

INTERVIEW WITH SHIELA ALEXANDROVICH

Claire Desmarais and Diane Parenti

Claire: This is another in the series of the Mount Lorne Community Association Oral History Project. We are here at the home of Shiela Alexandrovich on the Annie Lake Road. My name is Claire Desmarais. I'm the interviewer today and Diane Parenti is the technological assistant. It is March 14, 2014 at about 10:50 a.m.

Claire: So Shiela, we want to know about you, so tell us about yourself - where you were born, where you grew up, where you went to school, all those kinds of things.

Shiela: Okay, I was born in Whitehorse, and when I was a kid up until I was six years old, we spent kinda April through September out at Fox Lake. My parents had a boat rental and we had a cabin right near the campground, so what I remember of being young was out there. When we weren't out there, my older brothers and sisters were going to school, and also then as we got older we all did. And we lived in Marwell area for a little while and then moved out to Porter Creek until I was about nine, and from there moved out to Pioneer Trailer Park and then we ran that place until I was like 16 or something like that. And my parents kept it, although at 16 I wasn't around anymore.

I went to school at FH (Collins), Christ the King High and Christ the King Elementary, going backwards. School was okay, I did well but I didn't like it, and I spent quite a bit of time, especially at Christ the King High, we used to skip lots and then go snowshoeing and fishing along the river, stuff like that. It was not a big deal back then.

What else? Well, I grew up on very much not a wild, I mean we lived in Porter Creek so it's not like a wild existence, but all wild meat, wild fish, my mom gardened. Food was very much more local back then than now, so I think we just reflected pretty typical people. We all picked berries, and when we were headed out you came back when your bucket was full and not before. So it did limit the eating – you waited until your bucket was full. Mushrooms, all this kind of stuff we gathered. We did lots of gathering.

I came from a family of six kids, I'm in the middle. My mom often worked part time as a mail lady and here and there. My dad was full time with the federal government in housing, and then lots of sub-contracts, pulling apart old army buildings and selling off wood, rebuilding houses. My dad also built a couple of houses and we were all part of that process, like it or not.

Claire: The whole family pitched in.

2.

Shiela: Yeah, and also cleaning up reused materials and that. The kids were all nail pullers. I'm real good at it yet. (laughter)

Claire: So, if you don't mind telling us, what year were you born, just to place ...

Shiela: I was born in '59. So up until, you know, my kinda elementary school years were mostly in Marwell area and Porter Creek, and Porter Creek wasn't what it is now. We were over on Birch Street, so on kinda the far side and then moved out to Pioneer the summer I was nine.

Claire: Okay, so you've seen lots of changes in Whitehorse and the Yukon.

Shiela: Yeah, it's changed totally. Although I find out here, when I moved out here, I moved out here in 1980, bought here and then built over a couple of summers and moved out full-time in '82, and I remember thinking back then, "Oh, twenty years from now this will be all developed". And I must say that I'm so amazed and so pleased that we're still way the hell off the course. For the amount of change that's happened elsewhere, somehow or other, we've just been skipped over.

Claire: So far we've been lucky.

Shiela: So far.

Claire: So why did you pick this place in particular?

Shiela: I left on Kitamavik in 1977, out of high school, and I did a year out and about, and then another year out and about, and when I left it was to never come back. But then a few years out and about, and I kinda realized, hmm. So I came back in 1980 with my partner at the time Jacques LaCoste, and we were looking for land. I mean it was so classic – we had rented a cabin, filled the back bedroom with soybeans, bought an old Ford, and away we went off to Atlin. You know, like it was just classic. And my brother, one of my brothers had been hunting down in this valley before and knew of this property. It was one acre at the time. Kenny Wilson owned it, and he had said, "I think there's a place you might be interested in." So we came down here, and of course the road was not this road, and maybe two-thirds of the way down we were pretty worried, and by the time we got on our driveway you couldn't turn around anymore, so then we were really worried and got in here and decided within 10 minutes that this was the place.

Claire: Was this in the spring or the summer that you're talking about?

Shiela: It was late fall.

3.

Claire: Okay.

Shiela: Yeah, it was late fall, so everything was dry. We didn't know about spring yet, (laughter) or the spring road.

Claire: Was the place for sale, or you just saw the area?

Shiela: It was for sale. Kenny Wilson had sold it to somebody who had managed to get one acre titled, and some kind of story behind that but I never got the whole thing. So we bought one acre and then applied for lot extension, and raised it up to close to 16 acres, and in '81 also turned it into a co-op. So that's when we started The Far Side Co-op.

Claire: How, what was that process like, getting the co-op?

Shiela: It was quite a few breakfasts and suppers around the table, with all the babies, and the, you know (laughter) all that we needed to have a good time! It was a couple other couples, two other couples who were also looking for land and land was hard to come by. It was the middle of Land Claims, nothing was available, and because we had got this and had the access to more land, it made sense to allow other people to live here too. So it was totally informal, in the sense probably, I don't know if we had anything written down the first ten years.

Claire: But how about just getting title as a co-op?

Shiela: Well we didn't. That came after the fact.

Claire: Oh okay.

Shiela: We had our agreement between ourselves verbally, and then the title was in Jacques and my name until the lot extension was finished, which was five years, and at that point we just put everybody on the title.

Claire: Okay.

Shiela: It was, I mean the title people don't talk to the zoning people, and the zoning people don't talk to the other people, so, the tax people - nobody cared. It was a done deal.

Claire: Once you have title you can do pretty well what you want.

Shiela: Yeah, I mean we can be joint tenants or tenants in common. There's options owning land together.

Claire: And was anyone living nearby?

4.

Shiela: There was, not at that time, but within a few years Hans Koleritch bought up ridge, upriver here, so he's been here almost as long as I have. Campbell's place was in and out, so in the early years there was also Bob English was up there for awhile, and yeah, Cambell's were there, and then they left and they came back. So yeah, on the lake, did anyone live full time? The lake kinda moved around too. People sometimes, and then they'd move, and Gary Toews was down there for awhile a little bit later, but in the beginning, not so many, no.

Claire: Did you ever, I mean I know there was three couples here, but was that enough people? Did you feel isolated sometimes? Did you feel you were very far from Whitehorse?

Shiela: Only in the springtime when the trip took hours and hours you know, or you'd avoid it like for three weeks at a run, and isolation not being a negative thing. That's a positive thing for me. It feels great, you know. I still use the driveway a little bit like that . You know, people call and say, "How is it?" "Oh, bad!" (laughter)

Claire: What makes the place special for you here? I mean we can tell that you love being here. What is it about it that's ...?

Shiela: You know, I don't know if I can answer that, but I knew it the minute I came here. Like the first time I came down here, I knew this was where I was going to live and this was where I was going to stay. There was never a question about it. And over the years the Co-op's moved in formation all kinds of ways. So there's been people in and out, and couples come together and come apart, and this and that, and it never occurred to me, ever, to leave. My daughter in Calgary sometimes asks me, actually more than sometimes, "What happens when you get old and you can't do it all up there? Then what? We're going to worry about you!" And still the thought of leaving just isn't there.

So, maybe it's the confluence of the three valleys that meet here, there's a river running through it. It's a fresh place in the sense that there's always air movement – it's never stagnant. Water was key – I didn't want to be anywhere there wasn't a water source, so that's a really big one. It's dynamic – we're 60 km, 60 miles from the coast, so we get a lot of coastal weather. It comes up our side, the inside of Grey Ridge up the Wheaton, so our weather is very different from the other side of the mountains. It's quite a different zone for weather, and I built a masonry stove in '93 and had to check out earthquake zones, and Grey Ridge is the dividing point between a zone 5 and zone 6. So it's where two tectonic plates meet, so this is very much the coastal mountains, the start of it, and the other side of the mountains is not. So there's something about that too, that is just, I find just so intriguing.

5.

Claire: Are you saying you are in a ...?

Shiela: We're in a 6 here.

Claire: I don't understand.

Shiela: Well, it's just right on the edge of a line between two plates.

Claire: Yeah, okay.

Shiela: So this is way, much newer area, as opposed to ten km away is an older plate.

Claire: And does that mean it's more dangerous?

Shiela: Um hm, so how I put my chimney up was affected by whatever zone was happening. But just to realize, I mean you come around the mountains and you say, "Whoa, look at that." Somebody on some radio program years ago called it the Nepal of the Yukon, I heard it on ... "Quiet!" (laughter)

Claire: Yes, don't tell too many.

Shiela: Don't tell anybody! But that's what it feels like. It's a very different landscape.

Claire: For people who don't know the area, you said it's the confluence of three valleys, and you mentioned the Wheaton. What other valleys?

Shiela: Well, if you head up towards Annie Lake, there's all Red Ridge this way, so along Grey Ridge is one whole unit, like one whole, heading kind of north, one whole valley system, and then the Wheaton here does a 90 degree bend, more than 90 degrees. So we have a valley going that way ...

Claire: Upriver and downriver.

Shiela: Upriver and downriver, and it wraps around a mountain when it does that, and we're right at that bend. So we have, you look two different ways, when you look up and down, and the weather moves very differently in those valleys.

Claire: And does that mean that you're warmer here, or colder, like ...

Shiela: It depends.

Claire: Sometimes yes ...

6.

Shiela: Sometimes yes, exactly. In the winter, typically, we're way warmer than up the Annie Lake Road, like often 10 to 15 degrees, like often. Uh, in the summer we freeze way later than elsewhere, and I don't know, I think because Bennett (Lake) is also just down the valley, and most of our weather comes from the south. So we have, even though it's, whatever it is, 12 miles away, there's an influence from Bennett.

Claire: So not only could it be called Nepal, it could also be the Shangri-La.

Shiela: Well I wouldn't go there Claire. (laughter)

Claire: Okay, we won't tell anybody that. (laughter) Okay. And do you know the prior history from before, like I'm thinking of the turn of the century, of the last century?

Shiela: A little bit.

Claire: Tell us about that.

Shiela: It was mining, of course. The road came in. The original Carbon Hill, Carbon Hill Mountain is seven or eight miles up the valley. So the original trail came in and went into there. The original, there was a branch came off that actually came right here, right in front of the house. When I first moved here there was still an old cable wrapped around a monster old stump which was for crossing the river, like a little ferry line. Right across the river there's a stable and cabins, an old outhouse, which are all dovetailed, like beautiful work. And from there, there was a tram, a trail with just a tram for bringing the ore down off of the side of either Mt. Stevens or Mt. Wheaton, depending on the map you look at, and there was a mine up there. So they brought the ore down by horse on this little trail with log sides on it, basically. And little bits, I mean we've used that trail. There's still some left. There was an old man that lived in the cabins across the way, from '04 to '11. Alex was his name, that Marie France was caretaking, and so she knows a lot about talking to him about this valley. He lived here year round, in the cabins over there. That's what I know about this area.

Claire: Okay. I had not heard about this person who might – is he still around?

Shiela: No, he died, maybe 10 years ago.

Claire: But I wonder if Marie France might know.

Shiela: Oh totally, because she, I remember her talking to me about this and saying, "You know, this old guy ..." and kick myself, I never went and visited him and sat down with him. But she talked quite a bit with him about living here and what it was like.

7.

Claire: Yeah, that's so cool. That's really an interest that Diane and I have, not only the people who are living here now, but what happened way back then, so we might follow up on that.

Shiela: Yeah, good.

Claire: And how do you spend your time here?

Shiela: Walking back and forth to the barn, back and forth to the barn, back and forth to the barn. (laughter)

Claire: So you're a farmer. Tell us about that.

Shiela: Um, I don't know farmer. I call myself a smallholder, in the sense that it has, there's a component of growing which is organic gardens, non-certified but organic methods, an array of animals that all support the gardens and support me, and then also create my day. So I have, I explained it to someone the other day that I also do art work, and the art work actually supports the farming, which they found hilarious, that art work could support anything. But, it does. The farming feeds me though, because without growing my own food and producing milk, eggs, meat, all of this stuff, I could never afford to eat the way I do, because I don't run on a money deal. Like I have some money coming through, but it's minimal. So that's where my lifestyle comes from. I spend my days caring for geese, turning pens, and in the summer lots of composting and lots of gardening, managing a little bit. I have quite a few young people coming through here now on a regular basis for learning opportunities, so sometimes, you know, three to four to five a summer will be based here. And kinda a little bit of managing that, keeping everybody satisfied, and you know, also pushed beyond their limits sometimes when they're learning new things. Wood of course, you have to bring wood in, you have to go get it, you have to split it, shovel the ashes out after. It's a rural house, so there is solar panels. I do have lights in the wintertime, music, a few things like that, a few kitchen appliances, it's pretty minimal but it's enough. It's wood heat. The water system is just gravity feed out of a well, so I'm not packing buckets anymore, that's very nice. I have a phone. There's no internet or any of that and that's fine. I like it like that. Yeah, I would say three quarters of my day, most of the time, is outside doing one thing or the other, with homestead operation, and mornings I'm in the house in my studio doing beadwork, typically. And then evenings, or late afternoons, at this time of year I'm felting, but it changes over the year. It's not like I have a schedule that I can stick to. It really depends.

Claire: Yeah, so you keep it interesting by varying the routines and ...

Shiela: Oh yeah, life does that! (laughter)

8.

Claire: A lot of ...

Shiela: There's a lot of responding! (laughter)

Claire: So you mentioned you take care of the geese, and you have eggs so you have chickens, hens.

Shiela: Yes, chickens, hens.

Claire: And what else? What other animals?

Shiela: There's a llama out there who was a guardian for the sheep for years, although he's deaf now so he's not very good at that, but he's still a good old boy so we keep him around.

Claire: When you say guardian for the sheep, does that mean you let the sheep roam free?

Shiela: Yep, there's about seven acres fenced, and the sheep roam freely within that. I put them in a pen at night – they have a night time pen. Chickens and geese, now I have three girl geese as well, so they're also for eggs. Those guys, again, go in at night, but in the summer everybody's loose all the time, except for evenings, and in the winter a little bit more restrictive on the birds. If it's really cold they don't want to come out anyway, so they stay in. But on a day like today it's like getting warm again. The geese will go down to the river and swim in the spring. So they have um, it's quite, instead of fencing the animals in, I've chosen to fence myself in, because it doesn't seem fair to me that everybody except me has to be fenced so that I can walk wherever I want. So we all use the property, and the areas I don't want them, you know the outside kitchen area and my gardens, are fenced instead.

Claire: Right. Any problems with wild animals?

Shiela: The very first year, so maybe nine years ago when we got sheep we had a very sick old wolf kill two lambs almost right in front of the house on the river, midday, like totally oddball. I also keep dogs. I have a Heeler and a Lab and a Border Collie Karelian Bear Dog cross, so they're my alarms. The dogs sleep outside. Their houses are in the sheep pens, so they're with the sheep full time at night. Daytime they're not, but then daytime we're around. And if we take animals outside of the main fence we go with them, which in the summer is every day.

Claire: Right, take them for a walk. They take you for a walk.

Shiela: Yeah, well they go for an eat, that's what they do. We have a route, a graze route that we go on. It's quite amazing, because I only have ... there's six ewes, six seven ewes and a ram, depending. And if everybody lambs well we might have 19 or 20 sheep for the summer. And if

9.

your area is, you know, that you're walking, because they're not a sit and themselves out of house and home kind of animal, they like to nibble, walk, walk, nibble, walk, walk.

Claire: And they all stay together?

Shiela: Oh no!

Claire: How do you keep them together then?

Shiela: Well, I don't.

Claire: Okay. But they come home then.

Shiela: Well, we go with them. There's always one person with them when we're out, and the dogs of course. And the Heeler's really good – you can call him to go nip a sheep and he'll go pull it out of the woods for you, or push it back to the others. I keep Icelandic sheep primarily, so they are not flock, do what you want kind of sheep. They're the opposite. They're like head off in every direction, eat as fast as you can so nobody can see you, and run! (laughter) But, nonetheless, they still work kind of as a unit, and work through an area because they're always trying to get to the next area. They know the route, and we know the route, and we can go every day and it will still maintain itself, if it's big enough. So we've kind of figured that out over the years. And then we end up back in the yard at the far end of the fenced area, and then they're loose in here the rest of the day.

Claire: So how long would that walk be? Would it be an hour?

Shiela: Usually it's well, an hour to two hours, depending who goes with them. And often, I'll have an apprentice or one of my helpers as the main on the foot one, and then I'm on a horse. So I'll get on my horse and go, and it also gives me a chance to get out and ride around, and she gets out and rides around.

Claire: Well I was wondering if there's a competition between the help, the apprentices and stuff. "I want to go today! I want to go today!"

Shiela: Well, we have a schedule. It's a very nice thing to do! They say "Oh work, huh." Well, that's the goal is to have every day like that. It's like whatever I'm doing I can't believe I'm working. This is it, yay!

Claire: Work is fun!

Shiela: Yeah, that's what I think.

10.

Claire: Yeah, that's the best way to have it. (pause) Do you have any memorable stories or events? I'm sure you have many. Tell us a few.

Shiela: Well, there's a really funny one about the Brinks truck and the mine.

Claire: Go for it! The Brinks truck and the mine on the Annie Lake Road.

Shiela: Yes, there used to be a gold mine at the end here, and at one point they had a mill, they were doing bars and they had decided they were going to Brinks truck the gold bars out. Okay, and there had been newspaper stuff about this so we all knew. Our friend up the river back in those days was Hans Kolaritsch, who was very young and very full of life, and he used to come down here and visit in the daytime, and my partner at the time Jacques also liked to party big time. So midafternoon, we're enjoying the winter, and Hans had come down in his skidoo, and Jacques being from Montreal had never driven on the skidoo. So Hans talked him into getting on the skidoo and going for a drive up the driveway and back. Got him all geared, put on his face mask, sent him out on the skidoo. So Jacques heads up the road to the end where it butts into the Annie Lake Road, and just as he arrives there, around the corner comes a Brinks truck, and it was the first Brinks truck going into the mine to pick up gold. So he gets off of the skidoo and starts waving happily, not realizing he has a ski mask on, totally forgetting. The Brinks truck stops, so he waves more. They get on their radios, they pull into the driveway, turn around and speed back to town as fast as they can. And then at that point Jacques got pretty worried, so he comes screaming down the driveway on his skidoo, runs it right into the house, thump! Hans and I get out, and none of us are, you know, it's the middle of the afternoon in the winter, we're So we go out and Jacques is worried like crazy, so we start stashing and hiding (laughter) and everything! It was just this Monty Python scene! Nothing ever came of it. No helicopters showed up. (laughter) Everything was fine. The Brinks truck never came back. They helicoptered after that.

Claire: Oh, my goodness!

Shiela: They moved it to a helicopter instead. And when we thought about it, it was probably a wise thing because it would have been just an amazingly easy job to do. So that was one really funny story. I can't – I don't know. I'd have to think about other ones.

Claire: Okay, I have another question while you think of stories.

Shiela: Okay.

Claire: How many children do you have?

Shiela: Two.

Claire: And they grew up here.

Shiela: They did. My son Levon home schooled. He was born in '88. He home schooled until his 7th grade and then went into town. Sixth grade. And Jude, who was born in '85, she home schooled all the way with the exception of Grade 7. She went into the French school and tried a year there. And at that point her dad was living in town, so she was in town basically with him, home on weekends, and she didn't like it, but I had committed that if she was going to try it, she needed to try it for a year. So she stuck her year out, and then that was that. She tried in Grade 10 about six weeks, because we were getting into some higher sciences that – we had friends we called on for that sometimes for like mentorships, and that didn't work either. She was really disillusioned with the system. So she finished school. Well, she never finished school. She's still in school, like she considers learning what she wants to be doing.

Claire: Yeah, life is school.

Shiela: Yeah, so she ended up at one point doing a college prep degree at Yukon College before heading off and did other trainings. She's now working, working in her Engineering second year, and away she goes. Levon's in Victoria. He's working on his Red Seal Carpentry ticket, has a young family, loves it down there. He skateboards everywhere, so that's his big deal. And they're both great.

Claire: Do you see either one of the kids coming here, coming back to The Far Side?

Shiela: Levon makes a little bit of grumbly noises about it, but his partner Layla loves it. She likes the Yukon and she likes the lifestyle, so if anybody it would be her. Although Jude was up here last Christmas with her partner from Calgary, a born and bred Calgary boy, and holy crow, he liked it. So he wants to come now, and she's like grinding her teeth (laughter). She doesn't like Calgary. She hates Calgary, but she's in school there, and she has some health issues, so that's another thing that Whitehorse didn't do well for her. But who knows, maybe.

Claire: Well, you know, maybe you don't have to worry about getting older here. You'll have your family.

Shiela: Well, and as you know, what I tried to explain to the kids was that if I fall down and break my leg, there's probably way more chance, when I'm an older woman, that one of the other co-op members here will find me than if I fall down and break my leg in the city in my apartment.

Claire: That is so true.

Shiela: You know, like it is a co-op. We do have contact back and forth. There are kids that live next door that come over and visit. We eat back and forth. I mean not, we're not in each other's house every day, by any means.

Claire: So who are your co-op members now?

Shiela: At this point, Shannon Olson. She's away probably half time typically. She has a share and lives here by herself, and is here in the summers for sure. And Carmen and Robert Perron have, they have what was once Chris and Suzette's and blah blah blah – that share. They have three kids, from two years old up through to nine years old. And they're full time here - they do guiding and also run a B & B off the place.

Claire: Okay, so you are not isolated.

Shiela: No, not at all! No, I mean if there's an issue, it's about trying to find isolation. That's why winter is so nice because it's this really down time where there's weeks on end, I don't have to go to town, people aren't coming here. The summer, it's busy.

Claire: When do you expect your first people to come, like helpers and ...?

Shiela: What I hear is about the 20th of April. There should be two. The apprentice Stephanie is coming, and then Nick from last year is coming. Shaun by beginning of May from three years ago is coming back. A nephew this year is coming out of the oil patch and is looking for – he doesn't know what he wants, but he doesn't want that anymore, so ... And the one thing this place can do is it puts people in touch with like dirt and animals and river and wind and quiet and no phones, none of that, so for people that, if they're looking to try something new and don't know what they want, it's often a good place because you spend some time with yourself.

Claire: It's like going to a retreat but being around people.

Shiela: Yes, and animals. I mean, the animals are as much part of it as people.

Claire: Okay, do you have anything else you would like to add?

Shiela: I don't know, I guess another part of here that's become really important to me is the educational aspect, not just with apprentices and that, but working with kids and school groups, workshops and that kind of thing. And it is, it's a chance - I've had groups out here depending on where they come from and that really treat it like a zoo, like they can't quite believe what they're seeing, that people still live like this. Uh, live like this meaning pretty darn

normal, as far as I'm concerned. We eat well, we're warm you know, like I consider myself a regular person. (laughter) But when I watch the kids, especially school groups come out and be amazed – you know 1) that a sheep can be beside a goose that can be beside a horse, nobody's fighting or kicking, and it's like, well, when you walk down the street you don't kick everybody you walk by. And just trying to show people this element of community cross species that includes us. You know, that we're not outside of that at all.

Claire: We're not separate.

Shiela: We're not, and neither are the plants, you know, that everything kinda meshes together to give a working unit, and anything pulled out of there is going to cause a problem. You know, even if you take the worms out, the garden goes down. So that kind of aspect, being able to have a place where people can come, and I don't have to tell them about it. They can walk around and say "wow!" you know, and look at the animals and look at how things are and just kinda pick that up. That's really important to me.

Claire: And how many groups a year do you have usually come out?

Shiela: Through the schools, I would say probably between 10 and 12, something like that. I put on workshops in the summer. There's usually four or five groups come out with that. And I think, I have people coming back taking the same workshop over, and in the beginning I thought, "Oh, I must be a crappy teacher". But they've said no, no, no. It's about getting out of town and getting a group of people together, and they want to just do something else somewhere else.

Claire: So that indicates there's a real need for this kind of education.

Shiela: Oh, yeah, yeah. And with the school groups a couple of years ago I actually had to put a cap on the number of parents that were coming with the groups, because we were getting so many parents, we'd have more parents than kids. It's like, wait a minute, this is a kids' tour, not, I'm not going to explain my solar panels to you. (laughter) So there is definitely a need, and I think so many people have grown up without even the knowledge that there's another way of living rather than finishing school, going to university, getting a job, buying a house, having a mortgage, blah, blah, blah. That awareness just isn't even out there.

Claire: And if that's happening in a small city like Whitehorse in the Yukon, you can imagine cities down south like Vancouver, Toronto.

Shiela: Yeah, yeah. There's the young people that I do get up here, most are between 20 and 30, they are literally dying inside to find something that feels satisfying. And some of them are

just in this float mode down south. You know, they really don't know what they're going to do. They have no, nothing that's attractive. And these aren't the ones that are driving to be, you know, some, be it engineer, whatever like this. These are people that are just, that it doesn't work for them, but there's, they haven't experienced an alternative. And once they do, there's few of them that I think can actually go back and say, "Oh, it feels great to go back to the city, go back to the coffeeshop." They realize that there's a missing part of being human.

Claire: How many years have you had people come here, apprentices, or people helping?

Shiela: Probably about 12 years with a variety of people, one, two, three, six years with the paid apprentice. It's a government program that I'm involved with, so YTG pays towards an honorarium, not for me but for the apprentice. And then I've had returning volunteers from Whitehorse too, that come every year back and work two weeks here, three weeks there, which is great because they know the farm. I don't have to tell them "you have to shut the gate" every time.

Claire: And where do you house these volunteers?

Shiela: Uh, here and there.

Claire: Tents?

Shiela: Yeah, sometimes tents. I have a camperized van that often has somebody living in it. I have a little, a little guest house that can have three people living there. That's the apprentice house, so if we get extra volunteers and they want to share, that's their option, or not. I have a tipi that will be set up again this summer. Last year we had a wall tent camp set up with a tent and a little stove in it. It just depends. Sometimes people bring, my nephew is bringing his own little trailer he's going to park in a corner kind of thing. I never really know. (laughter)

Claire: Yeah. It all depends on who comes.

Shiela: It all depends.

Claire: And of those, okay, you've been doing it for quite a few years, do you keep track of the people, what they do once they leave. Do many of them start their own little farms?

Shiela: Wow. They do. Or they work within food. I had the experience last summer, walking out of my doorstep one morning having four out of my last five apprentices eating breakfast out there. That they'd all come back, they were all doing things working within some kind of food and/or alternative run in their lives. None of - and what really surprises me is that most of the people I get here have been halfway through some degree or something and have just

stopped because they can't make themselves go forward. So leaving, it's not like they're floaty people that are just - and some of them are but most of them aren't. They're people that have made choices to try something else and stay within that. They're not back working in their degrees, they're not back in those fields. They're doing other things. Yeah, it's very cool.

Claire: Great!

Shiela: Good. Well, there you go.

Claire: So, anything to say to wrap up?

Shiela: Um, well, I remember Al Pope telling me when I first bought here. He said, "Good luck! You'll never make it." (laughter)

Claire: Wow, you really showed him! (laughter)

Shiela: Well that's what I felt like. And then in '91, when at that point I'd separated from my husband, and I remember Steve Tufford telling me, "What? You're going to make baskets and live down there? Good luck! You'll never make it." (laughter) So there, Steve and Al!

Claire: But did you have other people who encouraged you, who said "Good for you!"

Shiela: My mom. She thought it was great. My dad shook his head. Couldn't believe it. I mean, my dad was up in Dawson, running dog teams when he was young, you know, living out in the gold camps, and he said at one point, "I spent my whole life trying to get out of that, and then you just move right back in. I don't get it." (laughter) But my mom understood totally. She was very supportive all the way through. Yeah, hmm. Mom.

Claire: Well that is interesting. How about your brothers and sisters? What do they think?

Shiela: I have two back here now, Mark and Paul. I see lots of them. We're good friends. My one sister that lives in Ontario shakes her head, can't believe it. And I have a sister in Port Alberni that I don't have much contact with. She doesn't like the Yukon. And another brother out around Edmonton that floats about and again I don't have much contact with him either, so I don't know. The ones that live up here, they come out here often and they're always bringing fish. They're big fishermen, so we always eat ...

Claire: Do you fish in the Wheaton?

Shiela: Not in the Wheaton, but I fish lots. Little Atlin, Fox Lake, anything within hour, hour and twenty minutes, I'm up for.

16.

Claire: Okay, so. Well, Diane, can you think of anything to add, questions to ask? No, okay, so I think we'll wrap it up now. Thank so much Shiela.

Shiela: Oh, you're welcome.

Claire: It's been really great to hear your stories, and thanks Diane for being the techie, and we'll give you copies of the interview.

Shiela: Thank you.

Claire: Great!