Interview: Elsie Dean (ED)
Interviewer: Al Cornes (AC)
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Transcription: Pam Moodie

AC [00:00:05] Welcome to Elsie Dean. And she is a teacher, a community leader, and she has got a proud and impressive history to her in all the things that she's done. And so for that reason, we're very thrilled to hear about those things. And we're here, we're thrilled that you're here to tell us about them. So how are you?

ED [00:00:29] I'm fine, thank you.

AC [00:00:31] You're good. Okay. So we're going to go through these questions more or less chronologically, but sometimes you'll remember something later in the middle of the conversation. By all means, remind us or tell us about that. So let's just start off. When and where were you born, Elsie?

ED [00:00:49] I was born in northern Saskatchewan. A town called Hillside. Doesn't exist anymore. In 1924.

AC [00:01:04] Okay. And so tell us a little about your family, and your upbringing, and what was your family doing in Hillside in 1924?

ED [00:01:16] Well, my father came from Middle England in 2000— in 2004.

AC [00:01:27] In 1904.

ED [00:01:29] 1904. Okay. And he got what they called free land. As many English people did. They came to Canada and of course the land really belonged to the Cree Nation. But we all know about colonialism and how they stole the land from the people. So he was very fortunate. He came from quite a well-to-do family. And I think he and the others that came with him felt they wanted to get out of England. They could see the war coming, the First World War. So, and he wanted. He admired the Aboriginal people, the Cree people and how they lived. So he came. My mother came to Canada with her mother in 20, in 1912. And she came to the same place that my father lived in because her brother was there. He had also emigrated. So there they were sitting on the land that they had been given. They felt very fortunate. So they proceeded to be farmers. They had a quarter section. And of course, it was a very difficult proposition. But in the late '20s when the, just before the Depression, they called it the Roaring Twenties. It was supposed to be everybody was well-to-do and happy. But for farming, the Depression began, not in 20, 1929, but in 1927 or even before. And my father had bought brand new farm machinery, but he had to, he didn't have enough money from his inheritance to, to pay the whole thing, so he borrowed from the bank. Of course, when the Depression hit, he couldn't make the payments. So the bank demanded either the money or the machinery back. So they had to come and take the machinery. So, the first thing, my mother drove them off the land. My mother was very sparky. She had learned to dislike wealthy people because she and her sister had raised four siblings by doing dressmaking. So she didn't have much use for rich people. Anyway, that was the beginning of, of my life. And I learned so much from that. From having strong parents who could survive that terrible Depression. My mother had, they had eight children. I was the seventh. And, of course, there were no hospitals,

no doctors, nothing. So they had no— my mother delivered most of the babies by herself and. She also became, she was a nurse in London, so she became the country doctor. Neighbours would come and get her to deliver their babies, fix their wounds, whatever. Because nobody had cars and they couldn't go to the hospital in North Battleford. Okay, then. So there they were. So all my siblings and myself, we were just happy to leave Saskatchewan because all we knew was Depression and—

AC [00:06:29] Well, you had a tough time on the farm. Your father obviously wasn't a farmer, but learned how to become one.

ED [00:06:37] Well, yeah, we became one. Yeah, they were raw land.

AC [00:06:43] He had the raw land and it was a tough place because it wasn't rich prairie soil like the South.

ED [00:06:49] No. it was rocky, sandy. It was beautiful there. But, you know, we had little lakes all around us.

AC [00:07:01] Right. And then, of course, because there's no health care, your mother becomes the health department where the hospital is, because it wasn't just the distance, it was also the people that had to pay. And certainly in the middle of the Depression, no one had any money at all.

ED [00:07:18] Nobody could go to the hospital or have a doctor. But even getting there, we were about 30, 40 miles from North Battleford. We had no cars, so it took a long time with the horse and buggy.

AC [00:07:40] Absolutely. Now, tell me. Your family was pretty progressive, it sounds like. Your father had been, you know, reasonably well off. But what was the— it was a progressive family, right?

ED [00:07:56] Oh, my mother. As I say, she learned to dislike wealthy people because they weren't nice to her and yeah, so we, the siblings, we all learned from her about wealthy people, and why they didn't really own what they said they owned, that they had stolen it from us. We learned that early in our lives.

AC [00:08:37] Yeah. So. So the wealthy, the wealthy people of Canada were no better than the wealthy people of England.

ED [00:08:44] I guess not.

AC [00:08:45] Probably that that's a, and so, yes. And so when you're serving people and doing seamstress work and all that kind of thing, you've obviously got people have got more money than you do and they have that sense of entitlement that they can tell you what to do and you have to—

ED [00:08:59] Yeah. Well, yeah. And, and so we all grew up with the idea that working people were not being treated well and that, you know, that they weren't getting their fair share. And I remember getting a letter from my sister and she had been on a picket line protesting the shipment of scrap metal to Japan. That was in '35, '36. And I was so proud of her because I thought, oh, she's standing up for working people.

AC [00:09:54] Let's just go back a little bit and talk a little bit about your schooling in Saskatchewan. What was your schooling like in Hillside?

ED [00:10:03] We had a little school and it was all grades, Grade One to Grade Eight, in one classroom. And so you just got along. I remember once a teacher had over 50 kids, One to Grade Eight, and she was marvelous. She could handle us really well. But you couldn't imagine what kind of skills she had to have.

AC [00:10:40] Yeah.

ED [00:10:41] Yeah. And after that, you had to take Correspondence. So I took a couple of years of Correspondence and that was the end. So that would be Grade Ten in those days.

AC [00:10:58] And that was sort of what a lot of people had. You know, a lot of working people kind of finished grade ten and that was it. Because you needed, you didn't have the resources to do other things.

ED [00:11:11] No, you were sitting there on this, on the land, living off the land, by the way, some of the time. And so, yeah, you did what you could. So after that I, I got a job in the town called Bresaylor. And I looked after a household and kids for my room and board and $10 a month, because I wanted to save money and go to finish my high school, which I did in North Battleford. So I did get my high school.

AC [00:11:58] Congratulations. So that was somebody who really— you were really someone who wanted to get that education. And that meant a lot of hard work on your part to get there.

ED [00:12:08] It did, yeah. Yeah.

AC [00:12:10] That wasn't an easy job helping somebody in the family. So, it sounds easy, but it was probably a lot of work and that work went on for 24 hours a day if you're living with them.

ED [00:12:21] Right. Get the mail in the morning from the train, because they had a store, you know, a store. Anyway, that that was fine. I got through my high school. Then I heard from, that I had some brothers coming through on the train. Because all my brothers, of course, were unemployed all through all of that. You know, they'd get seasonal work, and then they all rode the freight and you know, all that part of it. So when I heard they were coming through, I somehow got a ticket and I jumped on the train and came to B.C.

AC [00:13:10] Okay. Tell us a little bit about that. And what, that was, 1942? Was that when you moved to Vancouver?

ED [00:13:21] About that, yeah.

AC [00:13:22] Okay. So, 1942, you moved to Vancouver. So you go from Hillside to Vancouver, or Bresaylor, depending on where you were at the time, to Vancouver, which is quite a different scene. So what was life in Vancouver like? Were you in Vancouver? Were you living in Vancouver or are you in North Vancouver or, you were in Vancouver?

ED [00:13:43] Yeah, I had a sister in North Van, and so I went and stayed with her for a little while. Yeah, it was the most amazing thing to land in Vancouver and North Vancouver, and the streets were filled with people. Shifts going on to the shipyard, and shifts coming off. And you know, for me, that was the most amazing sight, to see all of these people and rushing to work and from work. So it was, I was just so excited.

AC [00:14:29] So this is North Vancouver. And so you're living with your sister and uncle there?

ED [00:14:40] Mm hmm.

AC [00:14:40] So what did you do then? What work did you take on?

ED [00:14:44] Well, when I got a job in a sawmill on the North Shore, Capilano area, it was a gyppo sawmill. It wasn't a great big one, but it was fair enough. And it was owned by a Czechoslovakian who had— he was Jewish and he managed to escape the Nazi takeover of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia and bring his money, and his family, and he owned this sawmill. So I worked for him. He was a very nice man to work for, but I was a shipper in the office. So I did all the invoicing of lumber. Unfortunately, MacMillan Bloedel, the big lumber company, had somehow gotten the mill from off him. It was a usual deal that businesses made as they expanded. They basically, he knew they stole it from him. Anyway, one day I was in my office working and in came the boss of MacMillan Bloedel who had taken over the mill. Now I— and he came up to me with a furious face. He was all red and angry. Because he had just learned that the workers were in a union, the IWA, of course. And he said to me, "You are fired for organizing a union. And you will never work in the lumber industry again." He was furious. I wasn't perturbed because I knew there were lots of jobs. But anyway, that was the end of that job.

AC [00:17:22] So? So. So how did you become involved in the IWA?

ED [00:17:26] Oh, I, I was a union person right away. Before I left Saskatchewan, you know, we had to listen to Tim Buck on the radio and all this stuff. So, I was very class-conscious, if you like.

AC [00:17:44] Right. So it naturally fit that you would be a member of a union and you would get—

ED [00:17:51] See, I had actually talked to all the workers about the union. I had gone and got pamphlets and distributed them, and of course, the workers had decided to join the union. So somebody told him that I had, what I had done, you see. I guess they must have, that's how he knew. And, he learned. So that's why all the anger.

AC [00:18:28] So Elsie, what happened in the end? Did, did the union stay inside this little, well, plant now owned by MacMillan Bloedel?

ED [00:18:38] As far as I know, it stayed. That plant is huge today. The operation. Yeah. But the fact is, I immediately got a better job in another gyppo logging company. This logging company was on Vananda Island, on Texada Island, Vananda. They had a camp there. Because in those days, a lot of logging workers had to go and live in a camp. I had the opportunity then to take the boat ride once a month up to Vananda, and living in the camp with the workers and doing all the bills and, paying the bills and, making the payroll, which for me was very exciting, very interesting.

AC [00:19:50] Okay. And was that, was that operation unionized at all?

ED [00:19:56] No.

AC [00:19:57] No. It was the little gyppo company that was just working off Texada, and—

ED [00:20:04] Yeah, probably 25 or 30 workers.

AC [00:20:07] Right.

ED [00:20:08] Yeah.

AC [00:20:09] Okay, so let's carry on. Is there? One thing I forgot to mention, Elsie, and you can tell us about that. When you were working in North Vancouver, the logs were coming from Haida Gwaii and they were huge trees that were brought in, I presume, on booms, log booms. And just tell us a little bit about that. And it sounded like a little amazing story because I think it also involved dynamite. So tell us the story.

ED [00:20:42] Yes, they, these big cedar logs. And I guess the mill bought some and they got, they were in the water and they couldn't get them up into the mill, so they had to blast them apart. They were huge, like, you know, 15, 20 feet around and of course. Yeah.

AC [00:21:08] No, that's quite that's, that's amazing. A cedar tree, here, is incredibly expensive now and they wouldn't been the size of two, two trailers or something like in the trunk, it was just something that was hard to see. I mean, it was, but it was huge, right? It was just an unbelievable size.

ED [00:21:33] Oh, yeah. But, you know, the waste was incredible in those days.

AC [00:21:40] Yes. Yes. And it didn't get a whole lot better for quite some time. Okay. So then one of the other jobs that—

ED [00:21:50] After that I heard of a group going on war reconstruction in Europe. And so, I joined that group. So in 1948, I went to Europe on the war reconstruction. The first, we went to France, then we were travelling to Poland and we had to go through Germany. And when we got to Warsaw, the train, we could get off the train. Otherwise, you see, they were negotiating the settlement of the Second World War. And they wouldn't allow anybody into Warsaw at that time. So anyway. There were five zones. And they were dividing up, they called it, the spoils of the war.

AC [00:23:04] These five zones of the war, which were U.S., Soviet, Britain. France.

AC [00:23:11] Yes. Yes.

ED [00:23:13] Okay. There were five. Yes.

AC [00:23:16] Okay.

ED [00:23:18] Anyway, we went on to Poland and Warsaw, and that was a shocker. You know, we thought we knew about the war. I had watched several movies were made of the war time. And I, I felt I knew. But, when you land in a city that has been totally destroyed,

and you know it. You really see. Because you can imagine the suffering that went on. And so I became a ardent peace worker ever after. It seemed to me that peace was the thing we had to have in the world if we wanted to progress. Anyway, so it was an interesting experience. We went to all of the European. We went from Poland to, I don't know, Czechoslovakia, several countries where we worked. In Poland, we were. I remember standing, chipping cement off bricks and, and I thought, "Gee, it seems to be it'd be better if they built it in a different place," cause there was nothing much left, but they were determined. I spoke to a young woman whom I befriended and she said, "No, we're going to build it, you know, in it's traditional fashion."

AC [00:25:04] Okay. They weren't having anything modern there. They wanted to restore it, maintain the history and maintain the heritage. And even if that involved a lot more work.

ED [00:25:12] Yeah. And, of course, while we were there, we did some travelling around. We went to, that part of Germany. We went to Death Camps. That was, you know, you say, "Hey, we've lost our sense of humanity", when you see what the Nazis did. And, of course that's why we got in our Constitution that we have a right to say what they do to our bodies, was because the Nazis did such horrible things, in experimentation on people's bodies. So.

AC [00:26:07] Yeah. And it's justified on the basis of superior race and ownership of someone else's body.

ED [00:26:15] Yeah.

AC [00:26:15] Now, you were, you were mostly then in the Soviet sector. Is that where you were?

ED [00:26:20] That's right. Yeah. Right.

AC [00:26:23] And that sounds like a book, Elsie. It sounds like we could probably interview for hours just on your, your stay in Eastern Europe.

ED [00:26:34] Well, I can hit on a surprise. We were. In Czechoslovakia we were building, rebuilding roads in a little town called Lidice, which had been totally destroyed, and bulldozed, and the people were pushed into a mass grave right there. Nothing left. But the Czechs were determined to rebuild. So there we were, pushing cartloads of dirt to rebuild the roads. Anyway, that was one incident. Another incident that was interesting in that trip was when the. We, we were to come back. We had paid our way on a ship to come back from Yugo—somehow, Yugoslavia. I don't know why, but anyway. The Yugoslavs cancelled that trip. They were fighting with the Russian administration, the Soviet Union administration, because they had their own idea about how they wanted to rebuild their country. And somehow, in the quarrel, they refused to let us come into their country. So we were stuck in Hungary for a long time.

AC [00:28:15] So the Yugoslavs saw you as allies of Stalin or something?

ED [00:28:18] I guess so, yeah.

AC [00:28:19] So, in the meantime, which you weren't necessarily. It was just you were there and they saw you as not contributing to their effort, but to somebody else's effort.

ED [00:28:29] Yeah, they didn't want—

AC [00:28:32] You didn't get to land and that didn't get sorted out for a little while after that, probably a period. What year were you there? Was this? '48, '48 still?

ED [00:28:40] Yeah, we had to borrow money from the Hungarian government to pay for a boat ride from Genoa, Italy.

AC [00:28:54] Wow! That's, that's, that whole thing itself is amazing. But that, of course was the year I think, when Tito sorted out his relationship with Stalin and they kind of moved on. For a whole lot of reasons. Okay, So all of this stuff, let's kind of stop here. How did all the culmination of your work up to this point and your travels overseas shape your political views of the world? Did that sort of— did you see it evolving and changing over that period of time?

ED [00:29:27] Oh, for me, yes. I became ever more determined that I was going to work for a change in the system. But there was one more incident. We did get a small ship from Genoa. And on that ship were admitted Nazis that we fought with. They were coming to Canada and we couldn't understand. Nazis were supposed, especially SS troopers were supposed to be investigated. But anyway, there they were, coming to Canada. We had some very, fights with them. Just verbal, of course. Well, that I thought was an interesting thing.

AC [00:30:31] I think it probably depended a whole lot in how high up and how public you were in the SS as to whether you were caught by the legal system. And so somebody in the SS would have had responsibility for a concentration camp or any variety of things they could have been responsible for. So that— it's kind of shocking, but it did happen, I know from the history I've read on it.

ED [00:30:57] And, of course, then when I came home, I got a job with the Local 213 of the IBEW, the Electrical Workers. And of course, the Cold War, as we called it, was raging anti-communism. Peace worker, you were a communist if you're a peace worker and, you know, it was a nasty time. That was— unbelievable things happened. And one of those unbelievable things was that one day, went in the office, walked a representative of the international union headquarters in the U.S. And they had come because they said we, we had communists on our board. So what they did is they took over the IBEW Local 213 and they fired the business agent, Bill Gee, and banned him from ever working in the industry, which stuck. He never worked in the industry. Then they banned others for 15 years. And to me, I couldn't understand how a democratic country could allow such a thing to happen. But anyway, that was a long story.

AC [00:32:54] It was a long story— that was George Gee, was it?

ED [00:32:58] Yeah.

AC [00:32:58] Yeah. George Gee. Right. Yeah. So he was the business agent and he ended up having to leave British Columbia and go to Alberta and pull up his roots in Vancouver. And again, a shocking thing all through the McCarthy International red baiting, red-prosecuting efforts from the US.

ED [00:33:25] It was awful. So I was very active in the peace movement then. Very active.

AC [00:33:31] Okay. Though, in the meantime, I have to say, you were married.

ED [00:33:36] Yes. I got married and was raising children.

AC [00:33:41] You were raising children in the middle of quite a bit of this, right? So IBEW, you worked there and then after that, is that? What happened after you're working in the IBEW?

ED [00:33:55] That's when I got married and raising children. So I didn't work in the— for wages. Until. No. When I, then I got divorced after many years, and I decided to go to university and get my teaching degree. So I packed up the three kids and went to Nelson and went to the Catholic University. Very interesting. Very good university. Got my teaching degree.

AC [00:34:39] So, yeah. Okay. So you weren't required to be a Catholic to go to Notre Dame. Is that right?

ED [00:34:43] Pardon?

AC [00:34:46] You weren't required to be a Catholic to go to Notre Dame. That was, it was an open, publicly funded university or something. I can't quite remember.

ED [00:34:54] Well, it wasn't publicly funded when I was there, but it became publicly funded shortly after.

AC [00:35:04] Right. Okay. And so you ended up in Nelson for a while, and then from there you moved back to Vancouver. Is that right?

ED [00:35:14] I did get a job in Trail for one year, and I quit that because it was not a good situation.

AC [00:35:25] The teaching situation. The teaching situation wasn't good.

ED [00:35:28] No.

AC [00:35:29] So out of curiosity, Elsie, what— you were elementary or secondary or?

ED [00:35:35] No, I was secondary, based on my office experience for many years. And they always found it difficult to get Commercial teachers. [unclear] was okay. They always got them for accounting, but for typewriters, shorthand and all of these things.

AC [00:36:05] All those other quote unquote, [unclear] skills.

ED [00:36:08] I was lucky, I got a job. And it turned out that the job was to teach, in particular, two classes of students who had really been rejected by the system and put in one class. So there was, I think, about 30 boys in one class and 32 boys in the other class. And I was doing fine, I thought. I get along with these kids very well and. But I was not following their particular rules. I was supposed to send, if anybody acted up— if any of the students acted up, I was to send them to the principal. The principal would haul out the strap. They still had the strap and they would go to strap these kids. Of course, the kids would tell them to F off and off they'd go. And then the school was rid of them. Well, I almost had a nervous breakdown.

AC [00:37:32] And it's pretty tense because, you see, this philosophy isn't going anywhere. It's only destroying people, not educating them.

ED [00:37:41] And they harassed me because I had all these boys and then the end of the year was coming. So that was up. So then I went to Vancouver.

AC [00:37:53] Okay, so you moved to Vancouver, and were you in Vancouver, Richmond or—

ED [00:37:59] Um, I moved to North Vancouver at that time.

AC [00:38:06] Okay. And you had a teaching job in Vancouver? North End? Richmond?

ED [00:38:11] Yeah, I got a job. Actually, my sister, who was a teacher, and her husband, had started what I call the private school. It was a non-profit school because we had ideas about education, we thought we wanted to experiment with, so I taught there for a couple of years. Then I got a job in Richmond because the other didn't pay enough to look after three kids.

AC [00:38:48] Exactly.

ED [00:38:51] Okay. So then I got a job in Richmond in, I think was '72 or '74 or something like that.

AC [00:39:02] Yeah. okay.

ED [00:39:04] And that was. I was there and just doing my job when, you know, remember the Solidarity Movement?

AC [00:39:20] Yes.

ED [00:39:21] In about '77, I think, there was a big demonstration. And the head unions called on everyone, union or not, to join this demonstration in solidarity because the government was doing terrible things there. That we couldn't accept.

AC [00:39:45] So 1983.

ED [00:39:47] No, that was the big one. This was [unclear] I believe. And so I, I heeded the call to walk off my job. Now, I understand nobody else walked off their jobs. So I headed downtown Vancouver, and I was at Granville and Hastings and all of these different contingents that were east, west and north came marching up into the centre of Vancouver. Was the most exciting moment! To see the unity, because I knew at this time that you had to have unity. You had to have more people wanting change. Anyway, that was exciting. Yeah. And then in '83 came the big demonstrations.

AC [00:40:51] So I'm still struggling a little bit to remember '77. Was this the complaints about wage and price controls by the federal government?

ED [00:40:59] Yeah. And of course, control the unions and everything.

AC [00:41:06] Okay. And then you were involved as well in the 1983 Solidarity.

ED [00:41:12] Yeah.

AC [00:41:14] Because the teachers were in the centre of it. Tell us just a little bit about that.

ED [00:41:21] Well, myself, I was just a member of the supporting public when this came up. And, you know, so disappointed when they settled because I didn't feel we'd won anything in particular. But, of course, we had. We had made a statement. We will not accept these kind of moves. So that was good. It was a great event.

AC [00:42:01] Okay. Anything else to say about your activism as the teacher— I'll get on to all the other stuff, I'm just finishing—

ED [00:42:11] Yeah. I was not that active but I always talked to people about the union necessity and, once I got, people persuaded me to run to go to the, the annual convention and I got elected. That was about my activity in the Teachers' Union.

AC [00:42:42] Yeah. No. And Elsie just, I should say, I was, in the late '70s sitting on the BCTF's Executives and I did. I knew your name, you know, so if somebody said, Elsie Dean, I would say, "Oh yeah, she's a Richmond teacher and she probably voted for me." So there you go.

AC [00:43:04] Okay, let's just sort of carry on, just a little bit. That was that. But you actually were involved in many, many social justice activities and the list is quite long. In fact, Tom Sandberg described you in his 19, or his 2015 interview with you, as one of the founders of the social justice community in British Columbia. And I think that's probably true but I look at this list because it's got Council of Canadians, 411 Senior Centre, Women Elders in Action, the World Peace Forum Society and the Voice of Burnaby Seniors and the Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan. And so it's hard to know— just a little bit about that. First of all, what kind of motivated those things? And let's take a little one like the the World Peace Forum Society. What, what brought you into your activism there, in the Peace Movement?

ED [00:44:12] Well, of course, my realization that the biggest enemy we have is war. And so I wanted to put my energy into trying to build peace. The peace movement, because that was so important. So I used to even go door to door, talking to people about peace. I joined all the different groups and just kept busy.

AC [00:45:00] You're a women who had nothing to do, right? So, go out and organize a little revolution opposing the, spreading the peace movement. So that, of course, was at the height of the Cold War, particularly.

ED [00:45:12] Oh, it was awful, yeah.

AC [00:45:15] An awful period where you kind of. Well, you were fearful that the bomb would go off and that would be it. And that was threatened at many points. To kind of raise public support and get public attention you put together with some other women a Ban the Bomb float for the PNE Parade. So just tell us a little bit about that.

ED [00:45:44] Oh, yes. It was Jeanette Rankin and I. We worked to build a float, we called it, to go in the parade. And one of the floats we built was, we got an old mattress and some

wire and we made an atomic bomb— or a replica, and we put our kids sitting on the truck, under this atomic bomb. And as it went along the street, you could hear it. I mean, it was kind of a rush of silence. Because it was pretty awful. It wasn't— we never did it again. Its sometimes not a good idea to shock people.

AC [00:46:43] So it's probably what people believe but you normally wouldn't go to the PNE Parade in the last weekend in August to see people making a political statement on such a thing that affected people so much and so, yes, okay. So you weren't invited back, but you obviously did other things with speech, peace marches and—.

ED [00:47:11] Oh, yeah.

AC [00:47:13] All the sorts of things that.

ED [00:47:14] The next year, you know, there was a bigger group. We built a very beautiful float with flowers, and we won a prize. So we were back.

AC [00:47:27] Okay. You kept the opportunity, you just turned it into a slightly different vehicle with the messaging. So, as well there's a little thing about, you did some street canvassing for money for the Vietnamese during the American war in Vietnam. So tell us a little bit about that.

ED [00:47:48] Oh, yeah. We had an organization actually to, you know, to support the Vietnamese people, let's put it that way. And, I tried to stop the war, of course. We had Dr. Engels was in the group and he proposed that we try to build a hospital. And so we started collecting money to build a hospital in Vietnam during the war. And doctors must have been very generous because we did raise the money. And we built a hospital.

AC [00:48:42] Now. So this hospital was built in North Vietnam, is that right?

ED [00:48:47] Yes.

AC [00:48:47] Yes. Okay. Okay.

ED [00:48:50] That was, that was good. We also, the same kind of group with the, we had what we called, was to try to make friends, to point out that the Russian people were good people, it was just a different system. So I took a group to the Soviet Union at that time. We had a wonderful time. Yeah, it was fine. But, you know, the Russian people are good. They are good. We had a great time. But you know, I was condemned in my community for being a Communist.

AC [00:49:47] As were many others. So just to change a little bit, some of the focus, you also got yourself involved in BROKE or the Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan. That's when you were living in Capitol Hill in Burnaby. And what, what motivated you there?

ED [00:50:11] Well, I was, I was interested, of course, in the environment and what we were doing, and we had formed a small group in Burnaby, a couple of professors, and we were trying to promote the idea that we had to look after the environment. And so I was so very conscious about it. So when I heard they were going to bring this pipeline in and enlarge the tanks, to hold oil, I thought, "No, they can't do that in Burnaby! There's a lot of people live here." Anyway, I went around and found two or three friends I knew were

interested in the environment and we formed BROKE. And you know the story from then on. They're still going on.

AC [00:51:16] Yeah, it's still a story and it's kind of ongoing and still continues in terms of various kinds of protests around the pipelines.

ED [00:51:25] Anyway, there's another interesting thing I did for my peace work when I was older. I joined a group of women I admired and who are quite, very much for peace. And they were part of what they called the International Women's Movement for Peace and Justice, which was formed in 2000— in one thousand and fifteen (eds: 1915), during the First World War. And these women were trying to get their husbands and fathers to stop fighting in Europe. So anyway, this was a very old organization for peace, and I joined it because I really loved the women who were part of that. And in 1995 they, the International Women's Movement, had persuaded the authorities that we needed a women's gathering, world gathering. And for some reason this women's gathering was in Beijing, China. And the international, the Women's Movement in Europe, organized and rented a Russian train because the Soviet Union was gone, in 1995. So, they were in bad shape but I guess these people had their, their train and they didn't know what to do with it. And this women's group rented it and we travelled all through Europe, for about three months, and we were going to Beijing to the Women's Conference. We had some very interesting— and as we travelled, I realized there's something wrong, there's something wrong with this group. The leaders were not very— the rest of us seemed to be just there, for no reason, and the leaders never took us into their conferences. They seemed to separate from us. So I knew something was wrong but when they got, when we got to Bulgaria and we were on the Black Sea, and suddenly a big U.S. or NATO warship pulled up into the dock. And I was standing on the street and contingent after contingent of sailors came off this big ship. This is in 1995. And they were immaculately dressed, contingents in black. contingents in blue and white. It was a amazing sight. And I couldn't understand, "why are these U.S. troops being paraded through the city?" Well, of course, I came to the conclusion the whole operation of renting the train, getting people to join was a CIA trick. They were travelling around organizing in these different countries. So that was very interesting to me. You learn so much when you travel like that.

AC [00:55:48] Yes, exactly. Obviously didn't change your view about any of that stuff. It just reinforced it, I assume. Okay. Let me just talk a little bit about your move to Haida Gwaii. So you moved to Haida Gwaii a number of years ago, with the rest of your family. And I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about how that has influenced your thinking about our relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

ED [00:56:27] Yeah. I moved here with my daughter in April 2018. So it's not all that long, about five years. Because her two children had chosen, they were adults, they had chosen to be Haida which, their father was Haida, which meant they could belong to the Haida Nation. So these two wanted to belong to the Haida Nation. And Karen had been very, they had been coming up here for a long time. So she wanted to move and live here. She had, she was hired by the Haida Nation, first. And, so here we, we sold our house in Burnaby and built a house in Haida Gwaii. And here we are. So it was quite a move for me. I liked the city. I liked all the activity and, but, you know, I was getting pretty old and so, it was fine, you know. This is a very beautiful place. I have always held a very sympathetic spot, or what ever you call it, for the Indigenous people, because, you know, I grew up knowing about Indigenous people and what had happened to them, because they were all around us on the farm. And my father was very friendly with the Indigenous people. So, to me, I never had any feelings that they were extremely different than we

were. They had the same feelings, the same needs, everything else. So of course, today, I am very, I keep in touch with their particular negotiations with this world, of the United Nations, which is really part of a big world government thing there going on. There is no question that the Indigenous people now are being, really seem to be the only ones who are really fighting to preserve a viable environment. They are opposed to mucking with too much technology, in trying to fix what we've done to the environment. They are very opposed to that. They have their own plans, and if you get on their web sites like there's Focus on the Global South. As the Far East, all of the countries the indigenous people are organized and they have made a statement on where they're going with the environment. I'm with that.

AC [01:00:26] Well, their collective position in the world is similar, right? As you look at, around the world what's happened to Indigenous peoples. There's a kind of a united approach because their conditions are much more common than would be the case in the class systems of the European countries and etc. The other point I just wanted to raise was in your early childhood in Saskatchewan, do you have any recollections about the schools, the Residential Schools for children, Canadian children, which had been in place across the country since the 1870s but were present in Saskatchewan?

ED [01:01:23] Oh, yes. I remember, my mother, being a nurse was, you know, became the country doctor, I said. But anyway, she and her sister talked about the residential school in North Battleford. And I, I remember them saying that they were murdering children in that school. They were aware of it at that time. That was, you know, in the '30s. So, you know, it's amazing that it could go on so long.

AC [01:02:13] Yes. And we're only just getting to the edges of that right now. We're starting to see the the depth and the significance and the numbers and the, yeah, its ah, interesting to know. And here you're talking about, of course, this would have been probably sometime between 1924 and 1934. So, you know, in your—

ED [01:02:40] Yeah.

AC [01:02:41] We're talking about this in the in the 1920s and we know about it in the 1920s. And it seemed to be the best answer, which is to take the children away so that we could take the Indian out of them, or whatever the expression was of the day, which is totally bizarre. However, let me bring you kind of to this point, which is, if you, Elsie, were to give advice to young people who are starting out today, and particularly young women, what would you tell them?

ED [01:03:25] Ha, ha, that's difficult! First, I'd talk to them about the situation today and particularly the dangers of nuclear weapons, which are more with us today. And they're making smaller nuclear weapons so they can use them, and they're being threatening Russia and they're threatening China, and China and Russia are threatening them. I would say, that the most important thing is to try to make them stop preparing for war, which is taking a big chunk of our finances and our resources. That we cannot improve if we keep on doing what we're doing today. There has to be a change or there's going to be one of the biggest calamities that people have ever known. That's my [unclear].

AC [01:04:47] That's your, that's your [unclear], I guess, because of your activism on environmental issues, what would you say about those?

ED [01:04:55] Well, I'd say, listen carefully to the Indigenous movement. Read their statements. Read what they're demanding. Get to know it, know where it differs from what is coming from the United Nations environmental meetings. They are there. They're there fighting for their position to maintain ownership of their land and to decide what will happen on their land and that they will not allow some world organization to decide for them. So they're there fighting. They go to every meeting. And so I would say, please read their statements, get to understand the difference between what they call, the UN calls the, oh, nature based. They say "We're going to fix the environment. Nature based." So everybody thinks, oh, they're going to work with nature. The Indigenous people understand what they mean. They're going to use nature to put their programs into place. So the indigenous people say, "You must, we must work with nature, because we are part of nature. And we don't understand the laws of nature. We can't just use nature to improve the environment, we have to work with nature." So that's the really big difference between what governments are proposing and what the Indigenous people are proposing. It's a fine difference, but it's so important. We are part of nature and therefore we have to obey the rules of nature and work with nature. That's all I can say.

AC [01:07:30] Okay. Well, that is a pretty impressive set of things that you've said. Is there anything else you want to add, to tell us at all about either your background or what led you to come to where you are today?

ED [01:07:52] Well, you know, I'm just grateful I'm, I'm able to still follow what's happening in the world and life is very interesting, even at 99 going on 100. But I don't want to live, you know, forever. I just, I think people should be able to, to end their lives when they want to. Not, you know, not willy nilly, but.

AC [01:08:31] Yes.

ED [01:08:32] They are some very good ways of being able to say, I don't want to live when I'm, when I lose my mind in particular.

AC [01:08:47] Okay, Elsie, that sounds like a point to conclude, and it sounds to us like a very amazing story of an amazing life and a person who's got a wonderful memory of events that occurred. And probably we could interview you the rest of the day and you'd still tell us more stories about more events. But certainly we appreciate very much your contribution to this interview.