline is a bad—a tough job. And you see these kids going to school nowadays with their baseball caps on and they sit there and that now this big business of the cell phones. They're all playing around backwards and forwards getting calls while cla—while the teacher's trying to teach one thing or another. Well everyday I tell you it's—well, of course, we didn't even know. I mean, we only knew what a telephone was but that's about all—the extent of it. And as, as I was mentioning before a long distance call was really something you saved up for in those days. [laughter] I can remember phoning home to my mother on her birthday one time when I was in the air force and stationed at Saskatoon. And I

phoned her on her birthday and my God she was so excited about, "Oh my gosh, oh just a second," and I said, "Mom I want to—I just phoned to wish you a happy birthday." "It's okay, just a second, just a second, here's Dad, here's Dad." My God she was so excited about the whole thing because it was a long distance call. Yeah and she thought something was wrong or whatever but it, it turned out and all that. I just said, "No, I just wanted to wish Mom a happy birthday and let it go at that." Anyway, as I say these cell phones in school and everything else about that, I would have—I would be standing doing the search—a body search with these kids to make sure that they didn't bring them in. And if they did have them in they would be turned off, there wouldn't be any use of a telephone in the room.

HR: A big shift, a very big shift.

RB: Yeah, well...

HR: Well, do you have anything else you, you think would be important, Ralph, from your experiences?

RB: Well, actually, Helen, I can't—I am answering these questions you have here, I mentioned a few. And then you said, "Financially were you able to manage?" Well as I pointed out to you we got $74 a month for 10 months of the year. It was a long stretch the last cheque in June until you had to go right through 3 months until the end of September before you got any pay cheque again. Out of that $74 dollars the government used to take another—I'm sorry it's—yeah. It was $78 they took $4 off, that was it for this retirement fund, and the rest, pension fund. And so we got $74 dollars but, $30 of it pretty well to room and board. So, I mean, then you've got $44 left. If you had—I happened to have a car when I was down here, but it was only by the fact that I worked for the people in the garage that I was able to get gasoline at a very economical price, let's put it that way. And my upkeep of my car was negligible because of that, the help that I did in the garage for these people. But you had to save up, you had to consider the fact that you were going to have to go over to summer school. There the cost of going over to summer school in Victoria. You had room and board that you had to pay for over there and then the courses that you took and so on.

HR: Did you do, did you do 2 years of summer school, Ralph?

RB: No, I just did the 1 year, Helen, it was just 1940 that I was over there. I taught from—we got out of normal school in '39. We taught, as I say, the fall of '39 up in the interior and then 1940 was the end of the first year and, and so then I put in my application, as I think I mentioned to you, in the air force. And I finished my teaching career, as it were, around April because I was leaving in probably the 1st of April, because I was leaving for the air force in May.

HR: Right.

RB: So—but I'd say, you know, it was—you didn't have excess money to spend when it came to it. I mean, your increments were only about $5 a month. After your first year you got an extra $5 a month the next year to teach. And that's in the, in the area where we—and out here in Surrey. So and then I think I got an extra, I don't know, an extra $5 because I was the principal, which didn't really mean too much. But it meant I had to run over to the school board pick up any supplies, that's about what it amounted to. They didn't deliver them, if you needed something you got hold of the school board and you made your monthly reports for the school board, school board office and then you put in that you needed x number of pen nibs, and they used to supply them in those days. And the kids had to buy their own pencils I think. But then the various little readers and so on and there was a few things that they did supply, but it wasn't that, that much that the school board did have to supply. They did have—of course, they did supply all the textbooks and everything that went with it. But there were some of these things—they didn't—I guess pencils were about the only thing kids had to buy. But they—MacLean's method of writing was—they had these certain type of pens and they used the straight nibs on them and they used to have the ink wells in the, in the desks. And of course they, they supplied the ink which was in the form of a powder and you put so much powder into this big cork bottle and it had a very small opening in it. Then you would—they would go around every night and there would be somebody would go around and fill up all the little ink wells. Of course, as the kids—some of the girls in those days had long hair and braids and one thing or another and the boy behind—that you've probably seen the cartoons about it. They would tip the girls' hair in the ink well and one thing and another. [laughter] So, but as I say the pen nibs were the things that were all—I can remember very distinctly getting them when I was going to school as well and when you got them they all had a coating of oil on them. And they wouldn't hold the ink very well until you had them in your mouth for awhile, you had to suck on them and wipe them all off to get this oil off them. And then put it in your little pen holder and, and then you dipped into your ink well and used it to—naturally to write with. But yeah, it's a—it was a different sort of life than they have nowadays all these ball point pens and of course—when in this writing program that they had, I mean, you had a very definite way to hold the pen, and you had to sit up and you had to supposedly use this muscular movement. In other words, you moved your whole arm. And the way that—just as a point, maybe it has nothing to do with paper; H.B. MacLean was originally was left handed and he wrote left-handed and somewhere along the line he broke his arm very badly and he was still trying to write. And he finally just devised this system of muscular movement where you held the pen at a certain position and on your hand and then you slid on the two finger nails of your little finger and ring finger and you sorted of glided on the—your forearm as it were. That was the whole thing that you used the big muscles to write with; you didn't use your finger movements at all and you didn't move your fingers at all in this system of writing. So everybody pretty well had the same opportunity to learn to write, let's say, legibly. But nowadays, by golly, I mean the kids hold the pen—I was just watching one on T.V. last night and, my gosh, this kid had the pen kinked around in his hand. I don't know how he managed to write with it or even see what he was writing. But the pen was right underneath the palm of his hand somehow. So—but old H.B. MacLean I'd say was, aside from this—I think I mentioned to you previously that he had made an awful lot of money out of this method because it all started, I

mean, had all the little manuals starting, as it were, from Grade 1 where they were printing and all the exercises they had to do while they were printing and then Grade 2 there was another set. And every school in British Columbia used them. And they were supplied and he was drawing royalties off these things like you wouldn't believe. And then as you progressed from Grade 2 to Grade 3 then you were doing more and more writing and then Grade 4 you got down to a smaller type of—smaller size has far has the writing was concerned. And then you carried right through until about Grade 7 or 8 and you were still practicing the writing. Then, and then once you got into high school, of course, you were sort of home free as you were and you went the way you wanted to go. But he, he had all these manuals and they, of course, they were supplied through the provincial government, the Department of Education, of course, to the various school boards to the various schools. So he, he was quite a wealthy man. So he gave lots of opportunities to practice magical tricks. He was quite a slight of hand artist, this little fellow.

HR: And he, he taught you at the Vancouver Normal School?

RB: Yeah, he taught at the normal school, yes. I think that I mentioned that the other day he gave all of us as we came through—he was asking to put in samples for the writing and so on. And he was, you know—you went through all these deals he had developed and all the practicing. And so then he always had about a half sheet of foolscap, I don't know if you remember the foolscap at all. But he had all these pieces of paper just all the same size. So then he would ask everybody to go through these different little exercises that they had and then give a sample of the alphabet and then writing a sentence and one thing or another. And then he'd come back the next class, which would be a week later, and say, "Okay this is—you have achieved Grade 4 level and you've got—your, your handwriting is a little better, you did Grade 6." I had a big argument one day about—I said, "Well it's all fine to do this Mr. MacLean but doesn't it take away from the individuality of things", I mean, so he said, "Well, okay let's do a little test." So he got this other fellow, his name was John Murray I remember that very distinctly, and he, he said, "Okay now John, you put your name up on the board," and so John put his up, and he was one of the better writers. So then I happened to be on the top of the class as far as this concerned, so I wrote and put John's name up on the blackboard as well. For the rest of the class to sit back and look at it and I said, "Well yeah, it is identical." I mean the "J" and "o" and the "h" and "n" were all exactly the same and the same size and everything else. But he said, "Okay now then, let's take a look here," now he said, "see this little twirl down at the bottom where he started a "J"?" I said, "Yeah." "You don't have that you just have sort of a straight line," and he started to pick out all the little differences that he as a writing expert—and he had, he had testified in court many times for identifying people's handwriting and one thing or another. For the usually the prosecutor trying to show that these people had written these letters and so on and he was pretty good at it. But so he was, you know, showing how the, the things were all the same. You had the same tendency to do the same little twirl or finish up your letter at the end of a word the same, same way. It was quite interesting from that point of view to have this pointed out to you so again I had to say, "Well standing back at 20 feet it all looks the same to me but when the closer you got

to it," and everybody could see what he was driving at as far as the fact that there were, there were individual differences.

HR: That's very interesting.

RB: Yes, so be careful now if I have to testify against you for forging my signature. [laughter] It mentioned in here about whether we could manage. You got through but you didn't live extravagantly as far as with the money you were getting in those days. But, I mean, it is considerably different I know now as far as the pay is concerned. People used to say, "Oh yeah, I mean, well you only work 5 days a week," and I'd say, "yeah, well I work only work 5 days a week at the school but then I have to do a lot of other preparation." We did not have in any of the schools that I was at other than the Vancouver schools where it was a big school where they had I forgot how many teachers, maybe 20 or 30 teachers in a school. Where I did my practicum teaching during—when I was at normal school and they had one of these Gestetner machines. I don't know if you have heard the word.

HR: Yes, they were there when I started teaching.

RB: Oh okay. You crank on the handle and you can run out the number of copies of whatever you needed, 20 or 30 for the class.

HR: In purple ink, in purple in I think. Was the ink purple when you were using one?

RB: Well, no I didn't have one of these.

HR: Oh I see.

RB: I never had one in any school I was in outside of when I was doing this practicum in the school. So what we had was these gelatin type of reproducing things. I don't if you have ever seen it. It's about as big as a good sized...

HR: Cookie sheet.

RB: Cookie sheet, exactly, you've seen them?

HR: I haven't seen them, Ralph, but so many people have told them about them. I would love it if we could find some somewhere. [laughter]

RB: [laughter] Well, what it amounted to was it was a cookie sheet filled with gelatin and then you wrote out your quiz or whatever it was or any kind of essay or whatever you wanted to produce. And you wrote it out in this purple ink and then you laid it on top of this gelatin. And you let it sink in for a certain length of time and then you peeled it off and then you took your

blank sheets of paper and pressed it over top this gelatin. And it would reproduced back onto the test sheet or whatever it was if you were writing—had a test that you were going to give the kids or whatever. And that was the way you made all different copies. And usually it wound up that you only had one for your school and then you would have to take it into the kitchen and of course in those days—we're back in the dark ages, you have to remember. [laughter] Everybody had wood stoves in the kitchen and so you would put this on the top of the stove and then it would melt the gelatin down and then you had to very, very carefully take it off the stove because the stuff was, you know, real liquid. Well it was just a real jelly, liquid jelly, as it were—and put it over and let it cool again and once it got cooled off then you could reuse it because by this time the, the purple ink that you have embedded into it had melted or at least shrunk down with the heat and dropped out. So you could reuse this stuff once the gelatin got hard again. Yeah, it was quite, quite a deal, but the trouble is it was very, very slow, so, I mean, if you only had one of these things, I mean, you could only do one bit of duplicating a night.

HR: Mm-hmm. I wonder what kind of ink that was, what kind of pen...

RB: Well the pen was any kind a—you just used these ordinary steel pens that we had in the schools. A regular ink pen—excuse me not ink pen it was a definite type of indelible—and it was a purplely looking stuff. I can recall it quite distinctly. And all the printing, of course, came back purple at you on the sheets that you were duplicating. Yeah, you just wrote it out just the same way you would anything else. And when it got put onto the plate, of course, on this gelatin thing and it would be backwards and then of course when you put the paper back over top of it then it would print out in the correct way, so the way you had put it down.

HR: Oh yes. So I guess you didn't do too many copies like that though because of the, the time it took. It must have been very time consuming.

RB: Exactly so, I mean, if you had—I, you see, used them probably for tests, we'll say. But the majority of time whenever you're giving a test in school, I mean, you just write all the questions on the blackboard. But if there was something else that you wanted the kids to do or whatever you would make out one of these duplications and duplicate the thing that you wanted duplicated, let's put it that way. But I guess I—what I think mostly I was making questions and you have the blanks on the statements and they had to fill in the correct word to make the statement read correctly and things like that and they would fill it in and then you would mark it as part of the test I guess.