

Muriel Upshall

Interviewer: David Jelliffe

Recorded at the home of Muriel Upshall in Vancouver

Tape No. 1

FULL TRANSCRIPTION OF TAPE - NO RESTRICTIONS

INT: This is a tape with Miss Upshall, U-P-S-H-A-L-L, one of the first nurses in Richmond, she now lives at XXXX West 14th Street, Vancouver.

INT: So I'll turn the thing on and so all we have to do is just talk.

MU: I'll have to forget about it because, um... my speech will become hesitating.

INT: You don't mind if I smoke?

MU: No, no ... I put out an ashtray before you came in.

INT: You are perfectly familiar with the vices of men.

MU: There are still some people quite a few people still smoke.

INT: You were one of the first nurses?

MU: Yes, just to give you a wee bit of the history, as you know the Metropolitan Health Committee which gave a generalized public health service started in October, 1936 ... and so Richmond and Burnaby did not have any health, not even a school program, I don't know about Burnaby, but Richmond had no health services at all and they were going to take part in the Metropolitan so Richmond started right off, Burnaby hesitated and joined in some years later and I was working for the Provincial Board of Health in Nanaimo. I'd been there for seven and a half years and then there was Mrs. Humphrey at that time, but she was at Duncan and so the Minister of Health, Dr. H.E. Young, I don't know if you've heard of him, he was a real politician and diplomat and so he asked the two of us if we would come over to the new generalized program here as supervisors so the result, we did, and I was in Burnaby, but they hadn't come in, and so Richmond was to be a sub-unit of unit 2 which ... as they had never had health service there at all they gave it to me to...

INT: Oh really, so you were the first then to go to Richmond?

MU: Yes, that's right and then I had a new graduate who shared half the Island.

INT: Oh, so you had somebody working under you?

MU: Yes.

INT: A girl who just, uh ...

MU: She had just graduated in that spring from U.B.C.

INT: You had your own office then?

MU: um...

INT: Or did you just travel around a lot?

MU: No. At that time more than now, the school program is different, but it was quite heavy so you were in the school a lot of the time.

INT: Oh I see, so then you worked out of a school?

MU: But we had an office in the old Municipal Hall. ... You went into the hall and then there was I guess it was the council room, I don't know that. But behind that was, I don't know, you called it the projector room today, but not then, I think and so they gave this woman and myself this as our office and...

INT: Oh, so they gave you a cubby-hole. Where was the old Municipal Hall here in Richmond?

MU: Just above, oh, opposite you know where the tracks are on three and the drug store that is still there and it was across from there and it is just about the same where the new one is actually. It was a great big, sort of a barn place as I remember.

INT: So um, your main responsibility then was to keep an eye on the health of the children in the schools?

MU: Yes. This was a generalized program so we had we covered everything so we started the school program in the schools and we started the child health program, babies mostly by the child health centres and then we started the Tuberculosis program.

INT: Oh really?

MU: At that time there was a lot of TB cases, not so many out there actually as I remember...

INT: This was a significant thing then in...

MU: Oh, Greater Vancouver and that was adults and everyone. Anyone in the district that had TB and at that time they were at home and there was no chemo- therapy as there is now, and so there was rest, etc., and then we tried to introduce a pre-natal program but it had small beginnings when I was there as I told you, I was only there six months, but I loved it I didn't want to leave, I was persuaded that if Dr. Young offered you a position and you didn't take it they would never give you anything else so I transferred to University Health Services at UBC where I stayed until I retired.

INT: You were there about six years you say?

MU: At the university?

INT: No no...

MU: Did I say years, I mean it would be about eight months.

INT: Eight months during 1936?

MU: No it was October, so I was there until June 31, 1937.

INT: Oh right, so it was just thirty-six, thirty-seven?

MU: Yes that's right.

INT: So then you spent, as I gather, most of your time then developing a health program in the schools with your focus essentially on the lower grades? The small ones?

MU: Um, I wouldn't say essentially ... because we had the secondary school too, which is where the old building where it is now, and we wouldn't spend as much time at the in the high school I don't think. We probably did in, since it was the beginning, we probably did more consulting with the teachers, but at that time you checked children regularly and their eyes were checked yearly, and that sort of thing so it was a more overall program. I mean you were doing it with all the children.

INT: Did you instruct the teachers? I remember when I was small for example, all the teachers were saying this is the way we brush our teeth and we all had to do this, this business.

MU: Yes, that's right and we also did now there was as far as teaching the classroom was concerned, it was the lower grades that was starting off on ... we did some of that.

INT: During this time when you were working in Richmond, did you live in Richmond?

MU: No, in this area.

INT: So you commuted everyday?

MU: And that was the foggiest year Vancouver's ever had I'll swear!

INT: Really?

MU: Oh, and those ditches! Fortunately I had Brighthouse School so I didn't have too many yards of distance to be scared or instead had I waited to Marpole and I didn't want to [INAUDIBLE for approx. .5 seconds].

INT: The other girl at the other school then...

MU: She had the distribution was very odd really, but it was to even off the number of school children and she had Steveston which was mostly Japanese and that was a very interesting school, and interesting to her as her first job...

INT: Is she still around?

MU: Yes, she lives in Haney, but I noticed by the paper that her step-mother has just died. It was in yesterday's write up, I don't know if you noticed, this lady from New Westminster, was the widow of the Lt. Colonel, and, but she is back here in Haney. I'll give you her address.

INT: Oh, that would be fine.

MU: And over there ... they had already, now I can't tell you whether this was church affair or whether it was Municipal, I can't remember, but it was a pre-school or kindergarten for the Japanese children and there was a large number and there was a Miss Kartner in charge and I can't remember the other but she did start a very good program and with them, and I would go over and help that was fascinating, I really enjoyed it.

INT: Tell me, at this time in 1936 which was just about five years before Pearl Harbour, what was your impression as an adult about the feeling towards the Orientals? Was there any discrimination or any...

MU: You mean as far as the local people with respect...

INT: Yes.

MU: I wouldn't think so. I am not conscious of it. Of course I didn't ...

INT: You dealt with the children mostly?

MU: Oh no, you visited the homes.

INT: Oh really?

MU: Yes. That was one thing I liked about Richmond was that the fathers were home because being farmers and they of course were very understanding and as soon as you start on diet then we would start comparing the diet of their cows and the diet of their children and that was fun. It was amazing the correlation, I was simply amazed because Nanaimo was a mining area, coal mining and then to come to agriculture ... and that was very fascinating.

INT: So you had an opportunity then not only of seeing the children in the school but the children and the parents in their home?

MU: Yes, we did a lot of home visiting.

INT: ... During that time, what do you think of the nutritional, how well did they eat?

MU: Well being agriculture and I having come from a mining area which is a lot of them are Welsh and had come from the mining areas of Britain and also in Southern Europe I thought their health was marvellous and their teeth were just...

INT: Very good?

MU: Oh, we found a lot of perfect teeth in the children. I was very impressed.

INT: So then as the public nurse you not only had to listen to their chest but also look into their mouths?

MU: Well we didn't listen to chests because it was the doctor and he did his regular, but we did check-ups and every year they would have a check-up and you would examine the teeth and look for cavities and that was Dr. Boyd was the first doctor. He's in the east of Ontario and has been for years, and of course when he did his examination naturally you worked with him and he did a very thorough examination of the teeth. I think it was because we were both very interested because it was a new agricultural area ...

INT: Then when you went around to various homes I suppose when did it stop getting very rural? Imagining you are right in the middle of Brighthouse at No. 3 and we'll say Westminster Hwy. and were to go up Westminster Hwy. when did it start getting rural? I mean just farms.

MU: Well it was mostly all farms now where you're speaking of No. 3 and Westminster, there was quite an area in there of houses that did not farm and some of them worked in town. But that was the main area as far as ... and the rest of the farms all ... I just, when I go up now, I do, I just weep because that was all completely farm and there were well most of those houses are new ones and then around Brighthouse School there was quite a bit that were not farms. Steveston Hwy. all along and from No. 3 to No. 5, that was all berry farms pretty well and there was an old school there that I had a two story one. You're aware of that one, it's all pulled down now.

INT: Oh that school you mean the school that Miss Bothwell, at the English school at Shell and No. 5?

MU: Yes it would be Shell now I think, a lot of the streets have names now but there weren't any streets.

INT: Shell runs right along those tracks which run between four and five?

MU: Five, that's where, hmm, it was Bothwell, I'd forgotten, you have interviewed her haven't you.

INT: Yes, I talked to her yesterday and she said that it was built for two sets of classes but the upstairs was never used so that was used for play. So that was one of the places you called at.

MU: Yes that was one of my schools. Then there was another little school, I can't remember which of the streets but it was just there was the tracks on No. 3 and then going south there are quite a few old houses that are on short streets on your left hand side, because the other side were all farms and it would be about three to four south of the tracks and I can't remember that teacher's name but she was most cooperative, I can't find the streets or anything that looks familiar now.

INT: Yes it has quite changed. How did you find the children being dressed, because being in farming and therefore I suppose not a very affluent district or did you find it affluent? Was there any real poverty you know rags type of thing?

MU: You know I can't remember, I can't really remember being impressed at all. As a matter of fact I felt that the children had well being older were some families that didn't ... but not as many as you would have in most districts.

INT: Now ... were you paid a lot?

MU: No, what was I paid? I had \$125.00 a month when I went to Nanaimo in '29

INT: Was it about that or a little more? It's not a lot when you think about it.

MU: It wasn't much more because you see '36 was still the great depression and um I'm sorry, I can't remember.

INT: Well it couldn't be much more up to about \$150.00 a month I suppose?

MU: I have a feeling it was \$150.00 because it seems to me it was about 1500 a year.

INT: On that you kept yourself together?

MU: But we also had a, as I remember because of the rural area we had \$30.00 a month car allowance.

INT: Oh really. It was just for use of your car?

MU: Yes.

INT: And so you were expected to check in at these schools in your area everyday?

MU: Oh yes, they had to have your car for home visiting and I was very keen on home visiting from my experience in Nanaimo and I thought a lot more so than the nurses who had worked in Greater Vancouver, but of course it was a city, but I felt working with the children was important, but specially with it being a new area in health it was extremely important to make yourself acquainted with the parents and of course you followed your defect and that was a contact. The teachers at one time would ask you to go in because they were concerned about something but being a farming area you were welcome everywhere so you could just say you were the public health nurse and go in and tell them what you were trying to do and it was a real pleasure, it really was.

INT: Did some of these home visits, were they at night?

MU: Oh no.

INT: It was all during the "working hours?"

MU: A five day week, yes. About seven hours a day.

INT: During your period in thirty-six and thirty-seven, besides the TB, the incidence of TB, which you said was prevalent, more prevalent than in other places when you searched for it in Richmond it wasn't as...

MU: No and I don't think it is still probably it has decreased so, and nursing has changed so tremendously. But Greater Vancouver it has always been the East End and the City area that's always been the high end than you would have Kerrisdale and West Point Grey would probably be the least for Vancouver and I don't think Burnaby was too heavy, at my work at the University, I was still at Metropolitan so during the summer months I did relief in Greater Vancouver and they gave, during the two summers I did relief in Burnaby and the number of TB cases that I had to follow was not very great.

INT: Did you ever meet a girl named Eileen Black, who ultimately became Mrs. Henner? She lives in Burnaby now.

MU: Yes, she was very keen.

INT: She worked down there at the time you were there?

MU: No, no there were just the two of us and then when I left Lila Pearlman she succeeded me but she was not there very long because Miss Breese who was director of nursing for the Metropolitan area she died and Miss Quinlan kept the position of supervisor and I'm not sure but I have feeling that Eileen Black followed her.

INT: Oh I see, so about 1938 or 39?

MU: Yes I would think about 1939. That's something you could find out.

INT: I was just wondering besides the TB business, where were the children at that time in 1936 when you think in 1971/72 with all the anti-biotics and preventive serum shots they give babies right in the hospital, you know diphtheria, were the children susceptible to a particular thing then that they are not now? Something which you had to think about?

MU: Well actually at that time there was a tremendous survey going on all over Greater Vancouver on Tuberculin tests, had just come in here and so that was, we spent a lot of time because as I remember I think we tested all the children and I think we started in Steveston because of the Japanese there and but I think we did the whole area, because there was another school on Sea Island, I can't tell you where because that was Eileen's.

INT: Was that just the little arm stretch?

MU: No it is the skin test.

INT: Oh right.

MU: That gives you a negative or a positive reaction and if you had your positive reaction then you must have a chest x-ray because it means that some time or other you have been exposed and had a slight amount of infection.

INT: Oh right.

MU: but not that you had the disease.

INT: Of course, yes. Standard testing?

MU: It's the same thing.

INT: It was introduced at that time?

MU: Yes, actually the Provincial Government started it in the Province in the spring of 1936.

INT: This was Dr. Boyd who was...

MU: Yes and he was the medical health officer for Unit 2 which is the Kerrisdale area and that included Richmond.

INT: Because the name Boyd sounds familiar, that sounds like a Richmond name.

MU: Well he wasn't ...

INT: He may have been a relative to one of the Boyds.

MU: He wasn't a Richmond person. I have feeling that he had a sister too in the health field and she, I think they were Vancouver at that time but he only stayed, he was only there about another year after I left and he moved to Ontario. He's done very well there.

INT: Besides the Tuberculosis tests, there is nothing you can think of which is remarkable about the children's health then as against current children's health now?

MU: Well I've been away from children a good many years since '37, except that I did have the university school up until about actively until 1946.

INT: Well for example, Diphtheria is just about unknown in children and Scarlet Fever is almost unknown?

MU: Yes, well Scarlet Fever ... the last large outbreak was before that.

INT: Oh it was before 1936?

MU: and there were still some cases and they were quite severe but not as severe as they had been previously and we were immunizing in the school and also...

INT: Oh for Scarlet Fever?

MU: No Scarlet Fever was never felt that it was 100%, It hadn't been done for a long time, and none of them are a 100% I shouldn't say that but relatively. But we were doing Diphtheria, I think and we were doing immunizations mostly in the Child Health Centre that was children until two years old and out there because it was rural and the pre-school area was two to six they came too.

INT: They came to the Municipal Hall, your little cubby hole?

MU: No, to the Child Health Centres.

INT: Oh and where...

MU: Well they were held in a different area.

INT: Oh, in the schools?

MU: Brighthouse was in the schools or different positions as there would be an empty school room we'd move in and

then Steveston wasn't in this school, they gave there was a little sort of community hall over on the west side of Steveston on a side road there and that was the ... we held the Child Health Centre there.

INT: Most of the children there were Japanese then?

MU: Yes, in Steveston at that time they were, there were some whites too they came too, and I think we just had the two as I remember, but the mothers were very genial the Japanese mother and also the...

INT: The white mothers? In Richmond did you ever examine any Indian children, do you remember?

MU: We didn't have any Indians.

INT: There were no Indians, no, but somebody else said on another tape that during certain periods of the year when fish were running and so on, the Indians used to show up and get into big fights, we were talking about law and order.

MU: Oh, maybe I might have heard about it some of the teachers speaking, and children, etc., you know about children etcetera, but I don't remember ever being conscious about it.

INT: So, um it certainly then would that this would be transient in that it wouldn't be people with family and children and children being sent off to schools?

MU: No. No I can't remember Eileen speaking about Indian children and I don't remember them being in the child health centre.

INT: At one time there was quite an influx in British Columbia having to do with in part with the gold rush in the Caribou of Indians from India the sub-continent and they were called Sikhs?

MU: Yes.

INT: You didn't run into any Sikh children that you can remember?

MU: You know they spread out, they didn't stay except for this area down there, but I got a few in Nanaimo and I can't remember.

INT: No, so then really you can...

MU: I can't even remember being impressed.

INT: Right, so it was just two groups and only two groups, the white farmers' children and the Japanese children?

MU: And then there were the children of some people that worked in Vancouver and then of course there were the people that had a business there.

INT: Oh yes. Were there, I just thinking now before we stop on this about the health aspect of your memory, whether there, I'm thinking about the way today they are so conscious about children not breaking their legs on the slides or injuring themselves generally, were they as conscious then?

MU: No, I don't think so, I think everybody was so relaxed.

INT: So the normal accidents were then were just the same as a normal accident, any place a child falls down and breaks a tooth or scrapes his arm or falling out of a tree?

MU: At Brighouse due to, I'm trying ever since you phoned to remember her name, the principal and I'm sure you have heard of her.

INT: We can find that.

MU: I'm sure you have heard everybody speak of her because she was just loved and she had that whole school was extremely relaxed because of her but by that I don't mean that they didn't have a discipline. It had discipline but the general atmosphere of the teachers, of the children, of everyone was just I think remarkable and I always felt that it was due to the lady principal.

INT: Oh right sure.

MU: and she was for the new program, she was very interested and cooperative and because of the good rapport with the teachers they were too.

INT: Oh yes so it just filters right on down?

MU: Yes and then the teachers in Steveston were very interested to and I think that the two teachers that worked in the kindergarten they were very good for boosting the people for the new health program.

INT: Oh yes of course well sure you pass it to the children and they take it home.

MU: But everybody was most cooperative and were so glad to receive us and to have a health program, in those days that didn't always happen.

INT: You said a little earlier that you had tried to introduce pre-natal care, that means information to pregnant woman?

MU: Yes that's right.

INT: And I suppose then there was no...

MU: No classes now as there are now it was all done on an individual basis and it would be mostly where we would make a visit because of a school child or a baby attending our clinic and the mother was pregnant or she would be coming to the clinic ... so that you would give pre-natal advice. I particularly, probably because I was experienced from Nanaimo.

INT: Then what was the general reaction to this, it would be nice for you to say there were factions drawn, some said my wife isn't going to get this and other people say...

MU: Well it was only advice I mean a general health advice because they were under their own doctors and would have pre-natal care from them and so that they would so frequently ask us questions that they would have forgotten to ask the doctor or that they felt that they wanted to know more about it because the doctors are busy people and so I mean it's what they are recommending these days and what are doing and so they really were asking for it.

INT: Oh that's very good. I suppose then in those days there was no such thing as, what would be the stage before pre-conceptual care, you know they are talking now about allowing girls and women to have the quote "the pill" now there is a great deal of information which is now being given out to relatively young people about how to understand what all these forces are with respect to pregnancy and conception and so on?

MU: Well as far as birth control, it was illegal as you know, but if and there was really no I mean there were a lot of different methods that married people had sort of worked out themselves and but in the States and also in Canada the movement had started, but actually as a public health nurse I did very little, probably more in Nanaimo but it would be mostly following up on what the doctor had already started. You were quite careful.

INT: Oh right, so that really it was out of the question to start a new sort of information program at that time?

MU: Oh yes. You couldn't go in and say you must ... the doctors were ordering it and when I was in Nanaimo but I don't remember following up in Richmond at all, but they would and then I would sometimes they would ask me to go follow up but it was definitely the whole thing was patient - doctor relationship.

INT: Then when you went to you say in the 1936, 1937 it was very foggy when you used to go...

MU: That was a terrible year.

INT: You went over the old Marpole Bridge?

MU: Oh yes.

INT: To Sea Island and then over the other bridge to get onto to Lulu Island? I'm just trying to think now what it was like doing that, you were living where?

MU: Actually I was living on 12th in this block no the 1300 block. We were boarding there when we first came and then I was living on the corner of Oak and 12th in an apartment there.

INT: Uh, uh and so you just used to shoot down Granville?

MU: Yes and thank goodness for the street car tracks. They were up to 40th as I remember so I had to struggle on and I was so glad when I found the tracks and the street cars running so I could relax a little bit.

INT: Oh really, and just follow the tracks?

MU: The tracks and then of course I had to turn off onto 12th to the right but as I remember I think that foggy area was mostly in the fall and over Christmas. I think by the time we moved to Oak Street I think ... but it seems to me it was November/December/January.

INT: How long does it take you to drive I mean all things being equal and no big fog or anything to drive from 12th and 14th Street down into Richmond just shooting down Granville?

MU: I think it was about half an hour.

INT: Oh really.

MU: To Brighthouse wasn't far because it was just Marpole and then the bridge. But I don't even know if it was half an hour I think it was probably about that. But the ditches ... they had their Maypole the children had and I think that was every year but they did have it the May I was there.

INT: It was a festival?

MU: Yes, and maybe it was for something special because I know the children spent hours and hours practising the Maypole and then they practised marching and they formed letters but I can't remember for the life of me what the letters are.

INT: Was this May 28 the King's birthday?

MU: It would have been what was May 24 ... so it was in that time and it was extremely good.

INT: Oh really, so all the various schools practised these?

MU: Yes that's right.

INT: And they all trooped off down there for the festival days?

MU: And I think they had a Maypole I'm pretty sure they did.

INT: That's interesting because you know that's a very old rite dancing around the Maypole, fertility thing ...

MU: Yes. But I cannot remember, but maybe you from speaking with teachers would know whether that had been an annual thing or that would be May 1937 and whether that was a special celebration for some year or not.

INT: That's interesting that that...

MU: But I think that's worth ... investigating from the school area.

INT: So you say that both race tracks were still in operation?

MU: Yes, well the Brighthouse one wasn't the regular one the Lansdowne...

INT: Lansdowne, yes.

MU: And Brighthouse though I did see one or two races for short periods of the racing season but the Lansdowne by then was the favourite one.

INT: So you say you went to one of the, you called to one of the tracks because somebody was injured?

MU: As I remember but it wasn't me I think it was Miss Williams, but you better cut that out because I can't remember. But I do remember the people in connection with the race track they would bring their families and have the odd contact.

INT: Really? It sounds a little fruitful by itself then. The race track people.

MU: And they ... horses were exercised during the regular season I think it started about June, July and August and then you had a lot of traffic over the bridges, it was bumper-to-bumper at race times.

INT: Yes and the people were saying that it was quite an excursion to go on the tram from Vancouver?

MU: Oh yes.

INT: Take a little ride out and go to the races and everyone enjoyed themselves and laughing and screaming and jumping on the tram and all piling back to Vancouver.

MU: Yes and it was very handy to the Lansdowne.

INT: Yes, it ran right ...

MU: People just poured right in .. it was really quite a sight.

END OF INTERVIEW