

Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Babe Richards
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STACEY CARKHUFF:Just tell me a little bit about how you got to Whitehorse, a little bit about your family and your background.

BABE RICHARDS: Ok, I was born in Whitehorse in 1924, and it was population of 300 at that time, until the army moved in to build the highway. And then things did change. And I grew up here, and then my last three years of schooling, I went out to Croftonhouse in Vancouver B.C. I was lonesome the first year, but after that I got used to it, and I'm glad I did do it. Then I came back here and I was going to be a nurse, I had, I was going back out in January to be a nurse and my oldest brother drowned, and i thought I'd better stay with my mother and then I didn't want to get back to schoolwork again.

STACEY CARKHUFF:So how old were you when the highway came through?

BABE RICHARDS: I would be 18.

STACEY CARKHUFF:So you remember a lot, then of what happened.

BABE RICHARDS: Oh yea, the town was really busy, really busy, and we had M.P's (mounted Police) at every corner.

STACEY CARKHUFF:What were they doing there?

BABE RICHARDS: Well they were just, at every corner they seemed to be, in case there were some of the army bunch were...not behaving, they got pulled off and we did have a few murders, but of course I was never in on that, I mean, which was sad. But ah, no, Whitehorse really grew, and it hasn't stopped growing since then.

STACEY CARKHUFF:Hmm, OK, so would you say that the highway was a good impact on Whitehorse?

BABE RICHARDS: Definitely. Because our only way out in those days was taking the train from Whitehorse to Skagway and then there's a small cruise ship there that would take you down to Vancouver. And I was one of the lucky kids, that we got to go out every year, because we used to go to the states to [Wanachee] washington because my mom and dad had friends there, and the other kids, they I guess their parents didn't have any money and when they got their own job, they saved their money and went out. And then the highway. Then we could drive out the highway, you know, which was nice. And they have really improved it too since that time. But it was pretty hard on the black people because they'd never been in such weather, and there was a lot of them froze up here; froze to death.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Oh, yeah.

BABE RICHARDS: You know I mean its hard to believe, but they had warm clothes, you know and things like that, but they did freeze to death I mean, because they're from the hot country. And ah, because a lot of people up here had never seen black people. I had seen black people and they were not too popular in the states at that time I know. You know I can remember being in Wenatchee Washington, we're walking down they street, and they would be coming in opposite way, they would step off the street and let us go by, not that they were going to do anything to us, but they would step off the street and then when we went by, there would be maybe three or four of us, and they'd get back on the street and keep on walking. And of course I'm just a kid, and to me, people are people, you know. Regardless of their color. And then when I got a little older, I asked about it and they said, "Oh no, they're not too popular" and I'm just hoping that the president that's in now is going to be Ok.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So in terms of travel in Whitehorse, how did you, like you said you got around before that by traveling by boat and by train, did you ever experience any other modes of travel, like...

BABE RICHARDS: Well, yes then we got airplanes, and then we could fly. Because I remember flying out to school and back home after Christmas like and then like that, yea we had, it was Yukon Southern was the name of our first outfit, and then CPA Canadian Pacific Airlines, and bought out Yukon Southern, and on April the 1st 1941.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So did you travel on the highway right after it was established, when it was open?

BABE RICHARDS: Well they had to do a lot of...They did build it in less time than they expected and all that, but I didn't go right away, no I didn't.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So, I want to talk a little bit more about Whitehorse. You said that the population when you were born was only 300? And it ballooned to over 10,000 or so?

BABE RICHARDS: Oh, it really ballooned. Yes. I mean of course they didn't stay forever, if you know what I mean but see like, where I'm living in Riverdale, there was no such thing as Riverdale, there was no Porter Creek or nothing. It was just Whitehorse. And you know that population of 300. And of course that's what i grew up with, and I'm glad I grew up in those times, you know. It was great, and I think my girlfriend, we've been girlfriends and that forever ever since we were just little kids and we think we had a better time of living here because we had to make our own fun, now kids you know, they go and buy all this electronic stuff, and they don't know how to make fun. Really, you know. Because we were very active, you know, playing ball and we'd be out in the snow, but we had, if we wanted any fun we had to make it ourself, and we got along just fine on it.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So you think the advent of technology was brought on quicker from the highway coming through?

BABE RICHARDS: Definitely.

STACEY CARKHUFF: It modernized Whitehorse?

BABE RICHARDS: Oh yea. Definitely.

STACEY CARKHUFF: After they built the highway, did you feel more of an attachment to the rest of Canada?

BABE RICHARDS: I think we did. You know, we were sort of, oh something like Dawson. You know Dawson you see they once the riverboat stopped running, that was it for Dawson.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Right, yea. The highway kind of killed the riverboat, steamers.

BABE RICHARDS: Right, yea and of course its... And well of course we had a train, which was fine, but now its trucking over the highway, for trucks that bring in our food I would say and all that, for the stores that we do have.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Ok. So how about your parents, do you remember them- were you informed that there was going to be a huge highway coming through to Whitehorse or was it kind of mystic?

BABE RICHARDS: No, I really really didn't know. I knew they were going to do this highway and I can remember my grandmother saying "Well I don't think I will live to see it" well she did live to see it, because they had been talking about it for a while, you know. And I was out in school when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And that was a disaster. And I've been back there, back a few times to Hawaii and of course I saw there, went to that place, and then of course the Japanese were not very popular. No, It was very sad but they're popular now. And my dad was working for Pat Burns and Company, a meat company and then, but he was a man that invested his money and then he ended up with the, the hotel of Whitehorse, the Whitehorse Inn it was called, and the rumor goes that he won it in a gambling game, but he didn't really. He maybe won part of it, but he didn't win the whole thing. And of course where the Bank of Commerce is now is where the Whitehorse Inn stood. And then after my parents passed on, we sold it, my brother and I sold it because I had 10, well I didn't have 10 right then, but I did end up with children, and I didn't have time to be paying attention to the, to the hotel.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So you've lived in Whitehorse your whole life.

BABE RICHARDS: Uh, more or less. No, my husband and I we moved to Watson Lake we lived there, and that right now I wouldn't want to raise a family there but at that time it was a good place to raise a family, but now it's a lot of dope and booze. And of course I wouldn't want to be raising them here either, because it's bad here too. You know, but

anyway all my kids turned out really good so that's number one. But they didn't have the dope around in those days, you know. I feel sorry for you know. And of course I tell my grandchildren, When you go into, you know they're old enough to go into the bar, and I say to them "If you have to go to the bathroom don't leave your drink there, and if you do, don't drink it when you get back, because somebody's put something in it." You now, you got to watch that, you know. They look at me as if I'm nuts. But that's ok.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Well, that's good advice.

BABE RICHARDS: You know, I mean, it's not the best, you know what I mean, that but. Yea, and um and then my mother passed away, and then my dad passed away and, but that's the way life goes I guess; we're here, and then we're not here.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So as you talked about Watson Lake and Whitehorse having...**BABE RICHARDS:** Yeah, and then from Watson Lake we moved to my husband had a saw mill there, and we got rid of that, and then we moved on to Dawson Creek and he decided to work for somebody else, and they were there for a few years and then they wanted him to be in the office, and their office was in Fort St. John so we moved there, to Fort St. John, and then they were going to move I can't remember who he was working for now, but he was, then they were going to open up a place here in Whitehorse, so they moved us back to Whitehorse, and here I am. And I was happy to come back, I met a lot of nice people, don't get me wrong, but this is home to me.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So you've pretty much lived along the Alaska Highway your entire life. Is there anything that you find to be different and interesting comparing the Alaska Highway to other major highways like in Washington, or anywhere else you've traveled. Is there anything specifically different about it?

BABE RICHARDS: Um, well I don't know if I would say different, but yea I guess maybe I would say that it is a little different, the Alaska Highway, you know because we have all these places you can stop and eat and all that. And of course I've noticed that on other highways too.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So it's like a linear town almost. So I know there used to be lots of roadhouses, and places to stop, and people used to be a lot more social on the highway. Do you think with the paving of the highway, and the advancement of machinery that this kind of killed off the roadhouses?

BABE RICHARDS: Yeah, there were a lot of them that used to stay open in the winter time and they don't now. We found one between here and Haines Junction that was open.

BABE RICHARDS: Yeah, well that was good.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Yeah.

BABE RICHARDS: Whereabouts would that be?

STACEY CARKHUFF:It was at Haines Junction.

BABE RICHARDS: Right at, oh yea ok, Haines Junction.

STACEY CARKHUFF:That Kluane...

BABE RICHARDS: I don't know if they've got a store there or not, because he was wanting to get out of the business, and they closed, and someone said its open again. So I don't know. But its sort of nice, but you've got to you know buy things there, you can't just be buy butter and milk and things like that you know what I mean, you've got to buy other things but I know its more expensive than coming to Whitehorse and buying here, you know. And a lot of people go Outside, and when I say Outside that's out to Vancouver, Edmonton, and they load up with their groceries and of course it doesn't...You know, but they get it cheaper, which you can see you know they want it cheaper which is fine with me. And it's I guess we feel more like we were sort of just here in Whitehorse, you know? When I look back, and of course I was just a kid, and of course you know a kid is a kid, and it didn't bother me or anything but then since the highway's gone through, naturally it has opened up Whitehorse. Yea I was just thinking this the other day about when I went to school here. We had a three room school house, and took grade 1, no kindergarten, grade 1-4, 5-8 and 9-12 and the principal he was one in the high school and that. And we never, we played, we had to go to another big room, wasn't attached to the school to play basketball and things like that. And we did have a little rink for hockey but us kids had to clean it off, you know because it snowed on it, and which it didn't bother us, we'd get those shovels out there and we'd clean it off, and we'd skate and that and we'd have, we'd play hockey and then we would play basketball in this other hall and the principle and the principle, he was very interested in and we'd play basketball. And then we go to go to Skagway on the train once a year, over to Skagway and play with Skagway. And then they would come here once a year and play with us, and of course we would what do you call it, they would stay at our house, what do you call it when they would, what's the word I'm thinking of...anyway, like when I went to Skagway I'd be staying with one of the girls.

STACEY CARKHUFF:Oh, yeah, lodging with them.

BABE RICHARDS: Yeah, right. That was a big deal for us kids on the train.

STACEY CARKHUFF:So you had a very active young life.

BABE RICHARDS: Oh yes, oh yes.

STACEY CARKHUFF:Lots of sports and outdoor activities.

BABE RICHARDS: Right, definitely. Oh yeah, you know there was...They didn't have to say "Get out and play" well we'd go out and we'd do all this you know, and that's why I think I've lived so long, because we were so active. But now with kids they got to be

driven, they don't even walk a block sometimes. I just think oh. But you know that's the way it is and well you see they, I think some parents put their children into too much, like we didn't have that much, but they, the girls are in dancing, and they're in hockey, they play hockey now with the boys and all that, and I think they don't have time time to play-what i call play. You know, I mean, because I think, like these daycares I had a daycare here too in the basement and they said "You don't teach them anything." And I said, "All I try to teach them is their manners at the table," I said. I said, because I don't want them to start you know I had, when the babies were sleeping, they were up here coloring. If it was nice, not nice weather out, but they were outside if it was nice weather and that. And everybody was happy with the way I did it, and I said no, I said, "I don't believe in them having to do..." Because I had one little guy, he'd been in a different daycare, then he was going to go to Grey Mountain School, which is not too far from here, and he came here, and I took him downstairs and introduced him to the kids, and then I come up to do something, and he came up. I said "what would you like to do?" He said "I would like to color," So of course we usually didn't do that until the afternoon or it was bad weather, but I said "OK" so I got all everything out for him to color, and he sat at the dining room table there coloring and then I was downstairs with the kids, and I thought I'd better get up there and see what he's doing. I guess maybe a half an hour had gone by and I come up, and he had everything put away, nicely like, he knew exactly what to do, which was good and I said, he said "Now what do I do?" You see, he didn't know...So I took him downstairs again, and then he finally worked in with the kids, you know. But he was always maybe they did coloring for a half an hour, and he was told what to do. Which you know, and I think he enjoyed it, and then he started, then the next year he started school over at Grey Mountain.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So when you were here and as a child, were there a lot of Native children and other Native people living in the area at the time?

BABE RICHARDS: Yes, I more or less grew up with the Natives, and we were friends, I mean that didn't mean nothing to me. You know what I mean, they were people, you know? And then somebody, I don't know who did it, they decided that the Natives shouldn't be in our school, so then they finally did bring And then somebody, I don't know who did it, they decided that the Natives shouldn't be in our school, so then they finally did bring them back, which they should, I don't see why they shouldn't be in our school. They're just human like we are. And I used to love talking to the old Natives; the old grandmothers, they have lots of nice stories to tell you. And at that time they were not allowed, well they just had beer parlors at that time when I grew up, and then they got cocktail bars, and they were not allowed to be in the beer parlors either. But I think they made their own home brew, which there's nothing wrong with it.

STACEY CARKHUFF: yeah, right. So when the highway came through do you think that the Native people in Whitehorse were affected differently than the white people?

BABE RICHARDS: In what way do you think that...

STACEY CARKHUFF: Like, culturally, like the impact that they would have taken as Native Alaskans, or Native Canadians, First Nations Canadians I should say were like a loss of culture, a confusion of what to do next because everything was changing so fast.

BABE RICHARDS: One thing I'm against what they did I knew the fellow that did it, it wasn't his fault, he was hired to do it in the plane, and they went around, like this would be on the river, and they had their homes on the river, and they just grabbed those kids and put them in the plane, and sent them off to school, you know what I mean? And I thought, of course, I would think of myself, and I think, I wouldn't allow that. In fact I know some people that telegraphed, that's in B.C telegraph people, it's only a small place and I got to meet a lot of people there because we would go in a boat, telegraph and we'd go to Wrangell, Alaska you know. And I got to meet a lot of people, and this one couple, they went the dad and the mother and the kids went in the bush and they stayed there for a couple of years. They were not going to lose their kids, which I don't blame them.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Right.

BABE RICHARDS: And I think that there, well I know the government did wrong on that, definitely and now they're paying for it. And they were abused too, and at Lower Post, that's just out of Watson Lake, its in B.C And they had a school there for them too. When we lived in Watson Lake, we didn't have a doctor and if anything went wrong we had to go to Lower Post down to the nurse. And you know, I did, I felt sorry for those kids, and they couldn't, I found out since then I thought they were not allowed to speak their language, but they had to not in school could they speak their language and I can understand that but they could, they could speak it amongst themselves when they weren't in school. Which is fine, but at first I was under the impression they were not allowed to speak their language, and that was wrong, as far as I was concerned. But I wasn't the boss, you know what I mean? No, but ah no I think they got a bad deal, taking those kids away from their parents.

STACEY CARKHUFF: A lot of loss... **BABE RICHARDS:** They lost an awful lot.

STACEY CARKHUFF: Yea, that's too bad.

BABE RICHARDS: But the government is sure having to dole out the money now. It's not helping as far as I'm concerned its not helping. No I have a lot of respect for the natives.

STACEY CARKHUFF: So, do you have any general stories, or events, or happenings or anything that you were involved in involving the Alaska Highway that really kind of made an impact on your memory of the highway?

BABE RICHARDS: Well, I could tell you one, I don't know if you want it or not but anyways, I was taking cash at the Whitehorse Inn, my dad had it, cafe and it was my day off, and my girlfriend lived there, her mom and dad had the Regina Hotel, and down the next, at the next corner was our house. So I decided to drop in and see her. So they had

their own living room, the Erikson's did, so I went in there, and we were visiting, and I said "Well I've gotta be at work at six in the morning, I guess I better go home." So she said to me, my girlfriend said, Goodie said, "I'll walk you home." OK. And then she got to the end of the Regina, and she said, "No, I don't think so." So I looked over, right next door to us, it was a store that my great grand father had built, and he's also built the house we were living in at that time before we moved up to the, up to the big house. And there was this command car, it wasn't on the road, and you know the main road, and it wasn't parked. And I got nervous, I just felt, you know, it wasn't right. So my mother and dad were at an anniversary party which I knew, and my brother he was, I thought he was, which he was, he was home in bed. So anyway, I got to the gate and I said they're not home and I turned around and two black fellows jumped in front of me, and grabbed me. And I had a big purse, and an envelope type, open and I banged one of them on the head with it, they say you can't hurt them. So anyway, I was screaming and hollering, and the train was shunting, that's when we had a train, because we were just across the tracks from it and so anyway, they and this fellow he they had three fellows, one sort of backed up, and I thought what are they going to do, grab me and put me in that command car? Command thing. And so anyway, then they left. And I was a little nervous, and I had, well it was in March and I had you know spiked shoes on and all this and that. And it was just melting like, so I went into the Regina and it was the first time in my life I had ever been hysterical. And I went right through to where the sitting room was and Mr. Erikson had gone in the back door, and he'd gone out and they had a stove in the lobby of the hotel, and he went out to get wood, and he heard me screaming, so he walked, he got the flashlight, and he walked down the alley, and I think that is what, I've said it right along to his to his daughter, to my friend, that he saved my life as far as I'm concerned, I said, because I think they saw him coming down the back alley with the flashlight, you know. And so that's why they moved on.