

Public History Transcription Project

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Summary Of Robert Thompson Tape

Dr. Thompson begins his tale with a brief overview of how his family originally came to Canada (he was born in the U.S.). Dr. Thompson briefly discusses his childhood and early education and then moves on to the troubles his family experienced in the Depression, and his own quest to go on to higher education.

He eventually completed a teacher's degree and at the same time became wrapped up in the Social Credit movement sweeping the Prairies. He ended up at a chiropractic school in Iowa, where he met his wife-to-be, Hazel.

Dr. Thompson returned to Canada, and after working with Social Credit again, he set up his own practice. The Second World War broke out at this point, and he enlisted in the air force, where he met the RAF chaplain who sent him and his wife off to Ethiopia to deal with the last vestiges of Mussolini's rule.

Highlights of Thompson Interview Tape

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Transcription/Notes of Robert Thompson Tape

Lynn Wilkinson: Today is August the 9th, 1983, and I am interviewing Dr. Robert Norman Thompson. We are sitting in the Archives room at Trinity Western College. My name is Lynn Wilkinson. I am the interviewer, and the narrator is Dr Robert Thompson. This review of his early days includes life in Alberta going back from 1901 to 1943.
[tape cuts]

LW: (unintelligible)

Robert Thompson: My father came to this country in 1901 with his parents, immigrants from Norway via Minnesota. They moved into the foothills area of Alberta. There were four families who lived together. The men who came the previous year had promised their wives that they would homestead on adjacent land. They couldn't find four homesteads together in Didsbury where they first landed, without going way back into the foothills, so they moved up to Innisfail, and fifteen miles to west and slightly to the north of Innisfail, just south of Red Deer they found a section of land which the four families homesteaded. They all lived in one log house until they had built a second. My grandfather was a very hardworking man. The homesteads they got were rather poor, and so he ran a delivery, freight delivery between the village Markerville which was a Danish community, to the town of Innisfail, hauling butter and cheese in from the local creamery which had been set up by the Icelandic community, and hauling groceries and food back for the two grocery stores in the village. By 1913 he had saved enough money to buy two sections of land five miles to the southwest, a quarter section for each of his sons and half section for himself. He paid three dollars an acre for them.

LW: (unintelligible) three dollars—

RT: --three dollars an acre. It was CPR and Hudson's Bay Company land. But in the meantime his oldest son, Theodore Olaf, or Ted, as he was known, had reached twenty-one years of age. The only school in the community was a one-room school which was called the Hola school, H-o-l-a, the first school in the community, offering education through grade nine. But there was no university in Alberta. Alberta had just been a province for four years. And so he received an invitation from an aunt, living in Minnesota, whose husband had died, to come and help her run her boarding house, and in return for that he could go on to high school and to college, and so before his father had moved to their permanent home on much better land, he had gone. He graduated in 1913 from college with a business degree and uh- the same year as his father and younger brothers had moved to their new land which was in the school district of Heckla, H-e-c-k-l-a. Again an Icelandic community and uh the district was named after Mount Heckla, which was the highest mountain in Iceland. Um, my Dad then had an offer to join the United States government, and his first assignment was in the post office. The next year the war broke out and thus he stayed in the States. In the meantime he had met my mother, who uh--and they were married on August the 13th, 1914--1913 and she too had come with her parents from Norway but they had settled in Eau Claire(??), Wisconsin.

LW: Um-hm. What was her name?
(5 min)

RT: Her name was Johanna, or known as Hanna, Olufson. O-l-u-f-s-o-n. I was born a year later in Duluth, Minnesota. My father was a Canadian at the time but interestingly enough there was no law in Canada that allowed for the registration of children born outside of Canada, so I was never registered in Canada; I was registered in the state of Minnesota. In 1917 my father moved back and my mother and my younger sister Grace to claim the quarter section his father had bought for him as he had bought for all his sons. Thus from age three on I had lived in Canada and assumed I was a Canadian. This is very much a pioneer situation as it is now in the community called Sprucefield(?) running along highway 54 running west of Innisfail southwest of Red Deer slightly north and west of Innisfail I remember seeing a bear in the trees. Where he built our house my father had cut the trees and had them cut in a sawmill and he had built our house. In the meantime we had lived with Grandma and Grandpa and so I grew up on a pioneer farm. I had my first horse when I was five. I had started school when I was six and I had graduated from grade nine when I was thirteen. It was a very good school; it was just a mile from home. We would walk in milder seasons. I would ski--summertime I would ride my horse and ahem--

LW: And what about your teacher at that school?

RT: We had many teachers at that school. Forty--thirty-five--forty youngsters, nine grades, a library of 178 books, including the Book of Knowledge which was the earliest encyclopaedia that we had knowledge of and I had read every one of them including the Books of Knowledge and many twice before I had finished grade nine. But uh--without naming the different teachers I think there were five in those seven years it took me to go through nine grades. They were all exceptionally excellent teachers. They instilled in me a love of reading. My dad was a great student as well. He was the highest educated native of that home community, so he was secretary treasurer of the school board and was uhh--umm--the executor of all the wills that were made and did all the letter-writing and this type of thing.

LW: I see so he was--

RT: Uhh, ohhh. And so that was my growing up time, we had to work, I remember many times when I was still only twelve years, I had to milk twenty cows night and morning and my dad had to go to town with grain, and that was fifteen miles, that was a long way for him to come and go in one day.

LW: And how did he earn his living? Was he--paid by the government to run different areas of the community-- to run--

RT: No, no, this was all voluntary; there was no payment. [unintelligible] I think he received an honorarium of twenty-five dollars a year for secretary of the School Board to

cover the cost of stamps, which were only three cents then (laughter).

LW: So he mainly made his living from the farm-- (both speaking at once)

RT: No, he made his living as a farmer, but we had tragedy in our family as well. My second sister died of sugar diabetes before we knew there was anything called insulin, my other sister died of typhoid and for three months she was in a coma having to have her spinal column drained three times a week. Mother was sick with a number of surgical operations, then their youngest son George died, eleven years old, likewise of sugar diabetes largely due to the mistake of a physician who did not know how to take care of it. So there were just three brothers who survived. My second brother is Howard and he is five years younger than I am; my third brother is Grant, who is ten years younger than I am. My grandfather and my grandmother and particularly my grandmother were strict Christians of puritanistic type, however it was my father, the eldest, who really picked up in me a love [10 minutes] of Christianity more than anybody else in the family, but we lived at least five miles away from the nearest church, both Lutheran churches, one in the Icelandic community of Markerville and the other in the Danish community of Dixon. And uh, I was sent to Sunday school. There were no cars, of course, in those days. But I rode my horse first five miles when I was six years old to Sunday school in Markerville. I was very afraid of some of the boys who used to bully me when I was a little fellow on that horse, so I turned and went to the Sunday school in Dixon, and that's where I grew up in church. It was a very evangelical church, uhh. They- through our family opened a Sunday school in our home school that was only a mile away from home. It was a superintendent from that school that lead me to the Lord at the age of fourteen. I did not go in to school when I finished grade nine. We had no money and we were moving into the very difficult times of the late twenties. There was no high school near by that I could commute to; there was no such thing as public transportation. And there was no money to pay for me to live with somebody in the town of Red Deer or Innisfail, so I was out of school for three and a half years worked as a farm hand for my family and the neighbours. I received twenty-five dollars a month during he summer months a dollar extra during the harvest and worked for my room and board during winter. It was not until I was sixteen years of age--nope, just turned seventeen that the pastor of our church, Ed Dixon, came to me and said that he was starting a high school in the basement of our church after the pattern of a Danish high school. And, uh, he more or less pulled me off the plow—

LW: Is that right?

RT: He said, "You are going to school", and I said, "I am not; I am working." He said, "You are," he said that "You have to be in school on Monday," and this was on Friday. I did not have a horse that was strong enough to ride every day twelve minutes so I went to my uncle and he lent me his horse his named Ned. He was a big black gelding, and all that winter and the next winter and the next winter and that spring I rode to school--high school five miles-- to go through grade ten; the high school in that church which was a pioneer effort in those days with many immigrant people mostly coming from Denmark attending the high school in order to orient themselves into English and a Canadian

history of their new land, but they did not offer grade eleven or twelve until several years later. So I now had the taste of wanting to go to high school but had to go sixteen miles to finish my grade eleven and twelve. Uh--in the town of Innisfail I had to work in the fields in the fall in order to have enough money. I would ride horseback sixteen miles; in the cold winter time I would go on skis. In the mud of the spring I would have to walk, and if it was too muddy or too cold I would stay with my aunt, who was unmarried, my dad's youngest sister, an unmarried lady who was an accountant who would let me sleep on a sofa in her apartment when it was too bitter to go home.

LW: And she lived in Innisfail--

RT: She lived in Innisfail, and this is how I finished my grade eleven and twelve. It was now 1932 and the eh--the eh--the eh depression was on in all its fury, there was no money. I remember my dad taking cattle into the stockyards in the town of Innisfail to ship them to packing plants in Calgary and not getting enough from the shipping yards to cover the shipping charges on the train. I remember he uh--he would take a load of grain or pigs and would just bring [15 minutes] back a small bundle of groceries, four or five cents a bushel for grain, uh. And so we grew up in comparative poverty, but always enough to eat because mother was a good manager of the house and there was always the garden and the farm. Along with sharing with the neighbours, we would take turns in slaughtering an animal for beef and share it; another neighbour would take it the next week. Those were the days that went on. I had no chance of going on to school beyond grade twelve, but I was determined to go to school. At that time having made a decision--having been confirmed-- my pastor would not confirm me until he was sure of my salvation: he was that kind of a man. I read my Scripture; I saw that God in many places in the Gospel had used Jesus' statement something like this, "And many who saw believed," uh--Jesus also said, "If you can't believe for what I say, believe for my work's sake." So my goal was to become a medical doctor, to become a Christian that I might be able to demonstrate to people the validity of Christianity. That was my calling. But to think of going to university in Edmonton in those days was just unthinkable. So in desperation just as I was finishing high school I applied to go to normal school, which was the school that trained teachers in Calgary. Teachers were a dime a dozen so to speak. Salaries were minimal. I went to a neighbour lady, a Swedish lady whose husband and brother-in-law had made money in the Klondike gold rush and she was very generous, and she lent me 125 dollars without interest to pay for my tuition for teacher training. And so I went to Calgary. First time I'd ever been on a train, the first time I had ever been in a city. I was now 19 years of age.

LW: And, uh, what was the name of the lady who lent you the money?

RT: Mrs. Nels- Nelson. (scratching sound) Uh, and uh, with the promise I would pay it back when I got a job. I rented a room for three dollars a week with a cook stove in it and I batched, and every Monday mother would send down with the trucking service a box full of groceries. We had no money-- many times none in our pockets. I soon got to know others and soon three of us rented a bigger room together, a little suite together, and batched together. Mother would send food-- the other boys would have a few dollars

to buy some things we had to buy in the store. That's how we went through teacher training college. That too was a tremendous experience. A teacher training college then was equivalent in pedagogy to anything that is offered today, in my opinion, in degree education regarding how to teach. I will never forget as long as I live the thoroughness of the instruction that I received. I, uh, served on the student executive, uh, I was director of athletics and sports for the normal school, I played hockey, had my face bashed in a few times (laughter) for the hockey team, I was president of my class--

LW: --you could not help but get involved--

RT: --and I really appreciated and enjoyed that year. But when I came out one year later with an interim license to teach I applied to over fifty schools and not one of them considered. There were teachers all over. My aunt that I had lived with part-time in Innisfail lent me her [20 minutes] car. It was a 1927 Ford coupe. I was very proud of that, and I literally drove all over southern Alberta, to find a place, but who wanted to hire a twenty-year-old schoolteacher with no experience? Finally just at the end of August, 1934, my home school took pity on me and said they had been waiting to see if I got a job, and seeing that I had not got one they offered one to me, so I went back to the very school I had gone to for seven years. Had nine grades and forty-four students, and some of them were bigger and as old as I was- who had been slower in going through school or who had to work at home on the farm and take their time as far as finishing grade eight. But that was a very good experience, I got fifty dollars a month and if the treasurer, who happened to be my dad, had the money I would get it and if it wasn't there I wouldn't get it and (unintelligible) I took turns living in different homes- who would donate a month or so to the teacher because he didn't get any salary.

This was now 1934, uh--and in the bitterness of that poverty and that cruel situation we began to listen on Sundays to the principal of that college high school. Crescent Heights Collegiate High School, the oldest school in the city of Calgary, and the principal's name was William Aberhart. We only had a crystal radio in our house in those days, two receivers on it; we would often take the receivers apart so we could hold one earphone to one ear so four could listen, and then I discovered by taking a milk pail and putting it on its side sort of as a funnel and putting all four earphones to that we could make a microphone so a whole room full of people could listen. I'll never forget the day my father went and bought a Philco radio console. That would be like spending 2,000 dollars for a T.V. today. He bought that so he could better hear Mr. Aberhart and invite the neighbors in to listen too, because Mr. Aberhart not only taught the Radio Bible Class on Sunday afternoons but also began to talk about the alternative that could be if they had a government that worked. And that system that he advocated was a system of Social Credit that had been written by a Major C. H. Douglas of Great Britain. Mr. Aberhart had read his first book on economic nationalism as he traveled on a train to Edmonton to mark grade twelve examinations.

I might go back to high school a little bit, my last two years in high school. In those days we did not have drama and literature and band and those things inside the school program. If you wanted to be a part of that sort of thing you had to do it extramurally [sic] in the community, and I belonged to the debating club, and fortunately the wife of

one of the medical doctors in town, a Mrs. Dorsey (??), was a beautiful elocutionist and also a drama teacher, and so she started a public-speaking club, a drama club, and a glee club, and I belonged to all of them. I have often been asked if I had ever taken lessons in speech and must say that I had not except for this lady after school twice a week who gave us lessons. I remember winning a silver medal that I still have for winning a public speaking contest in the local fall fair. I played Abraham Lincoln in Drinkwaters; I played the negro who appealed to Abraham Lincoln in Drinkwaters. Played in a number of others, even in Shakespearean plays. As I look back it is tremendous the standard that we were able to produce in that rural town community that was considered the far-out west, but I owe a tremendous lot to that woman and a couple of others who worked with her, both in speech training and debating, public speaking and in singing. I often just say, "Thank you for allowing me to come under those people." We were two country boys in that high school--I suppose there were 150 students in the high school--and were teased for being country and uh--we determined between us that we were going to run the school, so these extramural clubs and activities-- if I wasn't president he was, and if he wasn't secretary of one I was.

LW: And who was he? [25 minutes]

RT: His name was Ronald Jordan; he went on to become a Nazarene preacher. And even as high school kids we would go out and preach in communities where they had no churches. He would be the preacher and I lead the singing and then we would reverse that order and we were now eighteen years old nineteen years old, so all of that goes into the Christian experience and that same thing carried on--the idea of leadership and service and Christian witness--uh, carried on from high school to the days when I was teaching school.

Coming back to politics, we all admired- every teacher in Alberta admired William Aberhart as the best principal in the province and we used to argue between those who had graduated from Crestwood Heights High School and those who wished they had because of him. And so while we did not have much time for the politics he was talking about we knew it made a lot of sense and because of the respect we had for him as a high school principal, why-- we listened. One day he was to come to our community to speak on Social Credit. Turned out he could not come so he sent one of the men that were on his team of speakers. We went to the rural village of Caroline (??) on highway 64, sixteen miles west of my dad's farm and my school, to hear him. He did not come, did not show up, and yet the hall was packed--that hall still stands today. Packed with farmers and village business people desperate-- in the hard times the early thirties-- and wanted to hear an alternative to the United Farmers government in Edmonton. And uh-- in this evening after waiting for an hour and with the crowd very restless, why, uh, they heckled each other across the room, and somebody shouted out, "Some one ought to be able to speak to us here." And then the mayor of the village stood up right behind me, where dad and I were sitting with my uncle Peter, and he stood up and said, "There is a school teacher right in front of me. He must know something about Social Credit; he will speak to us." With that there was a tremendous applause and I was literally drug out of my seat to go up the platform. As I scrambled over my dad's knees I said, "What should I say, Dad?" He said, "Not too much," (laughter) but I spoke for an hour. I got a

tremendous reception afterwards, answered questions. Next day at my school I got a call from Mr Aberhart. He said, "I heard you had a big meeting the other night at the village of Caroline." I said, "Yes I did." "Who was the speaker?" I said, "Well, your speaker never showed up. Mr. Aberhart said, "No, he went into the beer parlour in Didsbury and never got out." (laughter) It was interesting for me because I thought everybody associated with Mr. Aberhart would be a Christian like he was; but anyway, he said, "What do you know about Social Credit?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "What did you talk about then?", and I said, "Social Credit." (laughter) So he said, "Look, you had better come down and get some training." It so happened that the principal of the school, the high school in Ponoka (??) was forty miles to the north and two other teachers, one in Red Deer and the other in Lacombe, had been called similarly to go to Calgary. So every Thursday afternoon I would drive my old car--I had my own first car now; it was a Star, 1927 Star car--I'd drive it into Innisfail--gravel road all the way to Calgary--meet the principal from Ponoka who had a Model A 1931, and we would drive and get to Calgary 6:30 - 7:00. Mr. Aberhart always had sandwich lunch for us, and along with 30 or 40 or 50 who he called from other different parts of southern Alberta we would study economics and politics, sometimes up 'til midnight, sometimes up 'til 3:00 in the morning. I remember once getting back to my [30 minutes] school for Friday morning just in time to unlock the door-- the kids came to school. In other words, we had been gone-- we had gone through the breakfast time and all night. And that's another thing that made a great effect on me. I was a Lutheran up until that time; we did not have too much time for Presbyterians or Baptists, and Mr. Aberhart was a Presbyterian. But I had learned along with economics and politics a lot more about Christianity. And an openness I had never had before-- because there were others who believed as I believed but belonged to another church. And so all of that added up very much. And so, along came the elections in the fall--spring. I was twenty-one on the 17th of May; the nominating convention for the district of Red Deer was called for the 5th of May. I was not yet twenty-one, but I was determined to run as a candidate for the provincial legislature, and I was nominated. But I was turned down at the time because at the time of the nomination I was not yet twenty-one even though the election had not yet been called and was not held until August. And I really got angry over that, that they had denied me the privilege of running when I would have been twenty-one at the time of the election. So Mr. Aberhart, trying to placate me in my eagerness, made me the offer of becoming the youth leader and this is what I did during those holidays of 1935. Uh, it was the winter of 1934-35 and so we helped to elect our member; there were fifty-seven members elected Social Credit out of sixty-three seats, uh. Fifty-four of fifty-seven were schoolteachers. It's very interesting. But I was broke, more than broke, now, so I went back to teaching school again. In December, just before Christmas time, I got a telephone call from Mr. Aberhart, and he said, "How would you like to go to Manitoba; they are crying for somebody to organize Social Credit in Manitoba; why don't you go?" "But I'm teaching school." "Well, get somebody to take your place." And so I got another teacher friend of mine to take my place; he was a little older than I was and was not teaching that fall and in January I had bought a new car; it was a 1928 Oldsmobile. I could not drive through the snow on gravel roads in western Canada so I went down through North Dakota and I drove to Winnipeg. So for February, March, April, May, June, July, and August (33:29)

[end of side 1]

[side 2]

RT: --from-- I held Social Credit meetings in every town and village in the province of Manitoba. I was counted an expert because I came from Alberta. It was a tremendous experience, but there was one experience that happened in that time that changed my life again. I got the flu in the month of March; the roads were snowy and wet and uh--I had to cancel out meetings and I did not get any salary; I only got the money that came in on collections, and sometimes that was hardly enough to pay for your gas and a place to sleep and sometimes it was. But here I was a whole week tied down in my room on Selkirk Avenue in north central Winnipeg; I was even too weak to go and buy any food. And I phoned the office, "I can't take any more meetings," but nobody thought to come and see me or anything, and I remember that particular day--it was a Saturday--of that whole week that I had been in bed. I managed to get enough courage to go downstairs and put some clothes on and I had enough money to buy a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread. But that day I promised God that if he got me out of this mess I would never be so foolish as to get in it again and I would follow him; it was a real commitment. Within two hours a lady [35 minutes] knocked on the door, and this dear lady had been at one of my meetings at Fort Rouge near Winnipeg at a lodge--a very well to do English lady, a widow--and she had called the office and had wanted me to come to supper because she had a son my age that she had wanted me to witness to and try to help--he was in some problems. And the office said, "Sorry, he is sick." Well the third time she called, "Well, where is he; I have to go see him." So they gave her my address she came and knocked on the door; she came inside the room and in one glance she says, "You're coming with me." She packed up my things, my typewriter, my books, my clothes, put me in a taxi 'cause she did not have a car, and took me to her home at 6262 on Macmillan Avenue in Winnipeg; just this spring I was back in Winnipeg to speak, and looked up the old house and it still stands--

LW: Did you—it's still there, eh?

RT: --and so for the rest of the time I lived with Mrs. Strood, S-T-R-O-O-D. And she regarded me as her own son: she fed me, she saw that I had clothes, she encouraged me, she'd go to meetings with me, and I owe an awful lot to her. But anyway, one night after I'd been there a week or two I got a call from a doctor who had been at the same lodge meeting that I had when I first met Mrs. Strood. I was very impressed with him because he was alert and uh, friendly, and he said, "I want you to come down to my clinic. I've got a clinic that you should see." So this particular morning I did not have any meetings for-- through the day and I went to his office-- it was on Main Street up from Portage and when I got to the office I found that he was a chiropractor and I had never heard of a chiropractor before, to meet one. I heard about one because I used to get notes; parents would want to take their kids out of school to go and see the chiropractor. I reluctantly would let them go. Usually I told the parents, "What are you wasting your youngsters' time in school for? Chiropractors can't do anything for them." That was my only contact with chiropractic. But he just was just coming out of the door for lunch when I walked up, and I couldn't get away; I had to go in. And I went in and discovered that he had

over 100 patients a day and published a health magazine called the *Herald of Health* that used to circulate four times a year through the city of Winnipeg. He showed me the results of x-ray examinations, pre- and post-, taking care of them and I became very interested, but I didn't think too much about it, but it was a very interesting experience, and he used to often come to meetings that I had and then uhh—

Leaving that episode, the premier uh, of Manitoba—Bracken--called an election, and immediately there had been interest enough in Manitoba that they called for-- a Social Credit should run for this election. I was named organizer for the province. They tried to get me to run in one of the constituencies, but I said, "No, I have to go back to my teaching position, but I'll organize the constituents, no problem." So during the months of June, July, and August I organized and managed the campaign for Social Credit, the first one ever held in the province. I had a daily article in both the Winnipeg Tribune and the Winnipeg Free Press. I was on Winnipeg CKY radio station every day. I became a big shot real fast. But it was a tremendous challenge for me, and an experience I'll never forget; but I had just had my experiential experience as far as uh--suffering and not having any money, and I was mindful of the Lord's leading. We elected five members to the legislature. They formed a coalition government because Mr. Bracken lost the majority government.

About the time the election was over I got a telegram from the chairman of the school board of my home school: "If you want to teach any more you had better come home; if you don't you're gonna be dismissed." I'd been away for six months of teaching. So I went back rich in experience, rather proud in what we had be able to do-- this time getting seventy-five dollars a month for teaching school, but determined that I was going to go on to higher education. But my Sunday school superintendent, my pastor pleaded with me to go into the ministry, but I didn't have time, I didn't have money to even consider it. Certainly couldn't go to medical school. So I was very frustrated and I paid off debts-- paid for the car through the winter months. But the next March, now 1935-36, I resigned from the school knowing that unless I did something like that I would not go on to school. I did not know where I was going; I did not know how I was going to go to school; I just knew I had to get more education. This same Mrs. Nelson, Mrs. Nels--Nelson, now a dear old lady, attended church Sunday [40 minutes] night in the school I was teaching in because there was no church in the community. There was a Nazarene college in the city of Red Deer and they used to send out a group of students Sunday nights and they would hold a service and I would be in charge of it. And, uh, Mrs. Nelson used to come. We didn't call it Nazarene Church; we just called it Community Church, and there was no real church so most of the neighbours would come. One night after church Mrs. Nelson came up to me and she said in her broken Swedish language, "Bob, I hear you quit." "Yes, I have resigned." "What are you going to do next year?" "I'm going to school." "Where will you go to school?" I said, "I don't know; I just know I have to go to school," uh. She laughed a little bit and went out and then she came in again, and she pulled my ear down to her lips and said, "Why don't you study chiropractic?" And I laughed at her; I said, "Why do you say that, Mrs. Nelson?", because I really respected the dear lady; she got me going to school as it was, and she said, "Well, it's this way, Bob, ever since I came from Sweden--I can remember it so

clearly--ever since I come from Sweden I have been constipated.” (gasp) “I think I have taken a carload of pills.” But she said, “You know, I went to Dr. Wall, the chiropractor, and now I don’t take no more pills,” and she laughed and laughed, and laughed, and she went out again and then she came back, and she pulled my ear down to her lips again so nobody could hear and she whispered, “If you want to go I think I can help you.” (laughter) And so I thought about that night and my mind went back to this Dr. Shawnigan (??) in Winnipeg, the only chiropractor I had ever met.

So I got up and wrote a letter and said, “Where do you study chiropractic? How long does it take? What are the entrance qualifications?” And he wrote back immediately, and he told me that he thought the best college was in Iowa, and he sent me a copy of the catalogue, and within a month I had sent in my application for September. I just felt that God had led that way, so I went down to see Mrs. Nelson, and the fee--it was a three-year program and I had the equivalent because I had been studying; I had gone to commercial college in the summer and I was teaching the year before and so I was acceptable. The tuition was 250 dollars a year—300 dollars, but if you paid it in advance it was 250, so I went to Mrs. Nelson and she and her husband and her brother-in-law, uncle John Nelson sat and talked together in Swedish a little bit, and I remember John who did the business for the family--they were prosperous farmers--took out his cheque book and wrote me a cheque for 1000 dollars. No interest, no note.

And so I had saved enough money that summer, even though I had been going to a business college part time, to pay for my busfare. I headed to Davenport for three years of education, uh. Paid the tuition in advance, had a few dollars left for textbooks and some instruments, and got a job washing dishes for my meals, but that changed. I found a real good Lutheran-- a real good church. I made a promise to myself as I went down. I was now twenty-two years of age; I had a girlfriend and I knew she wasn’t as Christian as she [45minutes] should have been. I just knew God was leading me, maybe he was just leading away from something I shouldn’t have done. And so I made a promise, three promises. I had to ride three days on the bus; I made them to God in the silence of my own thoughts. One: I would never study on Sundays; I had a conviction that I should never work on Sundays. Two: I would find a good church, I would select a good church. I didn’t know a soul where I was going. And thirdly: I wouldn’t have a girlfriend. I would leave the girls alone; I was going down there to work. I was agreed that I would study all through the year. It was part of the accelerated program that was in existence down there; soon as the spring semester was over you would go to school for another semester. And so those months were the most rigorous of my life. I found a good church, I taught Sunday school to high school youngsters, I didn’t work on Sundays. I got a job selling shoes instead of washing dishes, and then I got a job driving ambulances instead of selling shoes. I stayed away from the girls; I worked hard; I was president of my class; I never had made better grades in my life: I was an A average; and uh--when it came time to graduate another major event in my life happened and that was because I was president of the class I had to have a date because at the graduation banquet you sat with the president of the college and uh, and his wife, and I didn’t know who to ask. There was a girl in my Sunday school department who taught high school students with me in the church in another class, beautiful girl. She was a secretary; I knew she had

money; but then there was another girl who was a graduate assistant in the college who I knew was poor because she supported her brother in school, and her father was an invalid through an accident and I thought maybe she deserved to be asked as my date, but I did not know if she would have the clothes because it was a formal thing, but anyway, common sense ruled and I asked Hazel to be my date and when we gathered in the international club room of the college she was wearing a royal blue formal dress

LW: Was she the one that was helping her brothers?

RT: She was the one that was putting her brother through school, helped her mother take care of her father who was an invalid. Same colour as your dress. And I thought, *Man, that's not bad*. "Who made that blue dress?" She said, "I did," and I really thought that was good, so when I pinned the corsage on her I thought maybe she was better-looking than I thought she was. And so when we went down to the hotel where the banquet was held, we had to go down a flight of stairs, and I had to lead the way with my date on my arm, with the president of the college following behind me with all the faculty and all the students. This was a professional school so a lot of the students were older. The maitre d' that we had appointed for that banquet was a student from Czechoslovakia, and he had been the maitre d' in a very big hotel in Prague; he had left to come over to the States to go to school. His name was Pakgage (?), Stanley Pakgage (?), and he began laughing at me. By the time we had reached the half a dozen steps below, he stuck his head in between us and said, "When did this happen?" and I looked at her and she got red and she looked at me and I got red, and you might say without a date before and without any more that was it--

LW: That was it. (laughs)

RT: That was it; that was our engagement.

LW: That kind of settled it.

[50 minutes]

RT: That settled it there; two months later we were married, but anyway that was very much a highlight, but another highlight was-- that came just the day after, two days after Monday morning graduation-- was Sunday my pastor called me-- wonderful man, wonderful preacher of the gospel, Dr. John Miller--and he said, "We've been watching you, Thompson." First of all his Bible was on his desk. "Do you believe that?" I said, "Yes, I do believe that." "Well if you believe that," he said, "then you have to become a minister." Oh, oh, that hit me hard. I said, "I don't know if my credits would ever be accepted in seminary." "Oh yes they have, they will be; I have enquired into three different seminaries, and they will all accept you straight into seminary, but you don't have to go to the ones I contacted. If you want to go to a different one, that's up to you, but your credits are acceptable." So I said to him, "I owe money, I owe a thousand dollars. I've made my money here rather than tuition and the books. I owe money."

“How much?” “A thousand dollars.” “That’s not very much; we can pay that.” I said, “Well look, I have to have money to go on to school.” “No trouble. Congregation will support you.” They had apparently talked this over in the board. And then I finally came up with my last objection. I said, “I’m gonna get married.” “Who you gonna get married to?” I said, “Hazel Kurth.” “Oh, that’s all right, we’ll marry you.” (both laugh) I had nothing left to say.

LW: What was her maiden name?

RT: Kurth, K-U-R-T-H, and so I was desperate. I got on the bus that night and I drove overnight, I rode overnight to the town of Blair, Nebraska, where there was a seminary of my denomination. And the one of the professors—my pastor who pulled me off the plow; he was a professor. And he listened to my story and he said something to me that I have often marvelled at. He said, “Don’t go into the ministry if you can help it.” Well I didn’t need any more advice than that. What he meant was, you have to be sure, and I wasn’t sure. And I came back a couple of days later, he cried-- dear old man wept; he said, “You’ll be just like the rest of them; you’ll go out and make a lot of money and forget about it.” I said, “I don’t think so.” Anyway, that was another major event.

Just to close off that chapter a little bit, this was in 1939 and in 1972--that would be thirty-three years later--I was now a Member of Parliament; I taught in Waterloo Lutheran University which is now Waterloo University. I had gone to the senate because I had discovered in reading the history of the university that Dr. John Miller had been one of the founding members of the committee that had started that university in 1911. He was a pastor in Canada. I told him, I told the senate through the president that there was one man living who should get an honorary degree, because he was part of the founding of the university and nobody knew he was alive; he had moved to the States and had been forgotten. They looked up the records and sure enough, and so they gave Dr. John Miller, who at this time was ninety-one, his honorary degree, and as he received it he had to walk up on the arm of his own son who was also a pastor--’cause three of his sons became pastors--received his honorary degree and I waited at the end of the procession to receive the dear old man. And as he came down the aisle on the arm, cause he couldn’t walk on his own, with his son, tears were running down his cheeks, and he put his arms around me and he said, “You know--remember that day back in my office?” I said, “I remember.” He said, “I guess you were right and I was wrong.”

LW: Oh. Hm. Well, he knew that-- (both speaking at once)

RT: --a year later he was dead. But anyway it was one of the great things as far as knowing God’s will because we were married--he married us. We had no money; I had fifty-five dollars, but I wrote to my uncle who was a car dealer back in Red Deer and asked if he didn’t have a car to drive back, because in those days they drove cars back. He did send me twenty-five dollars to help pay for the gas. So we drove back in a brand new 1939 Plymouth car back to Canada. Hazel had never been in Canada; her mother, with her only daughter who married a foreigner, where only the Eskimo lived and the red-coated Mounted Police kept order, was heartbroken. And we wrote our government examinations, and while we were writing them World War II broke out. Her father had

pleaded with us not to marry because the war was inevitable; it was very close. This would be in the spring: May, late April. Now the war was on.

LW: And how old were you then, about twenty?

RT: I was now twenty-five, I was now twenty-five. And so we set up practice. Within a year I was in the army. I had a great struggle in my own life about carrying a rifle. We had rededicated our lives. We were baptized by immersion as an act of obedience and it was difficult. But an election was held in the spring of 1940. I was nominated. I missed one thing, however, further back.

In the fall of the year they held a Social Credit convention and elected the first government in 1935; I ran as a federal candidate and I was now old enough and I came within seven votes of winning. That's when I went back to teaching. And so now, five years later, in 1940, married, gone on to school, had a formal degree, I could have won it, and was nominated. But in the struggle within my own self- particularly when one of my own boys who had been a Boy Scout only the fall before under my troop was shot down over Holland- I felt that I had to do something. So I resigned from my nomination. I would have been a Member of Parliament in the fall of nineteen--in the month of June, 1940 I managed the campaign for the man who took my place. I received a government appointment as a registrar in mobilization and in August I joined the local Militia Unit. Took my boot training, and then the Air Force was mobilized; that fall I joined the Air Force.

LW: The Canadian Air Force?

RT: Transferred from army to air force. And because I was past twenty-five I was too old for flight service. As a pilot they wanted nineteen- and twenty-year-olds. Because I had been a teacher I [55 minutes] was placed in the number four training command of the Commonwealth Training Scheme. Within a year I commanded my own squadron. I had gone up to flight lieutenant. Each year I kept getting closer to the minimum age; they were wanting bomber pilots and people with more maturity-- fighter pilots, they wanted young fellows that would act first and think later. Bomber pilots, they wanted people who thought and stuck with their decisions, and I was headed overseas as a radar bomber pilot for the D-day invasion (noise) (unintelligible) and uh--in the Air Force I had to come to know another man who had come to make a great influence in my life. I am thinking of Mr. Aberhart, I am thinking of the president of my college, I am thinking of my pastor Dr. Miller uh--Pastor Miller but now I met the chaplain and the chief of the RAF in Canada. And he had been the Vicar of St. Paul's in Cambridge, and he was a tremendous, spiritual man, and as he was chaplain and chief in Canada, he had his parish on every air base, and there were lots of air bases that had come-- and he had his boys, as he called them, Christian boys on every base, that he taught to disciple and work with trying to win the lads before they went overseas

LW: What was his name?

RT: Dr.--his name was Gerald Gregson, wing commander Gerald Gregson, G-r-e-g-s-o-n, chaplain and chief of the RAF in Canada. And I became one of his boys. One day he came to me because he knew I was headed for D-day, and he said, "Bob, I want you to go to Africa." I thought, That would be crazy; I'm headed overseas. "No, I want you to go to Africa." "Why?" "Because when I was Vicar of St. Paul's Cambridge the Emperor of Ethiopia used to come over for mass and very often would go to our service. I came to know him very well and just this week I received a telegram from him pleading with me to find some men to help in the rehabilitation of his country, just being freed from fascism." He said, "I've been watching; you seem like the type of person I would want to go." So I again remembered the time that I had with Dr. Miller with a crisis in front of me, and I finally said to him, "If my posting can change from Europe to Africa I'll go, because you think I should go." On the 30th of June, 1943, at number five service training school at McLeod (??), Alberta, having taken a load of students for a training flight over the Rockies in navigation, coming back to the base, just out of the aircraft with my parachute on my arm, prop still turning, the corporal came running out from the tower. "Telegram for you, sir, from air headquarters." I stood there. The prop was making it difficult for me to read the letter, the telegram: "Released for special assignment, Ethiopia." We went to Ethiopia six months later. It took a long time to get arrangements. Gregson had gone to the founder of the Sudan Interior Ministry in Toronto, who I had never heard of uh, and told him about me. The Sudan team had been in Ethiopia, first in the frontiers of the Abyssinian Mission before the Italian occupation. They had the roots of a church planted, and they were looking to get back and I would be the first to go-- join the mission, so I had to join the mission. "But I'm going under government." "That's all right; you go through the process of joining the mission, and when you're through with the government, there, you won't have to return home. And so we went to Candidate school and in September we were commissioned as missionaries, even though I was still in uniform, to take effect when I could get out of uniform. And so we went as missionaries in the fall [60 minutes] of '43. We were going under government call--

LW: That is really unusual, isn't it--

RT: --so it took us three months to get there. We traveled on a neutral ship. They allowed Hazel to go because she was a doctor and we had a team of teachers and nurses with us. And we had to travel by neutral ship. We got a ticket on a Portuguese ship to Portugal and there we found a Jewish Portuguese ship hauling the first load of refugees out of occupied Europe; they had come across France and Spain and into Portugal, taking them to Palestine. And I was placed in charge of that. The fighting was moving by this time-- North Africa and across to Sicily and to the toe of Italy but we went through under the cover of neutrality, unloaded our people at Haifa and went on to Port Said and Port Suez, and then Cairo and then Khartoum-- by ship and by boat and then by bus, by truck, and then finally on to Ethiopia. And there we found a tremendous church that had taken place under the persecution of the fascists. My first assignment was to help get rid of 500,000 Italian prisoners of war. Then I was placed in a school, teaching in the first school that was opened, as assistant headmaster. And then I was called back to the

Ethiopian air force. And so '44, '45 I served in the government of Ethiopia in the air force--I was a Colonel in the Ethiopian Air Force in charge of all training--and then in the Department of Education. In the meantime, missionaries were allowed to come back, and I finished my two-year contract. The war was over in Europe and the government pleaded with me to stay on so I became the Superintendent of Schools, stayed on, still a member of the mission. [tape ends] **[32:52—side B]**