

# AN ACCOUNT OF MY LIFE

For my children and grandchildren, an account of my life from my earliest recollections and of people, places and events that have affected me.

*George Hollingshurst*



**“Sunday Suits and Eton Collars”**

George (10) and Ernie (8) in England prior to embarkation for Canada in 1913.

## **PART I - ENGLAND**

### **London 1902-1908**

To begin with I was born in London, England September 23, 1902. I do not remember the event but I have a birth certificate testifying to the fact and another certificate showing that I was christened on the 11th day of October, 1902. Moreover, my Aunt Florrie, who was fourteen years of age at the time and witnessed the event, told me that I was a bonny baby.

My father's name was Charles, my mother's name Emma. I was the oldest of three children. My brother Charles Ernest was two years and two months younger than me. His birthday was November 25, 1904. A sister, named Florrie after my aunt, was born in 1906 in the month of March.

I remember the first time I saw her was when Charlie and I were ushered into our parent's bedroom to see what mother had brought home from the hospital. It was tiny, like a doll wrapped up in a pink blanket and we were told that it was our baby sister.

My mother was born in London and had lots of relatives. My father came from Yorkshire and we never met any of his folk. My mother's father's name was Luke. I don't remember his wife's name as she died when we were still quite young. I vaguely remember the funeral hearse coming to carry her casket away. It was drawn by two black horses and I thought they looked grand. The attendants wore long, black coats and top hats with black crepe around the brim.

### **The Family**

My mother had three sisters-Aunts Lizzie, Flo and Sally. She also had three brothers- Luke the eldest, Harry and Fred. Harry was a soldier and looked quite dashing in his red tunic with the white belt, shiny brass buttons, black boots and trousers with a red stripe down the side. He was in the artillery and was a gunner. Later he became a sergeant and fought in the 1914 war in France, surviving it without injury.

Fred, the youngest brother, was my favourite uncle because he along with grandfather came to live with us. He used to take us to places like the local park where we could ride on the swings and teeter totters. He also took us occasionally to the local branch of the Salvation Army. We loved to hear the band play and we learned some of the hymns like “Onward Christian Soldiers” and my favourite, “The Glory Song.”

I don’t ever remember my folks going to church and I knew nothing about Sunday school. We used to visit Aunt Lizzie who was married to Uncle George. He was a hostler, what we call in Canada a teamster, in other words he drove a team and wagon for a milk company. Aunt Lizzie had two girls and we would play with them. I remember they had some guinea pigs which I tried to pet once and got bit. Uncle George always had a tub in his back yard in which he grew rhubarb. When we were there we would have rhubarb sauce which we thought was very good.

## **Impressions**

The first thing to make an impression on my consciousness happened to me when I was between the age of three and four. I say this because I was not aware of my brother’s presence so I suppose he was still too young to play with me.

Someone had given me a bright, red, toy mailbox fashioned after the English mailboxes which are round in structure, somewhat like the shape of a can. My mother let me out the front door of our house and I thought that as the can was round it would roll along the ground so I threw it as hard as I could and then ran after it. Unfortunately I stubbed my toe on a cobblestone and fell, cutting the palm of my hand to the bone. My mother wrapped it up and it healed but I have the scar to this day.

The next thing to impress me was a trip to the Kent hop country. Many working class people spent their holidays in Kent picking hops to earn some extra money and at the same time getting a change of scenery away from smoky, drab London. Kent was so beautifully green and the air was so clear everyone felt good.

Families would work together on a row of hops. The farm workers would remove the poles that held the hops up about eight feet above the ground and the pickers would gather as many hops as they could and fill up big containers made of poles and sacking. The children would soon tire of this and wander away. I did and very nearly drowned.

## **A Near Drowning**

My Uncle Fred was there with some other bigger boys. He was eight years older than me but I wanted to be with him. He wanted to go with the bigger boys on some sort of an outing

and figured I would be a hindrance to them. To get rid of me he took some small, green apples out of his pocket and asked if I would like some. I said yes so he threw them a distance away. Of course I ran after them which was just what he wanted and he took off with his friends.

I ran after the apples which were rolling down a slope at the bottom of which was a stream. The apples ended up in the water and so I got down on my belly and began to reach for them. They were out of my reach so I stretched out as far as I could and the next thing I knew I was in the water lying on my back. I don't remember being scared but before the current got me I saw a man's face and a big hand reaching down. It grabbed me around the waist and lifted me out of the stream. I felt nothing worse for the experience but the owners of the place and my parents were quite concerned. They took me to our living quarters and stripped me and made me go to bed in broad daylight. I wondered why I was being punished so.

## Nipper

At this period of my life we lived in a working class area in a two story row house on, I think, Thomas Street. We had a little black and tan terrier that slept in a cubby hole under the stairs. In the morning when we got up we would go to the fireplace in the kitchen to dress. Someone would let Nipper out of his sleeping place and he would come and nibble at our toes. All the while he would be wriggling about with pleasure at being free to play with us. We had to let him go when we moved to Ray Street and I think that was the most disappointing thing for me about the move.

We were fairly comfortable at the house on Thomas Street and my father had a steady job in a wholesale hardware house. When I would come home in the afternoon my mother would get us washed and dress us in clean white blouses. On one such occasion I went to go outside and mother said, "Don't go away, your father will be home soon and we will have supper right away."

I said I just wanted to sit on the front steps and wait for him. As I was sitting a boy came along kicking a tin can. "Hello," I said, "where are you going?"

"I'm taking a note to my aunt, do you want to come along?"

"I can't, my dad will be here in a little while and we're going to have supper. u

"It will only take five minutes" he said, "you'll be back very soon."

Without any more persuasion I joined him and we went merrily on our way. We soon came to a main thoroughfare. There was a lot of traffic, mostly horse drawn wagons, carts, cabs and even horse drawn trams. We got across quite safely even though there were no traffic lights.

We were soon at our destination and he went inside leaving me to play and talk with a girl who was swinging back and forth on an iron gate. We got along fine, she on one side of the gate and me on the other.

Too soon the boy came out and we were on our way home again. We arrived at the main street – I believe it was called Burdett Road. Now the traffic was much thicker and seemed to be moving much faster. I envisioned myself being trampled underneath the horses hoofs. My friend started but I hesitated and had to wait for a break in the flow of traffic.

## **Lost**

I took the first opportunity to cross hoping that my companion would wait, but he was gone. However I was sure I could find my way back home safely and started down the first street I came to. It looked exactly like the one we had come by but it was a dead end. So I went back to the main street again. I was puzzled. It looked like the right street. Perhaps I had not gone right to the end and maybe there was a turn that would bring me onto my home street.

I went back again but there was no turn. There was nothing for me to do but return to the main road and try another. When I got to the corner a postman asked me my name and where I lived. I told him and he said, “I think you are lost. Come with me.” So he took me to the local pub and put me in the charge of the proprietor’s wife. She was friendly and offered me a mince tart but it was too rich for my taste. Then she gave me an orange which I ate.

After a while a policeman came and took me to the police station where they asked me my name and where I lived. They wrote it all down and then let me sit down on a bench where I went to sleep. Later on I was awakened and told my Uncle George had come to take me home. I was glad to see him but he said I was a bad boy to go away like that. When we got back home both my parents were out. Aunt Sally, who was about fourteen then, was getting my brother ready for bed. She said “You are going to get it when your dad and mum come home. Here’s your supper I saved for you.” She passed me a plateful of food but somehow I had lost my appetite!

## **The Canal**

My timing of individual events may not be in chronological order but they all took place during this period. There was a canal at the foot of our street. It was part of a natural grid of canals that were used before the advent of railroads to haul freight from one part of the country to wherever it was needed. Nowadays those that are left are used mainly as tourist attractions and many of the barges still on the canals are for pleasure trips.



Some of the old barges were tied up to the canal bank when I was living there. Boys would play follow the leader. Starting at one end of a string of barges, they would jump on the first one running from one to another until they reached the far end. The vibration of many feet pounding the decks would get the barges swaying and you had difficulty keeping your feet. When the lead boy reached the end of the line he would leap off. The combined effect was to push the barge away from the bank.

This is what happened to me. I was last in line and when my turn came I knew I could not make the jump. I hesitated and just then the barge tender, who had living quarters on the barge, came out shouting, shaking his arms and looking very fierce. I didn't know which was worse, to drown or get beaten to death. I froze but as he came nearer to me his manner changed, perhaps because I was small or perhaps because he realized I was not one of the regular boys who pestered him.

"What's the matter you poor little cuss?" he said. "Don't be afraid." With that he took hold of one of the ropes and pulled the barge into the bank. "Now off you go and don't let me see you again." He didn't.

## **Moving to Ray Street**

There was a change in our circumstances and so we moved to another part of town, to a poorer district. The house we moved into had two rooms-a living room downstairs and a bedroom up. The lavatory was near the entrance and there was no bath or sink. Cooking was done over an open fire.

I didn't see my father much and my mother seemed to be away. I remember she would tell me what to say when people came and I remember she said that our name was Spooner. Sometimes we left money to pay a bill for coal or other merchandise but most of the time I was on my own so I would wander about the streets and learn the ways of the local kids.

One showed me how to get free fruit. Barrows were lined up along the sidewalks. Barrows were like tables mounted on wheels so they could be easily moved about. On them there would be fruit and vegetables for sale. Every two or three barrows would have a space between them so you could pass through. So what this kid did was walk along the sidewalk and when the owner was serving a customer he would slip through and as he did would reach out and grab a piece of fruit, cross over to the other side of the street and vanish. I tried to do the same thing but the man caught me and threatened to call the police. But he let me go and I got the idea that stealing fruit was not a very smart thing to do.

If a prosperous looking person would come into the neighbourhood kids would gather round and beg for pennies. I was not too successful at that either. By the time I got there the spare coins were all gone!

## Street Games

Another game the boys played was stealing rides on the back of wagons. They would stand on the sidewalk and wait for a loaded wagon to pass. If the teamster (hostler) was not looking they would run out and jump on the tailgate. They seldom got to ride very far because someone would see them and yell “whip behind.” The driver would then know that he had unwelcome baggage and would flick his whip back and catch the hitchhiker with the long lash of his whip- and they seldom missed.

Boys would also try to take free rides on the trams (streetcars). The trams were double-deckers and when the ticket puncher went up top the boys would run out and jump on a bar that extended right across the back of the tram and hold on to a railing that protected the passengers as they were getting on or off the vehicle.

When I tried it I got my foot stuck and had to wait while the ticket collector slowly descended the back stairs, frowning at me and telling me to “hop it.” When he realized that I was stuck he signaled the driver to stop and pried me loose. It seemed that so many of the things I tried ended in failure but never once did I get the punishment I expected. Maybe it was because I was so young.

Once we didn’t get off so easily, or at least my brother Charlie didn’t. We went to a park in the neighbourhood with Uncle Fred. It was the time of the year when the pips on the haw-thorn trees were ripe so we intended to fill our pockets. But Charlie and I were too short so Fred lifted us up into the tree where we could stand on a branch and pick. Then we heard someone holler and Fred yelled “Jump, it’s the park keeper.” I jumped and took off after Uncle Fred and left poor Charlie alone to face the certain wrath of the keeper who took it out on my brother. We could hear the whip smack and Charlie yelling at the top of his lungs. And then he came running as fast as his little legs could go. He was still blubbering when he reached us but a handful of ripe pips soon quietened him. I doubt that the keeper’s bight was as bad as his bark.

Summers could be sunny and warm but in fall and winter there would be a lot of fog and because houses were heated with coal the soot would mix with the fog and it would become prematurely dark. The lamp lighter would have to go along the street lighting the gas lamps. They used a long rod to reach up to the lamps which had a device to turn on and ignite the gas. These lamps would be at every street corner. When it became light again the lamp lighter would go out and turn them off. I saw both operations in our area. There were no electric lights in our district. I’m not sure just when they were introduced but I went back to London a few years later and there were electric lights and streetcars.

The house we lived in on Ray Street had but two rooms, one downstairs and one up. We had to go through a narrow alley to get to the only door. Just outside of the door was the lavatory. As you entered the fireplace was on the left and beyond it was a narrow stairway leading up to the bedroom where my mother and us three children slept. The room was so small that the two beds touched each other.



Downstairs there was a table in the middle of the room with two benches against the wall. On the right was a double bed in which my grandfather and Uncle Fred slept. There was a chair or two and that made up the sum total of the furniture. There was only one window beside the door and none upstairs. The rooms were lit by a single gas jet in each. There was only a cold water tap and any hot water for bathing and washing had to be heated on the stove. What a job my mother must have had to keep us clean.

I don't remember seeing my father very often. Once he brought me a pair of boots that had a red band around the top. The last time I saw him he was drunk and my mother was so infuriated with him that she pushed him against the hearth and he fell into the fireplace. Fortunately for him there was no fire in it. He never came back and years later when I was married I heard that he was a bigamist and had to spend two years in jail for his crime. My poor mother was faced with the responsibility of raising their three children herself.

## London

As a kid I found London a fascinating place. The streets were crowded with all sorts of vendors with things to sell. Some would have a regular spot to set up shop. One street was given over to this practice, it was known as Petticoat Lane. There were barrows lined up in rows taking up the whole street except for spaces for customers to walk. One could buy anything from shoes to wigs, socks to overcoats and even household items. It was a fun place to visit because the vendors had a great sense of humour and made the people laugh.

There were also other vendors that went house to house calling out their wares like "Fresh fish today, crab, cockles and winkles." A man with a basket on his arm would be offering "Hot muffins." Milk could be bought by the pint from a man pushing a hand cart with a large can of milk on it. I don't know how he kept it cool. Another man would grind your scissors or knife. He would cry out "Scissors to grind." There were ice cream carts but the ice cream was served between two biscuits like a sandwich.

In the fall and winter there would be men selling hot, roasted chestnuts and roasted potatoes. At regular times a horse drawn cart would come down the street, the driver half shouting and half singing "Any old clothes, any old clothes." Occasionally we would see a military unit with a band or highland pipes playing as they marched smartly by. I also liked to see the navvies working, they were the men who worked in the ditches. They had a pot of hot tar to daub on their leather boots to keep their feet dry and a pot of hot tea to keep their tummies warm.

There were also small shops such as butchers, bakers, sweet shops and fish and chips to take out. The fish and chips were always wrapped in newspaper. My mother would send me to the baker to get a loaf of bread. The loaves were round in two sections with the smallest piece on the top. Bread was sold by the pound and a loaf usually weighed about four pounds. If the loaf

was not up to weight the baker would cut off a slice from another loaf and give it to you. Sometimes the slice he gave you had raisins but whether it had raisins or was white I would eat it on the way home.

Sometimes my mother would send me for treacle, a kind of syrup. I would take a bowl to carry it in and once I held it up against my shirt to keep from spilling as it was quite full. When I got home treacle was running down my shirt. I was a very sweet and sticky boy.

I went to a big school and don't remember very much about it except it was behind a high wall and we had to go in through a big iron gate which was locked when school was out.

I had two bad experiences at school. I shared a desk with another boy. He had jam sandwiches for lunch and I had margarine sandwiches which we kept on a shelf under the desk. I thought I would like jam for a change so I switched them. As soon as the bell rang for recess I grabbed the sandwich and headed for the playground. I gobbled it down fast because I knew the boy would come looking for me. He did and brought the teacher with him. I was not counting on that. The teacher made me go into the classroom and stand for the rest of the lunch hour and when the other kids came in they were laughing at me. I felt very ashamed.

Another unpleasant memory was the day I moved to another classroom. We were asked to read a portion out of the reader and when my turn came I stood up. But when I looked at the page I became tongue tied and could not speak. After a painful pause I began to say "Oh, I know what it is." But the teacher said, "That will be all, go back to your former class."

## **The Christmas Party**

When I was six years old I went to my first Christmas party. A boy friend invited me to go with him. I think it may have been a Sunday school mission and when we went inside the place was packed with kids. I found a place against the wall and opposite me was a fir tree that reached to the ceiling. It was decorated with tinsel and brightly coloured balls and lit with candles.

There were grown-ups in charge and soon they began to call out names and children went forward and received a present amid much excitement. As they received their gifts they left the hall and finally all the children had gone except me. A kindly looking man came over and asked me what my name was. When I told him he said he didn't think there was anything with my name on it, "but wait and we'll see what we can find." So he went and took one of the balls off the tree and gave it to me. "Be careful, it's very fragile" he warned and off I went hugging it to my breast. I got home, rushed in to show my mother and tripped and fell. The ball fell and was shattered. I felt very bad about the loss and my mother and Aunt Flo tried to console me but as I have grown older I have often thought that we spend our lives striving for what we think are desirable things only to find that, like the glass ball, they are fragile and fail to give lasting satisfaction. "Now none but Christ can satisfy, no other name but His." In Him alone is happiness and joy complete and His love is firm and enduring forever. Amen.

A few months later my mother took Charlie and I to a strange place we had never been to before. It was an office of the Dr. Barnardo Homes. She talked to the receptionist and then she said we were to go with a nice, elderly gentleman. He had something to show us and we would be staying with him for awhile.

For the first time in my life I saw tears on my mother's cheeks. Then she said "Goodbye, be good boys, It and to me, ..Take care of Ernie," for after the disappearance of our father she had changed my brother's name from Charles to Ernest.

When we got back to the reception room mother was gone and we were taken to a place named The Good Shepherd House where there were lots of other boys. We went to different rooms- mine was a large dormitory with about twenty beds in it. I was assigned to one and after supper and evening prayers we went to bed.

In the morning when I woke up a supervisor was talking to me asking why had I made a mess on the floor. I denied having done such a thing but a boy in the next bed to mine swore that he saw me do it. When I was dressed I was sent down to the swim tank for correction. I was met by a teenage boy who was friendly. He asked me what happened. I told him and said I didn't do it. "Oh well," he answered, "there's nothing to it. Just take off your clothes and go to the opposite end of the tank." The tank was empty.

As I approached the end I was hit with a jet of cold water that pushed me up against the wall. It almost took my breath away and I was scared and thought I would die. But after a while the water stopped and I waddled back to the boy who handed me a towel and was smiling like it was a big joke.

We were only there a week or two. We were checked by doctors and dentists and then we were told we would soon be going to the country to live. We were allowed to go home for a short visit to say goodbye to mother. When we got home Aunt Flo, who I thought was very beautiful (she was tall and blonde and smiling) and Aunt Sally who was short, plain looking and serious were there. Both these aunts had been put into service in rich person's homes because grandfather thought that was more respectable than working in a factory. Aunt Flo gave me some money to go to the sweet shop and buy some lemon drops. I was warned not to be helping myself to them. "I'll smell your breath when you come back." She was teasing me of course. (I wouldn't do such a thing, would you?)

When the time came to say goodbye everyone except mother was trying to be cheerful. She looked sad. They told us how lucky we were to be going to the country where there was lots of trees and grass and flowers. I thought they were describing a park but I would have to wait to find out what it was really like. (So will you).

.

## About Smoking

Smoking may look harmless but there is plenty of evidence to prove that it is injurious both to the smoker and the non-smoker who may be subjected to the smoke. But a child sees an adult smoking and thinks it must be enjoyable or they wouldn't do it. So he tries it. The first smoke may not do much harm but if continued, it becomes a habit and can be costly to both health and purse.

I tried smoking when I was about six years old. I saw a man light a cigarette at a chestnut vendors' stove. Then I spotted a nearly whole cigarette that someone had thrown away and picked it up. I lit it at the same stove, the man said nothing. I puffed on it until it was so short it burned my fingers. When I got home mother said rather sharply, "What have you been doing?" I thought she knew so I said, "smoking."

"What?" she said, and I dived under grandfather's bed until I thought it was safe to come out. Some time later we were staying with Aunt Lizzie. The elders went out and left two girls, Jessie and May, with Charlie and me. I was the oldest and suggested we try rolling up some newspaper strips and light them at the fireplace. We were sitting on the floor and were not aware that the room was filling up with smoke or that a dropped "cigarette" could start a fire. Fortunately the parents returned before any worse damage was done as we could have been burned with the house.

## Suffolk 1908 - 1913

Not many days later we were given new clothes to wear and bags to carry extra things in then we were taken by a lady to Victoria Station to catch a train for our new home. The station was very large and noisy with many people rushing to and fro. There was also much shouting and a loud noise of escaping steam, tooting of whistles and trains being shunted onto the right tracks.

Each track had a gate at one end through which we had to pass. The gates were numbered and we were directed to the right one for our destination which was called Eye. I think it was on the line to Thetford. The lady guide put us into a compartment. There were two girls about our age in that section too who were also being sent to the same village as us. The oldest was named Mabel and youngest Elsie.

Soon we were on our way but it took ever so long to get out of London. I never realized how big the city was before. Eventually we came to open fields. The country was quite flat and to my eyes seemed to stretch out forever. We soon began to get hungry and lucky for us we had been provided with a box lunch. I think we were all excited and a bit amazed at the length of our journey but eventually we arrived at our station and the train master told us we were to get off.

## Redgrave and Jasmine Cottage

There were two ladies waiting for us, we went with one and the other took the girls. Our lady asked us our names and told us she was Mrs. Hawes and we would be staying with her. She led us to a horse drawn cart called a gig, a two wheeled cart with two seats back to back. Ernie and I rode on the back seat and we held on tightly at first but really enjoyed the ride. Soon enough we were at the house where we were going to live for the next four years.

It was a pretty, two story, brick house although it was hard to see because the entire front was covered with climbing tea roses. There was a little porch over the front entrance and it was covered with sweet smelling Jasmine in full bloom. We carried our bags into the house.

To the left side was a long counter and behind it shelves with an array of goods to buy. The lady ran a convenience shop for the people in the area, mostly tobacco and sweets, but also some grocery items such as tea, sugar, etc.

On the right was the parlour which we only used on Sunday and in the evenings when the weather was cold. There was a fireplace against the far wall, a big dining table with high back chairs in the centre of the room, a buffet on the near wall just past the door to the left. Above the table hung a chandelier with cut glass pendants hanging on it which sparkled in the light of the kerosene lamp and fire.

Two easy chairs, one on each side of the hearth, were the private chairs of Mr. and Mrs. Hawes. The floor in this room was made of wood and was raised about eight inches above the rest of the ground floor which was red tile. The floor in the parlour was partially covered with a woven carpet and there were hassocks for us to sit on when we were allowed in the room.

Coming out of the parlour and going to the back of the house we entered a large kitchen. The walls were spotless white and there was a large, plain table with a bench at the back. Along the back wall, starting from the left, there was an immense cauldron set in brick over a fireplace. This was where the lady boiled water for her washing. There was a mangle beside it to wring out the clothes and sheets.

The lady also used the cauldron to make home brew and wine. Next to the big pot was the kitchen fireplace where most meals were prepared. Next to that was a door leading out to a small lean-to which was where she did her weekly baking. She would heat the oven by building a fire of dry sticks and when she considered it to be hot enough she would scrape out all the ashes and put in all the weeks baking in the reverse order to which it would be taken out (bread at the back, then meat pies, cakes and tarts).

On the extreme right of the back wall was the pantry where all the food was stored on shelves and in bins. Upstairs were three bedrooms one of which we would occupy as long as we stayed there.

## **The Back Yard**

The back yard was the largest thing of its kind that we had ever seen. It would be about 50' by 30' and at the rear was a chicken house, a stable with a hayloft and a huge pit to keep the manure from the horse and chickens. On the right side of the house was a driveway and at the end of it a shed for the cart.

I mention the yard because it also served as a place of detention for us when we had misbehaved or for any reason that the lady of the house thought necessary. We were told to call her “Aunty” and I shall try to use that title in referring to her although she didn't remind me of any of my real aunts.

Shortly after we arrived Mr. Hawes came home. He drove his cart into the yard and we were allowed to watch him unhitch the horse from the cart. After backing it into the shed he then led the horse into the stable, took the harness off the animal and tied it up to the manger. He fed it some hay and then rubbed the horse down and gave it a bucket of water. After supper he went out and made the animal comfortable for the night.

At the table we sat against the wall on the bench. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Hawes there was a teenage daughter. She was very pretty and their only daughter. Her name was Sippy or Cippy? They had a son who was apprenticed to a jewelry firm in Birmingham.

## **The Church**

The first Sunday we were there we had to put on our best clothes and shoes that had been polished the night before. Saturday evening we had our weekly bath and cut and cleaned our fingernails and toenails. There was nothing left to do Sunday but attend church services, come home to eat and when it was nice we would all go for an afternoon walk along one of the many beautiful lanes that abounded in the countryside.

Going to church was an adventure for us as we had to follow a path through the squire's meadows. When we came to a fence there would be a stile to get over. The ladies had some difficulty because of their long dresses but uncle would help them.

The church was early English, built of hewn stone. It had a bell tower and when the bells were rung to call people to worship we heard them in the village a mile away.

There was a big pipe organ and it was operated by air. They usually picked a big boy who could not sing to handle the pump. The choir was made up of men and boys only. During my last two years at Redgrave I sang in the choir. We wore a black cassock and white surplice. Someone said we looked like little angels but we were really little devils. We practised once during the week. The schoolmaster was our teacher. Our reward for singing in the choir was two bob (about 50 cents) and a trip to the seaside.



The church was situated on a slight rise above the surrounding fields. It was topped by a steep roof which was covered with slate tile. It had tall windows on each side which were made up of stained glass sections held in a lead grill. Each window depicted a Bible character or story. They looked beautiful when the sun shone through them.

It was said that the church had many carved images in the early years but they had been destroyed by the “Roundheads” (Oliver Cromwell’s soldiers) who reputedly stabled their horses in the building during the civil war of the 17th century.

The pews were very hard and the backs were straight and Auntie would make us sit very erect and not allow us to lean back. My body would be aching and I would wish for the service to be over. There was a board about eight inches off the floor which we would kneel on for prayer from time to time during the service. I was glad when, at eight years old, I was taken into the choir.

## **Church Picnic**

Shortly after arriving at Jasmine Cottage we were invited to a church picnic at the vicarage which was the house where the preacher or vicar lived. It was situated in a fairly large area and well landscaped. There was lots of room for the kids to run races which we all took part in. Everyone seemed friendly and after the races we had pop to drink and things to eat.

There was plenty of food and some of the elderly folk kept offering us jam sandwiches and tarts. We did not want to offend them of course so we ate everything they offered. We really thought we had come into a good thing. By the time we got back home someone had already told Auntie how much we had eaten and she was angry with us and said that we had behaved like little pigs.

Auntie always seemed to have the knack of taking the joy out of our outings. There was the time I went to the seaside with other members of the choir. I had received two shillings from the choir master but Auntie would only let me take one. We had a great time at the beach. There were donkeys to ride and merry-go-rounds and many other things to spend money on. Most of the boys had all their allowance but we were all out of money long before the day was over. The assistant pastor, who was a very kind man, paid for many rides and took us on a boat trip through a haunted mountain. When we arrived home late that evening Auntie wanted to know what I had brought home for my brother. When I said nothing, she said, “You are just a selfish, unthankful boy!”

## The School

The school for the village was situated about one quarter mile to the east along a road that ran directly from our house. It was at the junction of our road and a main bi-way that ran from Colchester in the south to Bromwich in the north. It was said to be built on top of an old Roman road which ran straight from one Roman fort to another.

The school was really two buildings joined together, the smaller part for beginners and the first two grades. The bigger building was divided into large rooms each accommodating 40 to 50 children. Miss Elliot taught the beginners and she was a very gentle and kind person.

Miss Graham was older, a no nonsense person who taught the first and second classes. Mrs. Carson taught the third, fourth and fifth classes and her husband, Mr. Carson, taught the top three grades.

He was the disciplinarian and we were sent to him if we misbehaved. He was called the master and I remember I was sent to him because I made nine mistakes in spelling. He asked me, "How old are you?"

I said, "Nine sir."

He said, "For that you will receive nine strokes of the cane. Put out your hand, face up." When I did that he came down with the cane right across the palm of my hand. It sure hurt and I had a hard time to keep from crying.

But a worse thing awaited me when I got home. A girl who for some reason didn't like me had already told Aunty who told me that I had disgraced them and if it ever happened again she would have Uncle give me another whipping. I tried hard to improve my spelling but it has always been one of my poorest studies.

## Winter 1909

Our first winter in Suffolk was a new experience for us. It was the first time we had seen snow. Although Redgrave was only 100 miles north of London there was a good deal of difference in climate and the way people lived.

The pond on the squire's estate froze over and all the local people were allowed to skate there. We went to watch only as we had no skates.

In the summer people were allowed to swim in the pond. Our school master offered to instruct us free in the art of swimming but we needed trunks (which could be rented to us for a modest amount). Aunty said, no we might drown and she would be responsible, though she

added that “you couldn’t drown a person who was born to be hung,” which was poor consolation to us.

There was a lot of cold, windy and wet weather during fall, winter and spring and Aunty made us flannel undershirts. They made us itch but they certainly kept our bodies warm. It was different for our feet though. We wore leather boots that covered our ankles. The soles were studded with hobnails and the heels were reinforced with iron shoes. Our feet were always cold when we were outside and when we came into the house and got warm our feet would swell and we got what was called chilblains. They would itch terribly and sometimes the toes would swell and crack. The remedy was Zambuck ointment.

Some children wore clogs. They were shoes with wooden soles and felt uppers. They were looked down on by the wiser folk but I never heard any of those who wore them complain about cold feet!

## **Spring 1910**

How good it felt when the weather began to warm up and green leaves and grass shot forth, followed by spring flowers. Many types of flowers grew wild in the countryside along the roads and hedgerows. The first to appear were snowdrops which blossomed before the snow had all melted. Then daffodils and violets and in some of the fields there would bloom primroses and cowslips. “

One day when the primroses were at their best Aunty told us to go to the field opposite the school and pick a box full of nice, fresh primroses with long stems. She wanted to send them to a sick lady who was confined to bed. She said Mr. Morton, a dairy farmer who supplied us with milk, had given her permission to take all she wanted.

So away we went with a cardboard shoe box, happy to get out of the yard, and were soon at the meadow where the primroses grew in profusion. We located a spot near a ditch where the flowers had the longest stems and started picking.

We had just about filled the box when we saw a man approaching us. He had a shotgun under his arm and had leather leggings and we recognized him as the gamekeeper. “What are you doing here?” he asked, “Don’t you know that you are trespassing?”

We told him that Mr. Morton had given us permission to pick flowers here. He said, “This land belongs to the squire and you have no business here so dump the flowers on the ground and take your box and get out of here.”

## Summer

Summers were very pleasant, not too hot but comfortable. Life in the village went on at a leisurely pace. We used to see the farm labourers walking to work carrying their tools. In the summer time their tools were mainly scythes, rakes and pitchforks. (In spring time their tools would likely be spades and garden forks with short D-handles. Some employers thought that a man was not working unless his back was bent).

The men would also carry a lunch, usually bread and cheese and, most likely, a bottle of homemade beer or cider. During the summer holidays some of the bigger boys from school would get work. I knew one boy who worked for a month and received a gold sovereign, about five dollars in our money.

Uncle had some property across the road from the house where he had a large garden and a small field for hay. He would not let us work in the garden for he was a perfectionist and was afraid we would do more harm than good. He grew lovely vegetables of every kind: potatoes, both early and late varieties, beets, turnips, carrots, beans, peas and tomatoes. I have never tasted anywhere such flavoursome vegetables as his.

There were also small fruits like strawberries, gooseberries, black, red and white currants. He also had apple, pear and plum trees. We lived well with food, not only from the garden, but also milk and butter from a local farmer (Mr. Morton).

The only milk I remembered having in London was sweet, condensed milk which we had in our tea but in the country we had lots of fresh milk each day. It was one of my chores to go and fetch the milk. It was only a short distance away. I would go just before supper and someone in the dairy would fill my jug.

Once Ernie went with me. As we were walking down the driveway I could hear some boys giggling on the other side of a high hedge. Then an object came flying over the hedge and hit the milk jug, knocking it out of my hand and smashing it on the road. Ernie cried, "I'm going to tell Auntie that you have dropped the milk and spilt the jug." It was quite a joke for some time. After we got home I explained what happened. Auntie was quite a fighter and went with me to the boys home and demanded recompense. The parents, who were just working folk, paid without a murmur. They knew what the boys were like-always getting into mischief.

One job Uncle would let us do was to pick up stones in the meadow. We would put them in a bucket and then pack them over to a pile where we would dump them. We both thought we were hard done by but he was actually a very kind man. He only got angry with me once all the time I was there. He slapped my face and I was so surprised.

## Autumn

Autumn was also a special time for then the harvest of the root crops and tree fruits took place. Uncle had a garden on the fens where he grew the bulk of his late vegetables. This was the produce that would be put in the root cellar to feed us during the winter. We were proud when he allowed us to go with him to fetch in the root crops. He had a wheelbarrow but he let us carry some home in a small sack slung over our backs.

It seemed like a long way from home but we enjoyed the walk. The path to the garden led through some untouched land that was too wet to garden so was allowed to grow wild. The reeds were higher than our heads so I was glad Uncle was with us. Actually there was nothing to fear as long as we stayed on the path.

There was another crop harvested even later than the potatoes and carrots, etc. and that was acorns. It seems they made excellent pig feed and the squire paid good money to have them picked up. Auntie said we must go and make some spending money so off we went with the other kids. There were also some women in the party. Soon we got to the forest where the oak trees grew. Some of them were giants dating back to the days when the lords used to ride through the woods hunting wild boar. Well we were not allowed to pick the acorns because only families of the farm labourers had permission. The man that told us was the gamekeeper!

## Christmas 1909

When the cold, wet weather set in I got a bad case of tonsillitis. A doctor drove up to Jasmine Cottage in a grey, two-door motor car. It was the first car to visit our place, although the squire had a limousine. The doctor decided he could not operate on me without permission of the home of which I was a ward.

When the Barnardo Home was notified they sent for me so I had to go to London Children's Hospital for the operation. I arrived in the city and was met by a lady who took me to a hospital where, much against my wishes, I was given a bath and sent to bed. Next morning I had no breakfast but was taken to an office where a man examined my throat and told me to sit on a chair. A nurse came with a large towel which she wrapped around my shoulders and then she brought a white basin which she held in front of me.

The doctor said, "Open your mouth," and when I did he put a long, skinny rod down my throat. It tasted tinny, cold and sweet. When it was far enough down he pulled it up rather fast. There was a pain like a cut and up came the tonsils and half a bowl full of phlegm, blood and, it seemed, all that was in my stomach.

I didn't cry but I was scared. There was a girl in the next room having the same operation and she screamed her head off. Later there was a Christmas party in the girl's dorm and I was carried there by a nurse and put into a large crib with three girls. They were excited to have me. One of them was named Mabel.

After the party I was taken back to the boy's dorm. There was another meeting with a few well-dressed men and ladies. They sang for us and then one of the men told us a story. He held up a sheet of writing paper which was covered with black spots, some big and some little. He said this was a picture of the bad things you have done in the past year. I wondered if he had been talking to Auntie. After telling us what a mess we had made of the past year he said, "Here is a clean page. It represents the new year just beginning. Will you promise to do better this year?"

Well after a week on a bread and milk diet I was declared fit to return home. When I got back there was a big cardboard box full of toys that had come from mother for us. I gathered by Auntie's manner that she did not approve of such extravagance but she let us have them all. After sometime we got curious about them and wanted to see how they worked so we took some apart. Unfortunately we couldn't get them together again. When Auntie found out she was furious with me especially because I was the oldest. She took all the toys away and made me write a letter to my mother telling what a bad boy I was and that she was not to send me any more toys.

I had already got a black mark on my page and I'm sure there were many more before the year was up. The strange thing was I didn't realize what was bad or good until after I did something. If I got chastised it was bad, otherwise it was good.

## **Mr. Hawes**

Mr. Hawes was a very good looking man with a beard. I think he would have been about 50. He was medium in height, with dark brown hair and generally quiet in manner. He had no schooling so could neither read nor write. His main diversion was to play a small button accordion which he played very well. We liked to hear him play, especially on a Sunday evening in winter, when we couldn't go to church. He would play all the old hymns which he knew by ear.

I liked him and respected him. Twice a week he would hitch the horse to the cart and load some groceries that had been ordered on a previous trip. He always had a lot of table ware such as pottery, dishes, pots and pans and he would go out into the country and villages and sell his wares. He had a regular list of customers. He would take bread and cheese wrapped in a clean, white cloth and a red, bandanna handkerchief over all with a bottle of home brew beer which his wife always had in supply.



Sometimes he brought back meat and wooden artifacts which he bartered for. These road trips and the garden kept him busy and I think he was a contented man. He was a member of the Loyal Order of Orangemen and once a year he would attend a lodge function for which he would put on a golden bandolier and an apron. He was one of the flag bearers. It was the only change he ever had to an otherwise quiet routine.

## **Aunty**

Aunty was a more complex type of person. She was small, wiry, energetic, always talking and always busy except in the evenings when with the rest of the family she would relax around the fireplace and tell stories. Some of them were ghost stories and quite frightening to us children.

She had been to school and could read and write well. She kept track of the shop and her husband's business dealings. She was critical of people and openly expressed her feelings. She was also very religious and taught us how to pray. We usually said our evening prayers kneeling before her as she sat on her chair.

In summer time she would open the kitchen window which overlooked the front of the Half Moon pub and have us sing an evening prayer at the top of our voices. I don't know whether the publicans liked our offerings or not.

Aunty always took care of our appearance and always had us dressed neatly. She always inspected us after we washed to see that we were clean behind the ears, etc. She also fed us well but I think she did it for the effect it would have on the neighbours as much as for us.

I can't remember her physically punishing us but she could sure make us feel small and worthless. But maybe I misjudged her after all. She did take care of us and I'm sure the pay she got for looking after us would not compensate for all she did for us. She undoubtedly wanted us to grow up to be good citizens.

## **Sippy and Other Relations**

Sippy was the youngest of two children. Her brother was apprenticed to a jewelry firm in Birmingham, the largest city in central England. Sippy was a very nice girl, in disposition like her dad. She had graduated from school and had a job. I'm not sure what she did but she rode her bicycle to work. Sometimes she would be late coming home and her mother would go to meet her.

On Sundays she would go with us to a hall in the village where she took part in teaching us for awhile. It was she who gave us a religious card with the picture of a man guarding some sheep. He had a lamb in his arms. She told us that his name was Jesus and that those who believed in him were his sheep and he would take care of them.

I only saw the brother once. He came to stay with us during the holidays and he brought a young lady along who was introduced as his sweetheart. While at our home she shared the room with Sippy.

One day when we came home from school there was a strange man sitting in the kitchen with his back to the wall. He was an elderly man with a white beard and he was talking to Mr. Hawes. He was wearing a three quarters black coat with a vest that buttoned up to his neck but the strangest thing was that he was wearing a black bowler hat. We had always been told by Auntie that you never kept your hat on in the house and you always took your hat off in the presence of a lady. We found out later that he was almost entirely bald and kept his hat on either because he was afraid he would catch cold or because it embarrassed him.

## **Mr. Crisp**

His name was Mr. Crisp and he came from London where he ran a clothing business. He was Auntie's brother who had gone to the big city and done well for himself. He hardly paid any attention to us but he gave us a penny for shining his shoes.

One day while he was with us Uncle came home from his rounds soaking wet. Mr. Crisp was shocked. "You'll catch your death of cold," he said, "Where's your rain gear?" When Uncle said he had none Mr. Crisp said, "I'll send you an outfit when I get home." He was true to his word. One day a big box arrived and when it was opened it had an oilskin raincoat and hat and also a pair of rubber boots, the first seen in that part of the country. Uncle wore the outfit just once. He said it was heavy and hot and that he would rather be wet and comfortable.

## **Mr. Crisp, Jr.**

Another visitor was Mr. Crisp's son, Donald. He was a budding young actor. Some American movie maker had given him a job in Hollywood, California. He visited us one summer. He was a bit proud of himself and it must have embarrassed him to have to share the bedroom with us. But he got the bed and we had to bunk on the floor. He never got up until after we went to school. One day he left his suitcase open. On the top of some clothes was a pair of western cowboy spurs! He liked Sippy and tried to demonstrate his acting ability on her but she was rather shy.

For some reason if they went for a walk Auntie always said we should go with them. One day we went with him to the garden. He was ahead of us and going down a row of potatoes. They were in bloom and a pretty, purple colour. I picked one and ran up to give it to him. “Where did you get it?” he asked. His manner frightened me so I lied and said it was lying by the vine. “Show me,” he said. I took him back to where I had picked it and showed him the spot. “You are lying,” he accused. “Wait till your Aunt hears about this.”

When he told Auntie she had a fit. She was going to send me back to the Homes. First I had to write a letter saying what a wicked boy I was. I was in her bad books for the rest of his stay. I saw him in some of his movies in later life. He was more or less a celebrity but he was no hero to me. I felt he had little understanding or even compassion for a child who only wanted to please him.

There was another nephew whose name was Roy. A young man, he was a motor mechanic and chauffeur for a rich man. Once he drove one of his employer’s cars over to his aunt’s place. It was a shiny, black coach. When he left for home he let us ride in the back seat as far as the school. It was a double thrill for us, our first ride in a car and we were the first children in our neighbourhood to have such a privilege. Auntie would not ride in any mechanical contraption. Sometimes they blew up she said.

He came again but this time on a motorcycle. He tried to explain to the adults how the ignition worked but was not too successful so he had us all hold hands. Then he touched a spark plug with a screwdriver and a shock went through all of us. We all jumped and the ladies screamed but then we all laughed. None of us were hurt and we learned that spark plugs were not to be fooled with.

A memorable event happened in 1910, in fact I think there were two events. The first one was the arrival of Halley’s Comet. The schoolmaster had explained it to us and told us at approximately what time it should appear. We were all out in the back yard when it appeared. It was like a very bright ball with a bright tail of fire extending from the rear. There was no sound but it seemed to be travelling at great speed.

The other event was the crowning of King George V. We didn’t see the event but all the boys whose first name was George were asked to bring a penny to buy a silver tray for his highness. We were honoured the teacher said. Later we got picture books which illustrated all the various ceremonies including pictures of the new king and Queen Mary. They were very royal looking. They reminded me of fairy book characters-not quite real.

## A Second Trip to London

I was having trouble with my studies at school and the schoolmaster thought it might be my eyes. I was given a simple eye test by the local MD and, as a result, I was sent to London to be tested and fitted with glasses. I was taken to the railroad station and a label was fastened to my lapel with my name and address on it.

I was met by a lady at Paddington Station who said we had lots of time and asked me if I would like to see a cinema. I said yes but did not have the slightest idea what a “sinema” was.

We went into the theatre and took our seats. There was a large white sheet in front of us which the lady said was a screen. Soon the lights dimmed and pictures in black and white came on the screen and started moving. There was no sound except a piano playing. There were subtitles on the screen to tell us what was happening.

The film seemed to be about some fishermen by the seaside pulling in their nets. One of the nets had a creature with eight arms on it about four feet long which the lady said was an octopus. When the man tried to pull it from the net it wound itself around him and this struggle went on for quite awhile. Anyway, at this point the lady said it was time to go. I used to wonder how it ended, whether the beast got the man or vice versa.

## Odds and Ends

We took an electric tram to the doctor's. After I received the glasses I was sent back to Redgrave. The glasses seemed to help me with my studies but brought jeers and sarcasm from my school mates. I was called “four eyes” and “goggles” and it was hard to take. When I would get into a scuffle with the boys the glasses would get knocked off and bent.

Eventually I was accepted by my peers. One of the boys, whose name was Roger, became a close pal. We both sang in the choir and he was the son of the farmer where we got our milk. He had a sling shot and one day he came running up to me and said, “I killed a thrush with my sling shot.” He was quite excited and wanted me to come back and see it. So I went with him and sure enough there was a bird lying under a tree. He picked it up and showed me where the rock had hit the bird on the side of its head. There was a large lump as big as the bird's head. I think he was a little bit sorry and a little bit proud of his marksmanship.

Besides catapults the boys made popguns (which would shoot acorns) and bows and arrows. The bows were made out of willow and the arrows were made using reeds from the fens with pieces of alder wood for a point and the feather from a hen for the tail piece, to help the arrow fly true. They were lethal weapons in the hands of an inexperienced archer. I know because I nearly knocked the eye out of Ernie. I was shooting at a hen coop and the arrow ricocheted and hit him. That was the end of my dream to be Robin Hood. Aunty used the weapon to fire her oven.

## **A Trip to Norwich**

One day, late in winter, the choir was told to prepare for a music and song festival to take place at Norwich Cathedral. So we began doing extra practice besides our regular rehearsal.

When the time arrived all the choir members from our church were loaded into a coach and bused to Norwich. When we arrived at the cathedral we were marched into the building (it was immense to our eyes) and ushered to our section which happened to be in one of the transepts, far away from the main body of the church.

The cathedral was literally packed with choirs from all over Northeast Anglia. We could see some of the cathedral choir members in their red cassocks, a bright contrast to our black ones. We could also see part of the orchestra, especially the drums.

When everybody was seated we were called to attention by a tremendous roll of drums. It was like thunder and we all sat straight up in our seats. Then one, lone voice started to sing an aria and it was so dear and flawless it electrified me. The cathedral choir joined in and sang an anthem of praise which lasted for some time. Eventually we joined in and the whole cathedral resonated in music which seemed to fill every niche and corner. I am sure God must have been pleased with us that day.

After what seemed like hours the singing came to an end and we were marched back to a big hall where we disrobed and then passed into another long room with tables and benches where they had prepared a lunch for us.

## **The Castle**

After lunch where we had sandwiches, cakes, tarts and pop we were taken to visit the castle. It dated back to Norman times and had often been under siege by warring lords. The last attack had been by Cromwell in the 17th century. We were shown places in the walls that had been ruptured by his cannons. There were all sorts of ancient articles of war and equipment that had little meaning in our days.

There were rooms for the lord of the castle and his household and rooms for the servants and in the basement there were dungeons where they kept prisoners. They were dark and musty smelling. I would not want to have been put into one of them.

## **Concert**

One winter a concert was put on by the community. It was a Chinese play called, I think, Madame Butterfly. I was one of the squad of soldiers. We practiced quite a lot and when the night arrived we had to be at the school early to get ready. We were dressed in a smock and slacks and wore a stocking cap with a braided tail and had a wooden gun.

The show started and we waited and waited for the cue to come on stage. We were sure we would be the big hit of the show. Perhaps we would have to arrest the bad guys, we weren't quite sure what was expected of us. At last the fateful moment came. We marched on, lined up and stood while someone made a short statement and then were led off. We felt cheated.

## **Guy Fawkes**

Every fifth of November was Guy Fawkes Day. He was the man who attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London. He and his associates had managed to get several barrels of gun powder in place ready for the big day but alert guards were able to apprehend them and took them to jail. They were tried, found guilty and hung. Since then the day has been marked in England by the lighting of enormous bonfires in most communities throughout the country.

## **Christmas at the Manor**

There was a Christmas party every year at the manor. I attended the last two years we were at Redgrave. Every boy and girl received a toy and I remember getting a guards helmet. It was red with a golden plume on top, a golden regimental badge on the front and a braided chin strap. Ernie got the same except his was white. We really had lots of fun pretending we were soldiers and had the job protecting the yard from invaders. “

The second Christmas I got a box of real stone building blocks and columns. I gave it to my sister Florrie when we left England. She played with them and her children had them after.

## **The Titanic**

We heard the sad news of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. The choir was called upon to sing a special number on the following Sunday. We practiced the hymns “Eternal Father Strong to Save” and “Nearer My God to Thee.” For some reason we never sang the last piece; I always wondered why.



## **Farewell to Jasmine Cottage**

Spring of 1913 we received word that we were to return to London where we would be made ready to go to Canada. All I knew about Canada was what I learned from an old book I had read in London while getting over my tonsil operation. It was mostly about voyageurs, trappers, settlers and wild Indians.

Reading prompted me to draw a picture at school of an Indian chief sitting in a canoe, fishing. It got a commendation from my teacher as imaginative but she added, “I don’t think Indians use rods and reels to fish.”

Well Auntie got us ready to go back. She dressed us in our Sunday suits with Eton collars. Then she opened our piggy bank and we had the equivalent of about \$2 apiece. She said she would keep \$1.50 to help pay for the suits and told us the rest would be plenty for us as we would likely only spend it on foolish things like sweets!

The gig came to take us to the station and one of the neighbours, who had heard we were leaving, brought us some sweets for the journey. We thanked them and said our goodbyes.

At the station Auntie walked with us to our compartment and got into a conversation with a man who was the only other passenger sharing the space. He said, “I suppose it is hard to part with them?”

“Yes,” she said, “I have had them for four years and they are just like my own.” There were tears in her eyes and she looked sad. The train started to move and we felt free. I guess the man was puzzled by our behaviour-we were laughing.

## **Goodbye to England**

Arriving in London we were taken to one of the many hostels operated by the Homes. Here was assembled about one hundred boys ranging in ages from eight to fifteen. These were all to be sent to Canada if they passed the necessary medical checks.

We were segregated into two groups according to age. For meals we sat at tables made of unpainted boards. After eating we had to clear and scrub the tables with soap and water and stiff, fibre brushes.

We slept in dormitories and each boy had to make his own bed. It had to be done right or else the supervisor would pull all the sheets off and you would have to begin again. It was surprising how quickly one learned to do it right.

We attended classes every day to keep up with our studies and, on Sunday, we were all dressed in sailor hats and blouses and marched to the nearest Church of England for the service.

One day we were taken on a tour of parks and historic places like the Tower of London and Tower Bridge and Hastings Palace. We were awed by the soldiers on guard at the palace in their red tunics and black busbies with rifles and bayonets so polished they glittered in the sun.

One day mother, sister Florrie (six years old now), Aunt Jessie and Uncle Fred came to visit. My uncle was now a young man of 19 and looked handsome in his pin-stripe suit. He worked in a cake factory and brought us some cakes with icing and coconut on top. They were so delicious I can taste them yet in my memory.

## **Farewell Mother**

Mother brought us some caramels which helped us to make friends with some of the older boys who were in charge of us when we were at the tables or in the shower rooms. I played toss with Florrie while Ernie stayed close to his mother.

Aunt Jessie was all smiles and cheerful but mother was quiet and restrained. I can only guess what was going on in her mind; she knew we might never be together again. The last thing she said to me was, “Georgie, take care of your brother and let us know where you are as soon as you get to Canada.” She also gave me a packet of marigold seeds to plant at our new home. They were sent by Aunt Flo who was unable to come and say goodbye because she was in service.

The day came when we were given all new clothes. The suits we were wearing when we came to the Homes were taken away as soon as we arrived and we were given the same kind of clothes all the rest were wearing. I don’t think Auntie would have liked that!

Each child was given a small trunk containing an extra suit, shirts, socks, sweater, hair brush and two combs (but no toothbrush-they were not in use at the time). There was also a Bible, Fox’s Book of Martyrs and a little book called The Christian’s Guide.

Then we were all taken to a train and loaded aboard and told that we were on the way to Southampton where we would catch a ship for Canada. And so we were on our way to whatever the future had in store for us. But we all took it in stride, ignorant of what lay ahead.

## **On Board Ship**

When we arrived at the dock our ship, The Corinthian, was already under steam, waiting for us and a few last minute shipments. We were marched on board and shown to our cabins-

Charlie and I shared one with five other boys. The bunks were made entirely of wood (no springs) and they were equipped with a straw mattress and grey blankets with no sheets or pillow. We used our clothes to cushion our heads. There was just one porthole which was about large enough to stick your head through.

Our dining area, which was close by, was fitted out with bare wooden tables and benches much like at the Homes except the tables had a board all around the edge to keep plates from sliding off when the ship rolled in high seas.

The only deck space we had was the foredeck where the winches, anchor chains and other gear were located. There was no provision for any games or amusements except for tourists and first class passengers on the upper decks, an area forbidden to us. But while the weather was nice we would sit in the sun and talk and sing.

Our first stop was off the French coast where we hove to and took on some passengers from a small boat. The sailors hung a special gangway over the side so the people could climb up to the deck of our ship. Then we were on our way out of the Channel headed for the open seas.

## **Westward Bound**

When we awoke next morning we could feel a difference in the motion of the ship. She was rolling gently from side to side and, at the same time, pitching up and down in a forward movement.

When we were allowed on deck after breakfast, morning prayers and inspection by an adult who checked us for dirt behind the ears, dirty fingernails, etc., we were amazed at the size of the waves. They were hitting us at an angle and when we were in the trough they towered over us. It was quite a thrill.

There were two scout masters on board who were going to a Boy Scout jamboree in Canada. They were dressed in their khaki uniforms and each carried a sheathed knife on their belts. The blades were about six or seven inches long and us boys were quite impressed although it was not at all clear what they needed them for.

One of the deckhands had a rope to cut and asked a scout to lend him his knife. The scout obliged but although the sailor sawed and hacked away he was unable to slice through the rope. He returned the knife to its owner with the advice that he have it sharpened before he ventured into the wilds of Canada for as it was now he wouldn't be able to shave kindling for a campfire. The scout looked embarrassed and he lost some of his prestige with the kids.

## **Rough Weather**

One day it got so rough we were not allowed on deck. It was stifling in our cabin but we had to keep the porthole closed, our only source of fresh air. Some of the boys got seasick and there were a lot of empty places at the tables. I never got sick and those of us who stayed healthy got extra food to eat.

When the storm abated the next day and the rain stopped we were allowed back on deck. The ship was still pitching up and down so much that waves were coming over the bow and washing the deck. We had to be on our toes to keep from getting our feet wet as the sea water washed this way and that with the motion of the ship.

Some of the boys climbed up on the winches to stay out of the water only to get hit with the spray. One extra big wave came over and washed a boy off his perch on the winch. He cracked his head on a deck bolt knocking him unconscious and was taken to the ship's infirmary. He was one of the boys from our cabin and his name was Stanley. He was a nice boy, good natured and polite and we all liked him.

When we had been interviewed by the man in charge of our group and asked what we wanted to do in Canada he said he wanted to be a preacher. I remember it because the rest of us said we wanted to be farmers.

A few hours after he had been taken to the infirmary we were asked to come in and see Stanley at his request. He was in bed propped up so he could speak to us. He looked well and was smiling but didn't have much to say. The next day he died.

## **Burial at Sea**

At a certain time all the boys and girls were assembled on deck for the burial. The sea was smoother now. We were to sing two hymns, "Eternal Father Strong to Save" at the beginning of the service and "Safe in the Arms of Jesus" at the end.

Quite a crowd of first and second class passengers had gathered at the rear rail of the upper deck to watch the proceedings. Two seamen came onto the deck with a bundle wrapped in canvas on a stretcher. One end of the stretcher was placed on the side railing and the two seamen held the other end level. A Union Jack was draped on top.

We were told the bundle contained Stanley's body. Then the ship's captain joined us and our superiors led us in the first hymn. The captain read the burial service and committed the body to the deep until the day of resurrection and then as we began to sing "Safe in the Arms of Jesus" the seamen lifted their end of the stretcher and the body slid into the sea (after the flag had been removed).

We were told the shroud was weighted so it would sink to the bottom of the sea. It was a sobering event. It is hard to think of dying when we are so young but it is probably good to be reminded of our finiteness and how unpredictable life can be. It's a good thing to commit our lives to a loving God at an early age then whatever happens we can know we are indeed safe in the arms of Jesus.

## **Fog Bound**

After the storm we enjoyed a couple of days good sailing and the captain took advantage of it to make up for lost time due to the storm. But it was not to be for as we approached the shores of Newfoundland we ran into heavy fog due to icebergs. The fog became so thick we were stopped altogether for two days and were told we were over the Grand Banks in fairly shallow water and would have to wait until the fog lifted. Anchors were lowered to keep us in position. They were not taking any chances of meeting the same fate as the Titanic which had sunk the previous year after colliding with an iceberg off the coast of Newfoundland. The fog horn blew at regular intervals day and night and made a very loud and morbid sound giving us all a creepy feeling.

In the night we were confined below deck with not too much to do so those in charge rigged up an immense swim tank made out of heavy tarpaulins. Gallons of sea water were pumped into the "tank" until it was about two and a half feet deep. We were then told to strip off and jump in. Some of the boys hesitated and were told "Jump in and get wet and you can get right out but if you don't jump in we will throw you in." Well we jumped in and it was ice cold but, strangely, when you got out your body was tingling and after a rub down we all felt fine.

## **The Gulf of St. Lawrence**

When the fog lifted we were underway again and the next day we were told we were in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It was hard to believe because there was no land in sight. The sea was calmer here without the big waves we experienced on the open ocean but we still had to wait another day before sighting land.

The river was still very wide at this point and I think it must have taken another two days to reach Quebec. There we disembarked and went through Immigrations and medical examinations. We all passed and were soon loaded on a train and headed for Toronto where the Barnardo Homes had their Canadian headquarters.





## **PART II - HELLO TO CANADA**

### **Walsh**

We were there for a few days while we were segregated and sent off to our new homes, Ernie and I to a place called Walsh. We went by train and arrived there about noon. It was just a small place and we were the only passengers to get off. We had tags in our button holes to say where we were going. The station master's home was just behind the station. His wife, who was very friendly, asked if we were hungry and if we would like some fresh baked bread with sweet butter on it. We said yes and thanked her but the butter was so salty we had difficulty getting it down.

There was a red headed boy about my age who was friendly and showed us around the place. We picked some Transparent apples which were not quite ripe but helped to counteract the taste of the salty butter. We found out later the reason the butter was so salty was because they had no refrigeration and salt was the only way to prevent it from going rancid.

### **The Perrys**

About mid-afternoon a man and an eight-year-old girl drove up to the station on a flat deck wagon drawn by a team of horses. The man was dressed in working clothes and was middle aged with a sandy coloured moustache. He had a pleasant look about him and asked if we were the boys from the Homes. When the station master said, yes the man said he was Mr. Steve Perry and he had a letter from the Homes to expect us to arrive on that day and if it was alright he would like to take us to his place.

So we were loaded onto the wagon with our two trunks and started for his home. He said the girl was his youngest daughter and there was another girl at home, her name was Dorothy and she was fourteen. On the wagon there were some large milk cans and we found out that Mr. Perry hauled milk to a cheese factory in Walsh, some of his own but most belonging to his neighbours. We soon became acquainted with the girl whose name was Lucy. We became fast friends and had much fun together.

After we arrived at the Perry farm we met Mrs. Perry. She was a friendly person and was much concerned about us dressed as we were in woolen suits and woolen stockings up to our knees. “You poor boys, you must be boiling in those heavy suits. Look at your faces, you’ll be getting sunstroke. Take off those suits right away.”

When she found out we had nothing lighter to wear she said they would have to get us something more suitable for the hot weather. The family made us feel most welcome. Very soon after we arrived they went to the country store, about three miles away, and bought us blue bibbed overalls, black shirts with white stripes and straw hats with wide brims-the clothes to keep us cool and the hat to prevent sunstroke.

## **Learning About the Farm**

We soon adjusted to these changes. The thing I liked most was the liberty to run around in bare feet; we had never seen anything like that in England. We had arrived during school holidays and so had lots of time to get to know about the routine of the farm. There was a team of horses and a filly, three cows with calves and pigs. One of our first chores was to pull pig weed for them. We were also taught how to milk cows and feed the calves. There was also a hen house to clean and eggs to gather.

We worked in the garden weeding, hoeing and carrying buckets of liquid manure to fertilize a patch of celery which Mrs. Perry hoped to trade at the store for groceries. Unfortunately we were over- zealous and the celery grew too big and coarse. The grocer said it was only good for hog food and that is just what happened to it. We picked strawberries for a cent a basket. Mrs. Perry had more success with these and we made 25 cents each for our part.

## **Summer Picnic and School**

Don’t get the impression from this that we worked all the time. We had lots of fun. In August there was a community picnic complete with races which I had to enter. In the running race I did poorly but came second in the three-legged race in which I was partnered with another immigrant boy. He was also new to the district albeit from a different home. There was lots of good things to eat including home- made ice cream.

The next thing was preparing for school; getting scribblers, pencils, slates, chalk, etc., but the worst thing was that we would have to wear boots to school. After running barefoot for a couple of months the soles of our feet had developed a hard layer of skin and putting on stiff leather, ankle high boots was a painful experience.

## School Days

The first day at school we just got acquainted with the teacher and the other students. The teacher was a 19-year-old man and the students (about 25 of us) ranged in age from six to 14. Dorothy Perry was 14 and her friend of the same age had a crush on the teacher or at least they were quite occupied with each other so that they seldom came outside during recess or noon hour.

This meant us kids were left to our own devices and one boy figured his job was to challenge all the others, especially newcomers. He picked on me right away and I figured I was doing pretty well. When the bell rang I was ready to shake hands as we headed back to the classroom when all of a sudden he hit me a terrible blow to the side of my jaw. It was such a surprise, so unsportsmanlike! My jaw was sore for days and I never made the mistake of turning sideways to him again.

We fought whenever he was not putting someone else through his paces. Apart from that I found school interesting. We had to learn all the counties in Ontario. We were living in Norfolk County about six miles from Port Colborne on Lake Erie. On some Saturdays Mr. Perry (we were calling him Dad now) drove a horse and buggy to the Port to buy fish. He would get enough to supply our immediate neighbours with their needs.

On the way down, as we got within a mile or two of the lake, we drove by farms abandoned because the sand drifts had covered the land to a depth of two feet or more. In some places it was up to the window sills and even apple trees were buried up to the branches. Subsequently Imperial Tobacco bought up thousands of acres, cleared it and planted tobacco. With irrigation they were able to produce big crops.

With the coming of winter we got lots of snow which we kids put to good use building forts on the school playground. We had many a good snowball fight with the enemy who tried to take our position. I'm glad to say we repelled all attacks.

When the snow came the Perrys bought us rubber boots which fastened with buckles. We also got lumbermen's heavy socks which came up to our knees-no more cold feet!

## School Concert

As Christmas drew near we kids were all encouraged to prepare a poem or song. Mrs. Perry decided Ernie and I should sing "Star of the East" which guides all wise and gentle people to the babe of Bethlehem and also a poem about two brothers Hodge and Jack. Hodge always saw the doleful side of things while Jack was an optimist. Because I was the eldest I was

assigned to the part of Hodge but temperamentally Ernie was more suitable to the role and consequently it was a bit of a flop. But we got good applause for our singing.

## Christmas

Christmas at the Perry's was a real warm and wonderful experience for us. Sister Ada came home as did Roger and they cooperated in decorating the living room to look like a place of beauty with garlands, paper bells and chains made up of coloured paper crisscrossing the room. A fir tree was decorated with tinsel strips and strung popcorn.

Everybody gave gifts. I had 25 cents to spend so I picked the five most important people in my life: my mother, sister Florrie, Lucy, my first sweetheart, Mrs. Perry and Ernie. I sent mother a handkerchief, Florrie a white, silk ribbon for her hair, Mrs. Perry a handkerchief, Lucy a sketchbook and Ernie some crayons. I suspect Mum Perry, who did the buying at the wool store helped a bit with the financing.

Christmas Eve we hung up our stockings-a first for Ernie and me. The Perrys had a pump organ and Mum Perry played carols and we all joined in the singing.

Christmas morning we awoke early but there were chores to do so we could not open up our gifts. When we in came we had an English breakfast of bacon and eggs with toast and marmalade and then we opened our gifts. After that we played games and Roger, a born musician, played the latest ragtime hit, "Everybody's Doing It." Mum thought it was terrible but us young ones thought it was okay. We had a goose for dinner and Christmas pudding for dessert and it was sure good.

## Sundays

On Sundays we went to church. Mrs. Perry rode with a neighbour but we had to walk with Lucy and Dorothy and a girl named Flossie Swede and her brother. It was three miles to the little Baptist church and on hot days it could be a tiring walk. Mr. Perry did not go nor would he allow us to take the horses. He said Sunday was a day of rest and the horses needed a rest as well because they worked harder than most people.

Mr. Perry taught me to drive the team. He said to always keep a firm line and don't let the lines slack, always have them under control. "When you're driving through a gateway or on a narrow road in the bush keep your eye on the road ahead, don't look at the gate post or the trees at the side of the road. If you do you 'II hit the tree or post on the opposite side." I found out that was good advice.

During the summer he taught me how to use tools and how to load a hay rack with hay or sheaves. He also taught me how to pull a crosscut saw. We felled a pine tree about 18 inches on the butt and it was full of pitch which made sawing harder. But he would wet the saw with kerosene and after what seemed like an eternity to me the tree fell.

He had the tree cut up into planks and made a very good wagon box and hay rack out of the lumber during the winter months, planing all the boards with a large plane.

## **Sunday Nights**

Because of the distance we did not go to church Sunday night. But after supper and when all the chores were done we gathered in the living room around the organ that the Perrys had brought from England. Mrs. Perry was the organist and she played all the old church and revival songs and hymns. We all had to sing with even Mr. Perry taking part. I look back now with an appreciation that was sometimes lacking when I was there.

Mrs. Perry said to me one day, “George, I’m going to teach you how to mend a tear in your clothes for when you leave here you may not find someone to do it for you.” She also taught me how to dam holes in socks and sew buttons on shirts-all things that were to come in useful later on.

The Perrys were good people and I did not meet up with any others in my future places of employment that had the same thoughtful care and concern for my welfare. I was only one year in their home but I learned all the basic skills that my future employers would want to find in me.

Besides the skills I also learned that God cared for me and if I trusted Him He would guide and protect me wherever I roamed, a lesson I did not appreciate then but came to know the truth of later in life.

## **London, Ontario**

My next home was with the Brooks family who lived on a twelve acre orchard and truck garden near the city of London. We were across the road from a large cemetery which was bordered by a row of tall fir trees. It was quite spooky at night. The reason I left the Perry’s was because I was now 12 years old and able to work for my keep. The Perrys probably could not afford the \$200 I would receive for the next four years labour so I was indentured to a family that could afford to pay. Ernie, who was still just 10, did not come with me so we were separated for the first time.

Mr. Brooks was a middle aged man who had left England to take part in the 1898 gold rush in the Yukon. He was a fairly quiet man but had a hearty laugh. His favourite reading was Pluck and Luck and Fame and Fortune, magazines about men who had made a financial success of their lives. I was allowed to read them too but they gave me some funny notions of what life was really like.

Mrs. Brooks was a native of Woodstock, Ontario. She was rather delicate and had to watch her diet but she was a good cook and liked to prepare good meals for the family and I ate with them. I was also her chore boy, scrubbing wood floors in the kitchen and pantry. I had to push the lever on the hand controlled washing machine, a tiring job, and also turned the butter churn. I wiped the dishes after each meal, polished the silverware, brought in the firewood which I also had to split and took out the ashes.

There was a son George, three years older than me who was going to high school. He was a spoiled kid if ever I saw one. There was no love between us and sometimes I would tease him. He would become furious and punch me. Once when he was sleeping in a tent which we both used in the summer, I pulled the blanket off him. He jumped up and I led him through a patch of thistles thinking he would not follow in his bare feet. But it only enraged him and he caught me and lifted me up shoulder high and dashed me on the ground. I was really shook up.

I suffered a lot from splitting headaches during this period. Mr. Brooks prescribed one tablespoon full of epsom salts in a glass of water. He said irregularity was the cause but really it was my poor eyesight. I had thrown my glasses overboard on the passage from England and now I was paying the price for my foolish action.

## **The Hired Man**

There was a hired man on the farm whose name was Len. He was an orphan the Brooks had raised and was now responsible for looking after the truck garden, the orchard, berry patch, the livestock and poultry. I was put under his care and had to learn from him all that I was supposed to do. I took over the jobs of milking the cow, feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs.

I also helped him pick tomatoes and other vegetables which we put in crates and bushel baskets and loaded on a cart. The following morning we would be up at four o'clock to take all the produce to the farmer's market in London. It was located in a very large, open space in the town. The first time we went in most of the places had been taken by other people with produce to sell.

But we found a spot, unhitched the horse and tied him up, had our breakfast and then waited for the first customers to come. When they came and bought our stuff we let them take the small purchases but we delivered the large containers ourselves in the afternoon. By that time all the sales had been made and what was left was taken back.

In the fall we picked apples, pears and plums. After all the crops were disposed of we gave the trees a dormant spray which was a smelly job indeed. I had to man the pump from the back of a wagon that moved along from tree to tree as the job proceeded.

When all the outside work was done I went to school. It was a considerable distance so I left home at eight o'clock to get there on time. It was a one room school with about 20 kids and a middle aged lady teacher. It was November, 1914 and we received A Child's History of the War. I poured over every page and reveled in our victories over the terrible Hun.

## Horses

There were two horses there, a bay gelding and a dappled, grey mare. The mare was gentle, I could catch her in the pasture. She would let me get on her back and then would take off around the orchard. I would have to lay flat on her back or get brushed off by a limb. Then she would head for the barn and stop right in front of the stable door. I would dismount and lead her into her stall where she knew there would be hay and crushed oats to eat. After that I had to brush and curry her and then harness her for the day's work.

The gelding was a very nervous animal. When you put a brush on him he would quiver all over and stamp his feet. I tried to ride him one day and he leaped into the air and then proceeded to lay down and roll over. I went spinning off and landed up against a tree, not hurt only scared.

Another time when the winter set in the master decided to feed the horses hot, boiled oats to warm them up I suppose. The oats were in a cast iron kettle, fresh off the stove and steaming. They gave me the kettle to take to the horses. I marched right in alongside Prince, the gelding. He snorted and started to back up. When he reached the end of his tether I heard the manger crack and start to give way so I dropped the kettle and jumped as high as I could. I caught hold of the hay rack just as the horse and manger and all disappeared out the barn door. Naturally the kettle broke and what a mess the oats made all over the place.

## Further Problems

The Brooks had a Scotch collie. Punctually every morning she would come to the bedroom window, put her front feet up onto the sill, and give a low bark, as much as to say, "Get up you sleepy heads." The hired man and I would know we had better get moving. She was a nice, friendly dog but soon after I arrived she died.



They got another collie pup to take her place and one morning I heard her howling. I rushed into the stable and Prince was standing on one of the pups legs. Without hesitation I stooped to lift the horses leg and so free the pup. But the leg came up faster than I expected. He was shod with iron shoes that had chisel caulks on them and one caught me over the left eye and made quite a cut besides giving me a headache.

The folk were quite concerned and made me come in to the house and laid me down on a leather couch. Mrs. Brooks was very kind and bathed my wound, put a cold compress on it and called her doctor. Later that morning a man in an officer's uniform of the Canadian army came in. Was I surprised to find out that he was the doctor! He stitched my wound and gave me a dime for being a brave boy. The next time we heard about him was in a dispatch from a field hospital in France where he was commended for his excellent work under enemy fire. By the way Prince was sold to the army. The buyers said he would make a fine charger for some officer!

The Brooks family rarely went to church but I was compelled to go to a Methodist place of worship. So after chores were done on Sunday morning I got ready. I disliked dressing up especially because of the stiff, celluloid collar which was hard to get a stud through. I wore a tweed suit with knickers that buttoned below the knees, a jacket with a cloth belt, shoes that had nobby toes and, worst of all, a Buster Brown felt hat that I detested. Both the shoes and hat were hand-me-downs and the shoes were too large and hurt my feet.

But I went regularly and was taken on the church roll after a year. I had to take a test and sign a pledge. I did all those things to please my Sunday school teacher who was a good man.

The hired man left for a job at a milk plant in the city working ten hours a day, 55 hours a week for \$10 in wages. Of course you could buy a suit of clothes then for \$10. Mr. Brooks decided to discontinue the garden as it was evident I was too young to do all the things necessary to a successful operation. He also had half the older fruit trees cut down. So my biggest job outside was looking after the raspberry patch.

The first year Indians came and did the picking but the next year they had found jobs in the factories producing war materials and so we had to recruit about eight boys my age to do the picking. I was the supervisor as well as picking myself. I don't think anyone profited by this arrangement. It was difficult to keep the boys working and sometimes there would be fighting over who had picked which basket. I got in trouble with Mrs. Brooks' sister because I sided with another boy against her son. She was real mad and I don't think she ever forgave me.

Mr. Brooks said, "You will get into a lot of trouble if you take sides in such disputes, you should have let them decide it themselves." Probably good advice.

## George Brooks

George Brooks joined the army when he was 17. He lied about his age. His mother was very upset and his father was mad at him. He said, “We are going to get you out but you will miss a year of school and what will you do with your time?” After about three weeks he was released from the army and spent the rest of the year loafing.

Mr. Brooks also had his own tea and coffee business. He had a small house on the property where he stored cases of tea and sacks of coffee beans. He also had a blending machine and it was my job to turn the drum in which the tea was mixed. I also turned the handle on the coffee grinder and helped to bag the tea and coffee. When we had enough to take care of his customers we would load it into a cabinet on the back of a buggy that could hold about 200 pounds of goods.

I was getting up each morning at five a.m. now because I was doing all the chores. I was the first one up and did all the chores before breakfast. After breakfast I would hitch up the horse and Mr. Brooks would come out and give me my orders for the day. The son did nothing and got meaner. One day he hit me a blow on the nose that made the blood fly. Not long after I decided to run away. If it had not been for the son I might have grown up there. The parents were not too hard but the son made me think there was little justice in that place.

## My First Freight Train Ride

It was after dark when I made my break. There was a railway siding about four miles away where freight trains would drop off cars destined for London and pick up others for delivery east or west. I intended to find an empty railroad car but all that was there was a carload of wheat. I had to break a seal to get the door open and then climb up over the false door which extended up to about two feet from the top of the doorway.

I crawled over and landed on the wheat. It made an uncomfortable bed but fortunately I had on a heavy overcoat which helped. During the night an engine hooked on to the grain car and we were on the move. When it stopped I waited for daylight, opened the door and got out, stiff with the cold. A man passed by and I asked him the name of the town. I was disappointed to hear it was London. I hadn't gotten anywhere.

I found a corner store, bought something to eat and then went back to wait for another train that would take me west. I really had no idea where I was going or what I would do when I got there. About noon a train pulled out of the rail yard and I was able to go on an open coal car. I was all alone so I settled in for a long ride. After about two hours I looked up and saw

a man coming over the top of the cars towards me. It was the brakeman. I tried to hide but there was no place to conceal myself.

## **A Night in a Railway Station**

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Chatham,” I told him. “I’m going there to look for work.” “You’re pretty young to be doing that, where’s your home?”

“Simcoe,” I said. “I have to get a job because my dad was killed in the war and my mother has three kids at home to care for and needs me to help support my little brother and sister.”

“Gosh, that’s tough. Here’s fifty cents. It ain’t much but I hope you get a job. Try the carriage works. I hear they hire youngsters.”

It was Saturday when I arrived and I had to wait until Monday to look for work. But I got a meal and then went to the railway station to wash and rest up. As it began to get dark I was approached by a man who was very friendly. He asked me a lot of questions and I told him a lot of lies. When he asked me where I was going to sleep I said I didn’t know. He said, “Come home with me, we have lots of room.”

I was tired and the prospect of a good night’s sleep overcame my sense of caution. I had been taught to beware of strangers but away we went and after a while we were passing what seemed like a lumber yard. “Let’s go in here,” he said.

“Do you live here?” I asked. It didn’t look very inviting. “No,” he said, “but we can have some fun.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, getting nervous.

“You know, pull down your pants,” he said. I started running and didn’t stop until I was safe in the railway station where I spent the night.

## **The Black Samaritaness**

Next morning (Sunday) I started walking out to the residential area as I was hungry and looking for a place to eat. I had no money so I couldn’t go to a restaurant but I thought I might

meet some kind person who would take pity on a poor boy. As I passed a driveway I saw a man cutting the heads off two chickens.

I approached him and said, “Mister, could you give me something to eat, I’m hungry?” He turned and I saw that he was a Negro, about fifty.

He looked very stern and said, “No, go home.”

I said, “I have no home. My father is dead and my mother lives in Simcoe.”

Then a voice from the other side of a wooden fence asked, “Who is this poor little boy that has no home?” Then a face appeared over the fence. It belonged to an elderly, black woman. She looked at me then she said to the man, “You all feed the boy, you hear and I’ll pay you.”

So the man took me into the house and told his wife, “This boy is having breakfast with us.” Then he went out to pluck the chickens. I took a seat in the dining room and watched the lady of the house set the table for six people.

After a while two men and a young woman came in. They were all black. They talked but paid no attention to me. Soon they sat down to eat and I was told to sit and eat. It was a grand breakfast; cereal, toast and the best fried chicken one could imagine. I ate my fill and thanked them. They spoke not a word but I will always have a feeling of being in debt to the black people because of the kind, old lady who took pity on a poor white boy.

## **I Get a Job**

Early Monday morning I went to the Carriage Works and was put to work drilling holes in hard wood sticks that made up the frames for sieves for the fanning mills, hand operated machines that farmers used to clean their grain.

It was a very monotonous job and it was piece work. I was paid so much per hundred pieces. I tried hard to make a good job but the boss kept bringing back rejected sticks-maybe the hole was not straight and maybe they were 1/16” out. At lunch time I was glad to sit down. I had no lunch but one of the workers came over and talked to me and gave me a sandwich. He was asking me all sorts of questions like where I lived. Finding out I had no place to stay in Brantford he invited me to go home with him.

He seemed trustworthy so when the work day was finished he took me to his house which was not far from the plant. He introduced me to his wife and when he explained my situation she said they would be glad to have me stay until such times as I could make other arrangements.

They were good to me. I had a room to myself and as I had no baggage they supplied me with a night shirt, etc. They had one child, a girl about eight months old. She was a cute, little, blue-eyed, blonde and she accepted me as one of the family, in fact they all did. They took me when they visited relatives and friends and also took me to a concert. It was classical music, a bit over my head at the time. They gave me some of the man's clothes to wear while they washed my dirty ones.

## **The End of a Dream**

I was getting to feel right at home there but I was a little embarrassed when my week's wage was not enough to cover the cost of my board and lodging which we had agreed would be six dollars.

One evening shortly after there was a stranger waiting when I got home from work. He turned out to be a man from the Homes. He had come to take me to Toronto. Mrs. Williams, the name of the lady of the house, had been brushing my jacket when she noticed a letter. It was addressed to me and was from my real mother in England. They immediately notified the authorities who identified me through a missing children's circular. So this man was sent to take me forthwith to the station and then on to Toronto.

Mrs. Williams was very apologetic but she said what she did was for my own good and hoped I would have no hard feelings. I didn't because I had some doubts about my ability to pay my way, also I really missed the sunshine and the clear air of the country. If only we could learn at an early age to be content with God's will for us we would save ourselves from a lot of grief and spare others unnecessary concern. But old heads do not grow on young shoulders and I was bound to make the same mistake again.

Back at the Homes I was berated for my thoughtless behaviour, the grief I had caused my mother and, above all, the fact that I had ruined a good home by running away. The Brooks would not have another "orphan."

## **Courtney, Ontario**

My next family were the Herrons of Courtney. The man's name was Lorenzo. He was of Irish descent and held the English in contempt. He had an eighty acre farm with a dairy herd of twelve cows, one Holstein bull and a team of horses. Besides hay and grain they grew pickle cucumbers for the cannery.

Prices for farm produce were good and he was prospering. But he was a stingy and sometimes mean man. On occasion he would beat his wife for little or no reason. He never

laid a hand on me but he did threaten to sue me once for a thoughtless remark I made about his daughter, a big, homely girl 15 years of age.

He was also the county constable, mainly because no-one else wanted the job. As far as I could gather he had no friends in the community. The daughter attended the Methodist Church and I went with her. The parents never went. The girl's name was Gloria.

The church picnic that year was at Port Royal on Lake Erie. Gloria wore white stockings and running shoes, blue bloomers and a white blouse with a sailors collar. This was her swimming suit which she made herself. When she entered the water her bloomers puffed up and some 'wise acre' said, "a balloon."

"No," said his chum, "a hippopotamus." Gloria's day was ruined.

She was a good girl at heart and worked with us during haying, driving the team while her father and I spread the hay which was delivered by a hay loading machine. Her back was turned to us and he pricked her rather large backside with the hay fork and then snickered. He looked to me for approval but I couldn't go along with that. It got so bad that she stopped the team and threatened to get off if it happened again. Even at that he had a hard time resisting the urge.

I learned to plough there. It was a hard job for me as I was short and had difficulty holding the plough handles up high enough to keep the plough shear in the ground. Nevertheless the second year I was there I ploughed a field in one day and a half. Both the horses and I were all in. I think I partly did it out of pride and partly from fear of being criticized for not doing enough.

Mr. Herron was very agile for a man of sixty. He could hold a pole in both hands and jump over the pole. Some trick!

My wages the first year were \$85 out of which I bought my own clothes. Starting the second year I bargained with him for \$200. He hated to give it but a neighbour of his had offered me as much so he had no choice because he needed me. But he got more demanding and late in the summer before the wheat harvest I took off after getting all the money I could without rousing his suspicions. I also persuaded my brother to go with me. He was working in the same area for another farmer.

## **Ernie and a Visit to the Perrys**

One Sunday while I was still with the Herrons I hired a horse and buggy from the local livery stable and Ernie and I went to visit the Perrys who were living in Simcoe now. It was about a two hour drive and we arrived unannounced before noon. They were very surprised to

see us but made us very welcome. We put the horse in their stable. We had brought some oats and they supplied the hay.

We had dinner with them and then went with Lucy to a park. She had grown a lot since I saw her last and was now six inches taller than me. I remembered that I had asked her to marry me when I lived with them and that she had said “Let’s wait until we’re grown up. We might change our minds.” Wise girl She looked like the ugly duckling and not at all attractive.

In the evening after tea we went to the Baptist Church. They had a big choir and we enjoyed the service. We got home safe about 10 p.m. The horse made better time going home. We did not have to urge him but let him have his head and he didn’t stop until he reached the stable door.

## **The Evangelist**

Later that summer an evangelist visited Courtney. He had gained a lot of notoriety by getting into a fight with a local store keeper who gave him a black eye and said the preacher bit is thumb. Well the church was packed that night. Ernie and I were there. I don’t know what we expected but what we got was a hell-fire and brimstone message-repent or go to hell.

That was in the days of Billy Sunday, a rough and tough professional baseball player who had been born again and set out to let the world know about it. He was known for his acrobatics on the platform and his hard hitting rhetoric. People flocked to hear him from all over the United States.

The man that came to our village was trying to impersonate him, even claiming to be an ex-baseball player. I wasn’t too much influenced by his preaching but before they gave the altar call his wife, who was a pianist and singer, sang “In the Garden.” I had never heard it before and was quite moved emotionally so that when the call was given I went forward.

We were told to wait as the evangelist had something to say to us. There were about six of us altogether and when the preacher arrived among other things he said, “I want you to remember that you are saved for all eternity and no matter what you do you cannot lose your salvation.” In my youthful wisdom I knew that was wrong. After all hadn’t we been taught that in order to get to heaven we must be good boys and girls? I even laughed and made jokes about it after. I was to regret that and find out the hard way that God never lets you go after you have called upon His saving power.



## London Once Again

When Ernie and I decided to take off we headed west and got as far as Sarnia. It is a port on Lake Huron and we tried to get a berth on a freight boat but as it was late in the season they were not hiring anyone so we decided to turn back east.

On the way, while waiting for a freight train we started wrestling. We were soon on the ground rolling around and unbeknownst to us we were in a growth of poison ivy. The next day we had pock marks all over our faces and arms, a pretty mess but a helpful druggist prepared a solution that cleared the mess up in a day or two.

We finally reached a railroad junction about ten miles west of London where we met an elderly man carrying some parcels. He asked us to help him and said he would give us a quarter. He lived only half a mile from the junction so we were soon there. He all the time was asking us where we lived, why we were here and where we would stay for the night.

He invited us to stay for supper and we gladly accepted and stayed two weeks. While we were there I got a job pulling and loading mangels, a hard job for a man and men were scarce. My partner was a farm woman. The beet tops were covered with frost when we started early in the morning and that made them hard to pull and hold on to. They were cold on the hands but we endured and I made \$20 for five days work.

Then I returned to the junction and while there a train came with the whistle wide open and bell ringing. We went to see what the fuss was all about and learned that there was an armistice declared and the war was over.

## Cookies and Paint

Arriving in London in late November we looked for lodging and were able to get a light housekeeping room, no questions asked. I got a job in Perrin's Biscuit Factory for the large wage of nine dollars a week. I was employed on the top floor where all the mixing and baking took place. My first job was to remove large slabs of soda biscuits from the hot pans. Another job was putting maraschino cherries onto macaroons, a sticky job.

We had a tough time making ends meet. Ernie went hungry sometimes toward the end of the week. I was fortunate that I could eat any of the products I was working on but you get sick of soda crackers and macaroons after a while.

Eventually Ernie got a job as a delivery boy for a pharmacy for which he received five dollars a week. I finally got fired for wrestling another boy to the floor and sitting on him. He had started it but I got the sack because I was the oldest.

Then I went to work for a plant where they repainted carriages although when I worked there it was mostly motor cars they worked on. Because of the war new cars were hard to get so many people were having their old ones done. It was a messy job and my coveralls were soon coated with paint.

The foreman took one look at me and asked my name. “George,” I said.

He said, “That accounts for it. I never saw a George that was anything but a dauber” and he gave me a job removing the paint remover from the body of an early model Franklin.

Once all the goo was off we sanded the metal down with emery paper and when it was considered ready for the paint they started with a sizing and then various coats of paint until seven coats in all were applied. Each coat was rubbed and buffed until it shone. I was not there long enough to see the finished coat.

Even though I was getting twelve dollars a week we were not much better off. Ernie was still getting a paltry \$5 so I urged him to ask the employer for a raise. The man said that was all he could pay. I was getting a hot meal once a day at a pub which had resorted to serving meals when the prohibition of alcohol was enacted. An act passed by the Provincial Government allowed each district or town to vote on the prohibition issue. It was called “local option.”

I was walking near the armoury one day and was approached by a soldier and asked if I would like to join the army. I was surprised because I knew you had to be at least 18 and I was just 16. He assured me they were anxious to get recruits as they were planning to send a division to Archangel, Siberia to join the Americans and British fighting the Red Army. So I went with him not thinking about what would happen to Ernie in the event that I should be enlisted.

## **One Day in the Army**

He took me to the barracks where there were about 20 young fellows mostly new recruits. Some of them picked on one poor fellow and pulled his pants down and painted his privates with ink. I wondered if they might do the same to me if and when I was accepted. First I had to be interviewed by the officers who would swear me in then I would have to pass a medical check.

Meantime the dinner bell rang and my host told me to come right along. “You’ll be alright, just follow me.” So away we went and I had the biggest meal I’d eaten for a long time. After dinner we all went back to the bunk house and later the officer came, took one look at me and

said, “You’re just a kid.” He stroked my cheek with the palm of his hand and said “You’ve never had a razor on your face.” I felt embarrassed. Then he told me to get my medical and if I passed to bring the written consent of my parents the next day.

Away he went and my guide led me over to the medical building where they put me through the test. I had to strip and was checked thoroughly for deformity and disease, height and weight. I barely made the last two. Finally they gave me the eye test where they found out very quickly that I was nearly blind in my right eye. So that was the end of that.

For entertainment in those days we went to a cheap movie theatre. For ten cents on a Saturday afternoon we could watch the latest western thrillers. They were in black and white with no sound except from the resident orchestra. William Harte was the favourite along with Tom Mix.

The favourite lady of film was Pearl White. There were lots of bank holdups and train robberies. There were also comic films featuring people like Mack Sennett with his Keystone Cops, Buster Keaton and Laurel and Hardy.

## **In Trouble With the Law**

I guess we got some bad ideas from the shows and decided we would break into the store where Ernie worked. We planned to get in through a rear door that opened onto an alley. So one night after coming from the show we slipped into the rear alley, pried off some battens that held the glass in place on the door, reached in and pulled the bolt that let us into the store. We replaced the glass and closed the door and then went directly to the safe which was not locked. Ernie knew where to look. There was a roll of bills about two inches thick. I wanted to take it all but Ernie said no, if we did he would be a suspect as it would appear to be an inside job. So we just took twenty dollars and left. We were half-way down the alley when a policeman came to check the premises. He stopped us and wanted to know what we were doing in this place.

I said I had to pee. “Show where,” he said. We pointed to a place in the gravel. He shone his torch but there was nothing to see and he hesitated so long that I decided to make a run for it.

“Let’s go,” I said and took off. But the policeman grabbed Ernie and took him to the police station where the whole story came out.

I was apprehended the next day by a plainclothes man. I was in the pub to get some lunch and he walked up to me and said, “I have a warrant for your arrest.”

## Three Days in a City Jail

The man took a firm hold of my hand and led me out of the pub onto the street and right to the city jail. I was booked by the desk sergeant and escorted to a large room occupied by about six men. They were waiting to be tried or sentenced for various crimes. Only one paid any attention to me and the only furnishings were a wooden table and benches. Off the main room were a number of cells in which the men were locked up at night.

There was nothing to read, nothing to do-it was a time for reflection on the errors of our ways. We were fed three times a day but the meals were not very appetizing. I was glad to get a banana from an important looking man who was pacing up and down the corridor outside our room. He saw me and beckoned to me. I walked over to the door and he asked me what I was booked for. I told him breaking and entering. He said, "Son, crime doesn't pay. When you get out of here remember that."

The friendly man in our room told me that the man who gave me the banana was a big shot being held on a charge of embezzlement and fraud.

On the third day of my confinement I was taken into court and questioned by the magistrate about the crime. A court lawyer told him the circumstances of the case. He said the store proprietor did not wish to prosecute and that a representative of Dr. Bamardo's Homes was prepared to take responsibility to return me to the Homes. So the magistrate let me go with a warning to behave myself or else it would go hard on me if I got into trouble with the law again-advice which I endeavoured to follow for the rest of my life.

Incidentally on the night of the crime I knew it wouldn't be safe to go back to our lodgings so I remembered the hay loft at the Brooks' farm and went there to spend the night. When I entered the stable I noticed there was no cow and no horse. I climbed up into the loft and fortunately, found enough hay to make a bed. In the morning I awoke at first light of day and proceeded to leave the premises before anyone came out of the house. I noticed, however, that the buggy and wagon were gone and in their place was a new automobile.

## The Woodleys

My next home was near Hamilton in a little village by the name of Dundas. The farmer's name was Bill Woodley and his wife's name was Irma. They had two children, a girl two and a half years and a baby boy.

The Woodleys were farming about 80 acres. They also rented some land owned by Mrs. Woodley's parents whose name was Vassey. The Vasseys were of United Empire Loyalist stock. The Woodleys kept sixteen milk cows and raised some grain crops.

They were good, hard working people and they expected the same of me but they never went near a church and did not insist that I go. During the school term the teacher stayed with the Woodleys. She was only eighteen but she was paid the magnificent sum of \$1,000 per annum. That peeved me. She worked a six-hour day, five days a week. I worked seventeen hours a day, six days a week and a half day on Sunday for \$200 and board.

She had a sarcastic tongue and delighted in making me feel like a country bumpkin. We didn't hit it off too well.

The next farm to us was owned by a widow with two sons. The oldest boy had just returned from the army and was disappointed because he hadn't gone overseas. The war ended too soon for him but not for his mother who needed him to help on the farm.

John, the younger son, was the same age as me and we hit it off right away. One of the things we did together was to dam up a creek that ran between the two farms. We were able to make a pool large enough to swim in. I learned to swim there and we had fun after a hard days work or on Sunday afternoon.

At harvest time John and I worked together on the threshing crew. We got the honour (?) of working in the loft where the sheaves were towed. The strawblower would be discharging straw into the adjacent mow and the dust would get so thick it was hard to see what we were doing and very hard to breath. We tried to wear a wet bandanna around our face to stop some of the dust from getting into our lungs. We were too proud or foolish to ask to be relieved and, of course, the older men were not about to volunteer.

As Halloween approached John wanted to do something out of the ordinary. I said let's tie the milk cans up high on the power poles. But how could we get up to the cross bars? A ladder wouldn't reach. "Leave it to me," John said.

The next time I went over to his place he showed me a couple of pieces of strap iron bent at the bottom at right angles with a spur on the opposite side.

"What are you going to do with them?"

He merely said, "Climbing irons, that's how we can put the milk cans up high enough so no one can get them down in a hurry, no milking for us tomorrow." In the morning farmers were scratching their heads wondering how the cans got up the poles.

It took a team from the Hydro company to get the cans down and undoubtedly the cows, as well as their owners, were getting a little upset. We were suspected but no one could get a word out of us so the matter was soon forgotten.

## Some Activities

When the snow came John and I turned our ingenuity to making our own skis but unfortunately mine were too heavy and I spent most of the time on my seat and consequently had a wet bottom.

A pastime for all during the winter months was dancing. Neighbours would meet at one of the houses and have lots of fun doing square dancing, Irish reels, polkas and of course the waltz. I had an opportunity to learn but was too self-conscious and it made me feel miserable not to be taking part. But there was also a whist game going on in one of the smaller rooms and though it was mostly older folk who played I was welcome and got to be looked on as a very good player for a boy!

One of my jobs during the winter was to haul ice blocks from a local lake. All the dairy farmers would have an ice cutting bee. Someone would bore a five inch hole in the ice which would be sixteen inches thick and then another would saw a straight line fifteen feet or so and then another line eighteen inches away and parallel with the first line. Then they would cut across these two lines about two feet apart and, as the blocks were free, someone would pull them out of the water with a pair of tongs. The blocks would be slid up planks onto sleighs. When a man had a load he would take it to his farm where it would be stored in an ice house surrounded by sawdust to insulate it from the summer heat.

The ice was used to cool the milk which was put into ten gallon cans and set in a tank filled with ice water. The ice could also be used in the house, especially for making ice cream but not too often. Ice cream made this way was very rich as they actually used cream in the making. Turning the mixer was done by hand and was easy at the start but became increasingly hard as the cream set.

In the spring, when the sap started to rise in the maple trees, we would drill one or two holes into the trunk of the tree and insert a spigot, then hang a pail on it. When the pails were full we gathered the sap, dumping it into a large tank on a horse drawn sled. Then we would take it to a shed where it was boiled down to make syrup. Sometimes we would have a party and pour hot syrup on some clean snow. In a little while it would congeal and we would pick it up and chew it. It would stick to your teeth and be hard to move but in time it would dissolve. Most of the syrup was used for pancakes and cooking.

With all these activities and work on the farm one might think I was kept too busy to get into any harmful practices, but not so. The devil finds work for idle hands but he can trip up the busy ones too.

I was a well fed and healthy, growing teenager of seventeen and I had a carnal nature. I committed a beastly act that later demoralized me and as the scripture says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” It came back to haunt me. Remember, at this time I had no church connection or moral instruction from anyone.

In the spring of 1920 when my year was up my employer wanted me to sign on for another year. But he would not pay what I wanted and he had no power to make me stay. He got angry with me the only time that I was with him. He said I was stupid, I had a good home and if I left and went to the city as I had said I would, nothing but harm would come of it.

He sent away for another youngster to take my place and I had the job of breaking in the fellow to do all the things I had been doing. He thought I must have been crazy. He said he wouldn't do what I did and no one could make him.

I think Mr. Woodley had come to the same conclusion and the last thing he said to me as I boarded a milk truck going to Hamilton was, "Think it over and come back with the driver, you will be better off here than in the city."





## PART III - OUT ON MY OWN

### Footloose and Fancy Free

I did not stay long in Hamilton nor did I go back to the farm. Instead I went to Toronto where I met a fellow a couple of years older than me. He too had been an “orphan” and raised on a farm but was glad to be free. We enjoyed the sights for a few days and then we went to a labour office where we got a job in a foundry in Brantford. The work was hard and dirty. Iron dust was in the air and left a metallic taste in the mouth.

One of my jobs was to “carry heats.” This meant that when the iron ore was melted to a liquid state a hom would sound and we would go in pairs carrying an iron pot lined with clay to catch the molten metal as it flowed from the furnace. It was very hot and blinding to look at. When you carried it to where the molds were waiting to be filled the heat from the pot would literally pull all the moisture out of your body and your shirt and pants would be soaked with sweat in no time.

When the furnace was empty we had twenty minutes to cool off and then it was back to work. I began to think the farm was not such a bad place after all.

The company ran a boarding house for single men. An ugly woman was cook and housekeeper. Her cooking was not the best and no effort was made to keep the flies out. On hot days they would be all over the food so it was not very appetizing. One of the fellows got the idea she had something good stowed away in the cellar so he decided to break in and see. He asked me to accompany him and foolishly I consented. We had no trouble breaking in but we found nothing of worth except some raspberry vinegar home brew, a pleasant enough drink for a hot afternoon.

There was a big row the next morning and when we got to work the two of us were told to go to the office where we were accused of breaking and entering. They said they could sue and we could be jailed. They decided instead to pay us off and, after deducting the cost of damages, ordered us to leave town immediately. To make sure we did a policeman was brought in to conduct us to the railway station.

So I went back to Hamilton where I met Pete, a full blood Indian. He claimed to be from one of the Iroquois tribes. He had just been released from the army after three years overseas and was looking for a job. We both found jobs driving a team of horses on dump wagons. In the morning we would go to the stable where the owner would have the horses harnessed for us. We hitched them to the wagon and drove off to the work site where they were building a grade for a new highway.

It was a monotonous job, driving to the loading site, having the wagon filled with gravel by a steam shovel and then driving to the dump site to dump the load and then do it all over again. This went on from seven a.m. until noon when we stopped for one hour to feed the horses, eat a dry lunch, smoke a cigarette and then go back to work for another five hours. At the end of the day we would drive the horses back to the stable and go to our lodging where we washed up, changed our clothes and then went to a nearby restaurant to eat. Pete was always trying to date one of the waitresses but without much success. The job only lasted a couple of weeks so we decided to go to Toronto and try our luck there.

## **Toronto**

In Toronto we went to the Canadian National Exhibition which is one of the greatest of its kind anywhere on earth. After looking at many of the fine exhibits of livestock and attending the show in the stadium we thought we would take a tour of the midway where there were all kinds of games to test your skill at shooting, ring toss, ball throwing, ringing the bell, etc. We stopped in front of one such place where a fellow was trying to entice passersby to part with their money.

As we stood there three “peace time soldiers” approached. One, not much older than me, bumped me (purposely I think). I said, “Hey there, watch out!” good naturedly. He responded by hitting me on the nose and the next thing I knew I was in a brawl.

## **A Brawl on the Midway**

I knocked one fellow down and then they ganged up on me. One grabbed me from behind and another started to punch me real hard. I looked for Pete to help. Meanwhile quite a crowd had gathered. One woman was yelling for someone to help the “poor mothers son” by which she meant me.

I caught a glimpse of the showman and he didn’t seem very pleased at this counter attraction. Things were going bad for me because I could not defend myself and then some people in the crowd decided to take a hand. They pulled one guy off my back and another took care of my opponent. He was an older man than his buddies and had an evil face. He snarled at me like a beast and said, “If I see you again I’ll eat your heart out.”

Someone had called the police I guess because a siren sounded and a man who had helped to stop the fight picked up my cap, took my arm and said, "Let's get out of here before the cops come." He walked with me as far as the gate and advised me to go home and bathe my face which was kind of bloody. I got back to the hotel all right and tidied up. I was a little sore from the pounding but not badly hurt.

A bit later Pete showed up. He was very apologetic and said he tried to help but someone grabbed him from behind. There were only three soldiers so I don't know who it could have been. Anyway next day we got a job at the employment office that sent us to Iroquois Falls in northern Ontario. So we took the T.N.T. Railroad the same day and next morning we arrived in North Bay. After breakfast we still had an hour to wait for the next train that would take us north to our destination so we went down the shore of Lake Nipissing. The shore was lined with black coniferous forest. It was a lovely day only marred by the presence of large black flies which bit when they landed.

Soon we were on our way again and eventually arrived at Matchewan where we discovered we had to walk four miles to the campsite. We were put up for the night in one of many bunkhouses and I took a top bunk.

In the morning we were given a metal tag with a number on it to identify us with the timekeeper and at the cookhouse. Besides several bunkhouses and dining halls there were office buildings, a small hospital, a pool hall, a theatre (one new show a week) and a gambling hall for those who wanted to lose their hard earned wages. I saw a pot at one game that had several hundreds of dollars. It represented several months pay for the average worker and there were men there who were professional card sharks. After a week or two they would leave with the poor suckers wages.

## **Northern Ontario**

Soon the temperature was dipping below zero and I was glad to be offered a job waiting on tables. I stayed there all winter collecting ninety dollars a month and board. For a while I was head waiter but I got in trouble for calling one of the waiters a "dirty French Canadian." The second cook, who also was French Canadian took this as an insult to all French Canadians.

He was a big chap and without warning he grabbed me and started mauling me. I fought back as best I could but he was too big and, in fact, he picked me up and threw me against a wall where pans and skillets hung. They were knocked loose and fell on top of me. The cook who was outside came running in to see what the fuss was all about and stopped the fight, probably saving me from a severe beating.

I was none the worse for the incident but I heard some of the “Frenchies” were waiting for an opportunity to beat me up. It didn’t happen but it was a lesson for me to avoid saying things that could be considered racist.

The cook wanted me to become his helper but I had heard that he was quick tempered and erratic in his behaviour so I decided it would be better to wash pots and pans, and that is just what he made me do. I was glad when I got the opportunity to work in the clinic. There were four beds and only one was occupied by an injured worker. I had to keep the place tidy, keep the fire going, sort pills, etc. But eventually the man I was substituting for returned and as spring was on the way I decided to go south. It was either that or work with the cook so I drew my pay and headed south.

## **South Again**

In Toronto I bought a complete, new outfit of clothing. The reason I did that was because I was lousy as were all the men in the camp. I tried desperately to get rid of them by boiling my underwear, even putting lye in the water, but to no avail. Even hanging them outside in sub-zero weather had no effect.

I was too ashamed to admit it to others so imagine my embarrassment one day coming into our dorm to find two of the fellows having a race between two lice on my bed. They had been aware of my attempts to hide the fact that I was lousy and had watched my vain efforts to rid myself of the pests with glee.

## **Niagara Falls**

I worked that summer for Ontario Hydro on the Niagara River. They were building a power house at the end of a twenty mile canal which brought water from Lake Erie to a point below the Niagara Falls. It was a big job, employing up to ten thousand men at the peak of construction. I worked in the gate house as rigger and painter.

I shared a room in the bunkhouse with a young chap my own age. His name was Henry and he was from New Brunswick. He often got homesick but wouldn’t save enough money to make the trip home. In the evening six of us would get together to play poker. The pots were never more than a few dollars but one pay day Henry started busting the pot and was doing quite well. In fact after awhile the other guys dropped out leaving only Henry and me. There was about \$80 in the pot and we each drew cards. I had a full house but Henry tried to bluff and bet more money. I matched him and he nearly fainted because he only had a pair of aces. I felt sorry for him and gave him back his share of the pot. Next morning he took off for home. I hope he made it as I never heard from him again.

Our camp was not far from Brockton Heights where there is a memorial tower commemorating the battle which took place there in 1812 between Canada and the United States. Across the river was Fort Lewis where many American soldiers were stationed. We would sometimes go over to the town of Lewiston to buy cigarettes and American beer. I got into a dispute with some of the soldiers once who were making offensive remarks about the 1812 War. I reminded them that George Washington was an Englishman as were many of his friends. The pub owner saw that there was going to be trouble so he grabbed me and shoved me through the door. I had enough sense to keep going.

## **The Harvest Excursion Train**

The summer of 1921 I decided to go to the prairies for the harvest. Every year the railway companies would put on a harvest excursion special. For \$15 one could get a ticket to Winnipeg and so I took the opportunity to see western Canada.

The train left about the middle of August and each year thousands of men took the trip. Our train had about sixteen coaches, all with wooden seats, the same ones used to bring immigrants to western Canada. The train took three days from Toronto to Winnipeg and you just slept in your seat. Our train would often have to move over onto the side tracks to allow all other types of trains to pass-in other words we were not very important cargo.

At some stops we would get out of the train and walk around and some of the fellows would have to run to catch the train when it pulled out.

When we could we would buy something to eat but in some small towns the shops would be shut up. The shopkeepers said the fellows stole or damaged more than they bought. Eventually we reached Winnipeg, which to my surprise was a large, bustling city. We walked down the main street where we were continually harassed by the clothing store proprietors who were anxious to sell us anything.

We discovered we were two weeks early for the harvest so I decided to go to Saskatoon with two other men. We could purchase special tickets west for only one half cent a mile. Arriving in Saskatoon we discovered the fields were still green and wouldn't be ready for some time yet. After a few days the other fellows were broke and I was feeding them as well as myself. I didn't have all that much money so it was mostly doughnuts and coffee.

One of my companions knew a place in Manitoba where he thought we could find work so he and I took off. This time we travelled by freight train. When we arrived in one town we went to the pool hall because my friend said farmers always come to the pool halls to hire men. But instead of a farmer we were accosted by a man who said he was the town policeman. He said there was nothing doing around there and to get out of town as fast as we could. I thought

he was most uncivil but I ran into lots of people with the same attitude in Canada and the United States during the hungry thirties.

## **Grand View and Ryder Mountain**

When we arrived at the next town it was on Saturday afternoon. It was a very busy place and we went to the pool hall which was very crowded. As I was picking my way through the crowd a man asked me if I wanted to work.

“I sure do,” I said.

“Well, I need someone. I’ll pay you the going wage.”

I looked around for my friend but he was nowhere to be seen so off I went with my new employer. His name was Lou Baker and he lived with his parents on their homestead at the edge of the foothills. Besides his parents there were two brothers, Bill and John. John and I were about the same age and height and we got along fine. There were also two sisters, one single and the other married to a man who had come west for the harvest a few years before and stayed.

We started next morning stooking sheaves of grain. Some of the grain was grown on freshly broken land and the sheaves were so tall that they would bend in the middle when we picked them up.

When all the sheaves were stooked the threshing started. Lou had a Ramley tractor, a big, iron wheeled monster. It was hard to start but once started it was equally hard to stop. John and I were told to help load. As a wagon would come from the thresher we would load it and the men driving the wagons would be urging us on to see who could throw on the most sheaves. Of course they were just doing it to get as much work out of us as they could but we were naive enough to think we were doing something big.

## **The Prairies**

Harvest was over at last but they didn’t seem to want me to leave. I was waiting for my wages and was surprised when John asked me if I could ride. He had two ponies and were they ever lively. We took off across the open prairie at a full gallop and rode for miles until we came to a pretty lake. We dismounted and let the reins drag on the ground. The horses started munching grass which the locals called “prairie wool.” It looked like something you would use for packing but the horses evidently liked it. John said it was very nutritious and horses could work all day on it alone.



He had brought a .22 repeater with him and started shooting gulls. After a while he gave me the gun. I loaded and pulled the trigger and a gull several hundred yards away flew up and then dropped dead.

“My,” he said, his eyes opening wide, “you can shoot!” I never told him I was aiming at another bird much closer.

They asked if I would like to go and cook for Lou and John who were going to do some fall ploughing. I thought it would be fun. Besides keeping house for them I could go hunting for partridge, prairie chicken and wild duck. I really enjoyed it but a heavy frost put an end to my fun.

One day Lou said, “Well I guess it’s time for you to go. Here’s your wages.” I was disappointed when he handed me only \$65. I had been there over two months and if he had paid me the going wages I should have received well over \$100. But it was hard to complain, they had treated me like one of the family and that was not always the custom on the prairies.

Going home I went via Portage La Prairie which was the flattest, largest and most treeless expanse of land I had ever seen. It is so different from the land east of Winnipeg which is spruce forest and rock dotted with numerous lakes. I went right back to where I had been working on the Niagara River and got a job with the same foreman, Paddy Flynn, a genial sort of man who always treated me like a son.

The following spring Ernie came to stay with me and we roomed together. It was good to have him and we got along well. We decided to go to the U.S.A. where working conditions were better we thought. We had no trouble getting visas and went to Toledo where we worked for the Overland Automobile Company. The wages were good but the climate was very sultry and we weren’t used to working inside so quit and got jobs on a farm in Illinois. We wanted to earn enough money to get back to Canada.

When we approached the border on our way back and saw the Canadian Flag something stirred in our hearts. I thought of Scott’s poem:

Breathes there a man with soul so dead  
That never to himself hath said,  
‘This is my home, my native land?’

## **Mr. Pineo**

I should backtrack here and tell you about Mr. Henry Pineo, the farmer I worked for. He picked us up at the train station in a little town called Rokano, Illinois. He drove us out to his

farm in his Maxwell car. It used to be said of the Maxwell that one had to be a mechanic or a magician to operate one but Mr. Pineo had no trouble. Maybe it was because the first winter he had it he took it apart piece by piece, numbered the parts in the order taken out and took up most of the barn floor to keep the parts separate. He examined and cleaned every piece then reassembled it and she ran perfectly. I'm not sure whether he was a mechanic or magician but I think he was an exceptional man in more ways than one.

He taught me to drive, first on a Ford tractor, then a truck and last of all the car, although I just drove it once, with him beside me. Mr. Pineo was without doubt the finest gentleman I have ever worked for. He treated me as one of the family and was most appreciative of my efforts.

Mr. Pineo was planning to retire after twenty years or more as a corn farmer. He had done well as he was in a part of the country exceptionally well suited to corn. He had two programs, corn and hogs. When the hog market was good he fed his corn to the pigs and when the market was not good for hogs he sold corn or switched to wheat. His system had paid off well and he was quite happy with the results.

He lived in a big house with his wife and her twin sister. It took me a week to tell them apart. They were both gracious ladies and they shared the work of the house. They were wonderful cooks and treated me like a son. I had a room to myself as Ernie had left to work for a young farmer who Mr. Pineo had trained and started up in the business.

Mr. Pineo was a well read man. Besides the daily paper he had a good library of classic books. He was very fond of Mark Twain and, surprisingly, of Rudyard Kipling. He knew the poets and was fond of quoting Emerson but knew little about Canada. He would not accept my account of what Canada was like but insisted that Canada was only a frontier country. I don't think he was teasing.

While I worked for him I saved enough money to buy a Ford coupe, a two-seater with a canvas take down top. When we left we drove it almost to the Canadian border. We needed a new tire but were almost broke so sold it for half the price we paid for it, \$160.00.

## **Canada Again**

We arrived at Emerson, Manitoba and had to check through Customs so we stayed the night at a small, family hotel where the owner, wife and daughter made us welcome and were interested in where we had been and what we had done. I got the feeling he was an undercover agent for the government.

Next day we arrived in Winnipeg and I lost no time getting an up to date postcard of downtown Winnipeg, (not Fort Garry) and sent it to Mr. Pineo.

Then we took the train to Saskatoon where we were hired to work for a threshing crew. It was a big outfit with ten horse drawn racks. Ernie and I each had a team of horses and got right into action. We stayed until harvest was finished. The operator, who was a Swede, took us all into town to the hotel, bought us supper and then took us into the beer parlour and paid for all the beer we could drink. I offended him by offering to pay for a round. I had never before run into such a fellow. It was a matter of pride with him.

We stayed in the area and hired out to a farmer to do fall ploughing at \$30 a month. But the freeze up came early that year so we hauled grain to the elevator, a cold job. After two weeks the farmer said he could only pay us half wages starting from the time we began. We said nothing doing so he paid us off and we shipped up to The Pas to work in the woods for the winter.

## **Logging in Carrot River Country**

Arriving in The Pas after an all night ride on the train we were directed to the personnel office of the logging company (which also had a large sawmill and planing mill in town). We stayed in the company bunkhouse over night and after breakfast next morning set out over the railroad bridge to the south side of the North Saskatchewan River which is quite wide at this point. The North Saskatchewan empties into Hudson's Bay at Churchill, Manitoba which is also the terminus of the railroad.

Soon after crossing the bridge we were in swamp country. There were clumps of grass covered with frost which made walking difficult but by noon we were out of it and stopped for lunch. There was a box of sandwiches but they disappeared so quickly you would think the guys were starved. Some fellows had both hands full and, in spite of the protests, they held onto them. They were new immigrants and hungry a lot.

At sundown we arrived at a half-way house where we bunked for the night. We had covered twenty five miles since morning and some of the guys were very tired and came straggling in after dark. Ernie seemed to be in a bad way but didn't say much.

I told the cook about the lack of sandwiches and he said not to worry, he would put up lots. But the next day was a repeat of the first. It was like a bunch of pigs diving for the trough.

## **The Logging Camp**

We arrived at our destination and were directed to our bunkhouse. They were substantial log structures holding a hundred men. The washup room was in the centre and on Saturday

nights the fellows would have a stag dance or play games of skill like kicking the pig. There was also a grind stone on which the men would grind their axes to a shaving sharp edge.

We slept in two-tier bunks and there was a laundry where we could get our undergarments washed once a week. The meals were varied and the variety good. Logging is hard work and men develop tremendous appetites. Lunch was brought out to the job and we sat on logs around a fire but the beans and stew would be frozen to the plate before you could finish so we learned to eat fast.

I was picked as a sawrnan and was teamed with a guy named Charlie. He had been invalided out when we arrived because his privates were swollen to such an extent that he could hardly walk. He was sent out on a tote wagon and after two weeks carne back with a clean bill of health. He had developed an infection.

But his manner had been changing. He seemed to resent my presence and was difficult to get along with. When we were falling a tree we would be on opposite sides of a big crosscut saw and he would push the saw in a way which would cause the blade to turn in toward my legs. I suffered many nasty and painful cuts on the shins. I tried to reason with him but he would not listen so I quit camp and moved on when the foreman refused to give me another job.

## **I Go to Another Camp**

The next two camps had openings for sawyers which was the hardest and least liked job in the woods so I kept moving on. Finally I carne to the last camp. I was now one hundred miles from The Pas and again I had my choice, move on or be a sawyer.

I decided to give it a try. This time I got a good partner and we got along fine. We were rated as one of the best in the woods. Our only trouble was with the man who undercut the tree to determine which way it would fall. He would always put the cut where it was easiest for him and then tell us to hold back on one side of the cut to make the tree fall where he wanted it to go instead of in the direction of the lean. This was sometimes difficult and would lead to a lot of wedging. In spite of our best efforts they would often fall into other trees. Sometimes we would have several trees hung up and it was like taking one's life in one's hands to go in and fall the hold up tree. Then he complained to the foreman and I got angry and called him an "old s.o.b."

## **The Wild Trapper**

The undercutter was a trapper who had lost all his outfit in a fire the year before and was in camp trying to make enough to grub-stake himself for another season. When I swore at him he ran along the tree trunk we were cutting up, raised his axe and took a swing at me. I was

standing in loose snow up to my knees and could not move back fast enough so I grabbed him around the legs and flipped him over my shoulders. He landed in the snow head first and my partner jumped on top of him.

Well it was quite a tangle. When he got up he had cooled off a bit and we had no more trouble. We got along okay but I always kept an eye on him when he was near. Come spring most of the men left. My friend went back to his folk's homestead but I stayed on for the river drive.

While we were waiting for the ice to let go on the river we burned brush to clear right of way. One guy had a chip on his shoulder and accused me of taking a magazine. I had not done it but he called me a bad name and the next thing we were mixing it up. He was bigger and wrestled me to the floor. I knew I had to do something drastic so I put my free arm around his face and pulled his nose with all my might. He let go of me quick and once I was on my feet I stayed my distance and sparred with him.

## **Boxing Lessons Pay Off**

I had been taught the rudiments of boxing by George Brooks and now, for the second time, it paid off. We fought from one end of the bunkhouse to the next. I had smooth, leather oxfords on and when he connected I would slide back. Then one of the shoes came off and I realized I had better footing without them. When he closed in I kicked the other shoe off and braced myself. I let him have a good uppercut and he staggered back and collapsed on the bench and wouldn't get up even when I called him a "fink" and a few other things. A couple of days later he left camp. One of the old-timers said, "You were too easy on him; you should have jumped on him with both feet."

## **The River Drive**

Well finally the ice began to break and the logs piled up along the river bank began to move. The river boss and a small group of men walked across the logs to the other side. Then he yelled back, "Anyone who wants to jam come a running." Most of the fellows in the crew had never seen a log drive-nor had I except in pictures. I felt I must take a chance so I started to cross with my heart pumping like mad. I stopped on the first log and it began to sink. I jumped to the next one and it went deeper. Then a voice from the other shore said, "Just step easy like, and keep moving. Not so hard, take it easy."

I began to get the knack of it and ended up on the other side. I was the only rookie to make it and it sure paid off as the guys who didn't take the risk ended up standing in ice water up to

their waists pushing logs off the shoals while I had the job of patrolling the river and breaking up any bunches of logs too big to go through a chute.

Our work day was twelve hours. We packed a lunch and left camp before daylight and arrived back after dark. We received thirty cents per hour (\$3.60 a day). I was in the woods for seven months altogether and came out with \$350. I stayed at a hotel in The Pas for six days and had \$50 left when I went south to Saskatoon. Easy come, easy go as the saying is!

## **Rosetown**

I went to Rosetown next and went to work for a farmer named Shaugnessy. It was my first experience with prairie gumbo. I was told to hitch up a team and move a wagon. I noticed the horses seemed to have trouble walking. When they were hitched up to the wagon and tried to move it they could only go about three feet and then stopped just like someone had put on the brakes. When I examined the wheels I found the tops were coated with about six inches of very adhesive clay. I imagined I could hear laughter as I unhitched the team and led them back to the barn.

## **Summer Fallow and a Hail Storm**

The horses were turned over to my care. There were five, fairly well matched beasts but one, a black mare, was a kicker. You had to keep your eyes on her at all times or she would let you have it. Fortunately she was not shod. She nearly got me the first time I entered her stall but missed by inches so I was forewarned and managed to keep her off balance after that. When I had been there a week the boss came out to the stable and said with a straight face, “Keep an eye on the mare, she might kick.”

I replied in the same manner, “Yes, I’ve noticed.”

I was sent to a section about three miles away to summer fallow. I was to stay at the place while I was doing the job. I had a two furrow, gang plough hauled by five horses. I worked a ten hour day—at least the horses did! I rode on an iron seat that was very cold early in the morning and very hot on a sunny day after the noon break.

There were rocks and occasionally we would hit one with the plough and I would have a hard time keeping from being thrown under the horses back feet, but it did keep me awake. It was a monotonous job for the furrows were a half mile long and then I had to turn and do the same thing in the opposite direction.

The boss warned me if I saw a black cloud rising on the southern horizon to unhitch the team and hightail it to the bam as it was the season for hail storms. I thought “so what” but said nothing.

One day soon after I noticed the horses were restless. We were near the end of the furrow so I was kept busy controlling them. Then I noticed a cloud that a few minutes before was only a spot on the horizon was now a boiling, black mass approaching very fast. I threw the plough shears out of the ground and the horses lit out at a full gallop heading for the barn.

As we approached the building the hail started to pelt down. The horses were running full out. Fortunately the shed door was open and we drove right in and stopped dead. The horses were heaving and sweating. There was a terrific roar as the hail pelted down. I turned and looked out the door and the ground was white like a winter snow fall.

Some of the hail stones were as large as a twenty five cent piece but I was told some times they could be much larger and had killed livestock that could not find shelter.

## **Another Harvest**

After summer fallow was done I did odd jobs. One was hauling water from an artesian well four miles away from the home farm. Very few farms had drinkable water.

I stayed there until harvest and threshing was finished. Mr. Shaughnessy had a threshing rig and did custom threshing as well but we were finished early and so I went south with the farmers son and his friend who had a Chevy car.

We went to Hollister, near the Canada-U.S. border, where we got another twenty days threshing with an outfit owned by a Swede. He had a bunk truck and cookhouse on wheels that accompanied us as we moved from place to place. There were two, local, young women to do the cooking for us. They were good cooks and even made our beds for us.

We hated to see the job end and when we were paid off the boss took us into town, bought us supper and all the beer we could drink. The Swedes were usually good people to work for. They expected a good day's work but fed you well and paid top wages.

The fall of 1925 was a bad one as it rained often and we could not thresh when the grain was wet or even damp. We met a fellow in Calgary who we had worked with and he said he was going south for the winter. He said there was a big construction job in Idaho and they would work all winter. So after some debate as to which place was most attractive, B.C. or the U.S.A. and not having been to either destination we tossed a coin, heads for B.C. and tails for



the U.S. It was tails. One thing we did agree on was we did not want to spend another winter in the northern bush country.

## **A Brief Account of Six Years in the U.S.A.**

We rode a freight train to Sweetgrass on the border and crossed over into the U.S. at night, keeping to open prairie until we came to a place where we could get a cup of coffee. We became violently sick after drinking water from a ditch. We were in oil country, north of Shelby, Montana and the air was full of the stench of oil.

We rode a freight to Pocatello, Idaho and got a job on a dam site. We worked there a year and bought an old Buick and drove to Portland and then down the coast to San Francisco. We sold the car and went to work on the largest lemon tree orchard in the world near Maxwell, California. I got malaria and was advised by the doctor to go to the mountains. So we went to Westwood, California which is on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Range at an altitude of four thousand feet. We worked in a saw mill there for two years. By the way, while I was in Maxwell in 1927 Charles Lindbergh made his successful flight across the Atlantic. We heard the news in camp on the radio!

## **Oregon**

The summer of 1929 I worked for a dredging company out of Klamath Falls, Oregon. It was the best job I had in the States and Oregon had the best labour laws. It was the first time I worked an eight hour day. I worked up to Christmas and then was told that the job was closed down until more money could be raised. 1929 was the year of the stock market crash and we did not realize right away how serious an effect it was to have on our lives. The Depression that set in lasted until 1939 when war with Hitler started the wheels of industry rolling again.

## **Riding the Rails**

The next two years we rode freight trains up and down the coast from Seattle to Los Angeles and as far east as Wyoming getting work where we could. We picked fruit, harvested rice, did haying and fought forest fires. We “jungled up” (a hobo’s term for camping) carrying a bed roll in a tarp and used tin cans to eat from, which we sterilized by burning them in the fire. We boiled water in five gallon oil or gas cans to wash our clothes in order to control the lice that some fellows harboured.

We bathed in lakes and streams to keep ourselves clean and fit. In many ways it was a healthy life but at times depressing because there was not enough work during winter months.

Then we would go to towns and cities to visit the missions and hostels, both protestant and catholic, looking for handouts. It was most degrading and certainly deflated our self esteem. We were despised by the authorities and sometimes chased out of towns by police or given suspended sentences by magistrates. We were looked on as vermin by established society, just no good bums. But most of us would have loved the opportunity to work and earn an honest living.

Nevertheless it made many of us think for the first time and seriously wonder what life was all about. For me it led to my eventually turning to the Bible and salvation through Christ. I saw myself in the story of The Prodigal Son and returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of my soul. (I Peter 2:25)





**Just Married**

George and Agnes Hollingshurst in Vancouver on their wedding day September 23, 1940.



## PART IV - BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Vancouver 1931

I came to Port Coquitlam, B.C. from Edmonton, Alberta about the middle of October, via freight train. I was carrying a paper suitcase, not my own but left in my care by a fellow traveller while he went to rustle something to eat. It was while the train was stopped at Boston Bar to water up and refuel. Well the train began to move and the owner of the suitcase failed to appear.

I have no idea what happened to him. He may have been apprehended by the railroad police. So I had a suitcase to look after. I left the train at Port Coquitlam and walked into town. Stopping at the first restaurant, I ordered hot cakes and coffee.

I asked the restaurant owner the best way to get to Vancouver. He said a local bus would take me to New Westminster and I could catch the inter-urban tram to Vancouver. This I did and arriving in the city in mid-afternoon I booked a room at the Crown Hotel on Cordova Street, about two blocks from the tram depot on Carroll and Hastings.

When I was settled in the room I opened the suitcase, which was not locked. Inside was a black suit with a white pin-stripe. That's all, nothing to identify the owner. I thought it was probably likely that I would bump into him in a few days as I gathered from what he told me that Vancouver was his destination.

The incident reminded me of another time when I was travelling east to Toronto with a bunch of fellows. One, who said he was a logger from B.C., was on his way back home to visit his folks. When we arrived in Winnipeg he decided to go into town to see a friend and asked me to keep an eye on his pack sack, which I agreed to do.

He was gone several hours and it was getting toward evening. The train was all "made up" and ready to go when he arrived, just in time. He took his pack sack and opened it and, reaching in, pulled out a roll of bills as thick as your wrist. He pulled off a couple of one dollar bills and said "Treat yourself to a bed tonight and I'll see you tomorrow."

I never saw him again but I wondered why he would take such a chance on a casual acquaintance.

## **Looking for a Job**

Well I started looking for a job. I went to the unemployment offices in the area. Many of them were privately owned and they charged a fee in proportion to the salary paid. But although I had the money I could not get a job because I had not worked for any of the coast logging companies and that was the first question they asked.

There were many loggers out of work because of the Depression so the bosses could pick and choose to suit themselves and they took advantage of the situation.

Then I started going to the sawmills and warehouses and any place that looked like it hired help but the answer was the same- “no help wanted.” I talked with the other men and found out I was only one among many. I was invited by some fellows to a large upstairs hall run by a group known as the U.W.U., the Unemployed Workers Union.

I was urged to join and help to put pressure on the government to provide work for all who wanted a job. I joined up. The membership card was red and I later learned it was sponsored by the Communist Party of Canada. Tim Birch, a member of parliament, was one of the many speakers who urged us to work for a better society!

## **The Communist Influence**

Saying we had “nothing to lose except our chains” we were given propaganda briefings that were financed, I am told, by Russia. There were excerpts from Marx, Engels, Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin and American and Canadian socialists.

From time to time they would stage demonstrations and parade through the streets but they did not help any of the men find a job or give them a handout. Sometimes you could get a meal ticket by handing out some of their tracts and leaflets advertising meetings and rallies. Their objective seemed to be to stir up as much dissatisfaction and unrest and to make as much trouble for the authorities as possible. Their main aim was to overthrow the government.

Talking with one of the leaders it became apparent to me that he believed the only way the common people could improve their lot was to rid themselves of the present form of government and establish a socialist regime. The only way that could be accomplished was by force, i.e. to “liquidate” the present capitalist establishment and organized religions.



I found this hard to accept. I favoured a cooperative type of society though I found very little in the way things were to encourage me.

## **Hard Times**

Meanwhile I was coming near the end of my resources. I had already decided to leave my hotel room finding \$4 a week “too expensive.” The hotel manager reduced it to \$2.50 and I sold the suit and suitcase for \$2.50 enabling me to stay another week. But I had very little to buy food and began to miss meals. I reluctantly started to visit some of the soup lines for soup and sandwiches.

I visited the relief office and was asked, “Where are you from?” I told them I was from Ontario but had not been there for the past six years. They told me they could not help and that I should go back there, though how I was to do this they did not say.

I tried to do a little begging on the streets with mixed results; the first was the gift of a dime from three men coming out of a beer parlour. One said, “Oh give the poor son of a b something.” My pride took a beating.

## **Hungry Times**

On another occasion I stopped a young man and asked if he could help. He surprised me by saying “Yes, I’ve had the good luck to get a job today and I feel happy to help you.” He gave me twenty-five cents, which meant I could get a hot meal plus coffee, enough to carry me through the day.

I eventually had to vacate my room and that night I slept in the Salvation Anny Hostel on Hastings Street. In the morning we were given a bowl of porridge and cup of tea . We had to do a couple of hours work in exchange for it and also sign our name to the effect that we had had a bed and breakfast.

The next night I stayed at the Central City Mission. I was allowed to stay three days which was the limit. I got a shower there and some meals but that too came to an end.

The weather was bad, lots of rain and cold. I had been in lots of cold weather in Saskatchewan but I had never felt as cold as now. I just had light summer wear and couldn’t stop shivering every time I went out on the street so I spent a lot of time in Casey’s Pool Room on Hastings. It was next to a building which at that time was in use as the City Hall.

Another place to spend time was at the City Library which was a Carnegie Institute. We could sit in the reading room for hours on end reading the latest papers and periodicals. But I was getting very depressed as there didn't seem to be much hope.

## **At the End of My Resources**

I spent a lot of time reflecting on my past and there was not much to be proud of. I felt I was a failure with no good prospects and without money, family or friends. I felt all alone, unwanted, useless to society, in fact an outcast. But hunger takes your mind away from such depressing things and to get something to eat becomes the immediate preoccupation.

One afternoon I was looking for someone who showed in his manner that he might be generous when I saw a man in his fifties approaching that looked the type. I said, "Pardon me mister, could you help me, I'm broke without a home or a place to stay." He smiled and said, "Sorry son, I'm in the same fix, broke and with a family to care for. I'm on my way to Hamilton Street to get some groceries so that we can eat. Why don't you get relief like me?"

## **The Refuge**

I explained that I was from the east and not entitled to relief. "Well," he said, "why don't you go to the Emergency Relief Centre?" I hadn't heard of it so he gave me directions and as it was threatening rain I thanked him and set off to locate the place. I found it. The entrance was down an alley and up a flight of twenty steps or so.

Already there was a group of men occupying the stairway which led to a door on a landing. We waited an hour or more. One of the fellows shared his makings with me. I knew it was most likely butts picked up off the streets and opened up and put into a tobacco tin, but when you have the habit it is hard to say no. Smoking is a bad habit and when people become addicted to it they will do almost anything to get it. Eventually the door opened. When I got to the door the door keeper asked for my scrip. "What scrip?" I asked.

"Don't you know you have to have a scrip for meals and lodging?" I guess I looked downcast and he said, "Sit down on this bench, sometimes there is food left over. I will ask the manager."

I sat down, getting hungrier by the minute. Being so close to food and not being able to partake aggravated my senses. Finally Mr. Miller, the manager, came and the doorkeeper told him of my situation. He gave me a very sharp look and then handed me a ticket that was good for one meal.

I walked up to the counter and received three large herring, potatoes, some bread and jam on a tin plate and a large cup of tea. I ate it all and then ate some fish that were left by others who, surprisingly to me, said they didn't like them. I was sure they weren't very hungry or they would be glad to get them, even as I was.

After the meal there was the problem of getting a bed for the night. That was what was needed for the present. One could not afford to look too far into the future so I went back to the entrance. The doorkeeper asked me how I liked the supper. I said, "Ok."

He asked, "Where are you going tonight?" I replied I didn't know. Just then the assistant manager, Mr. Bee, who was in charge at night, passed by. The doorman stopped him and said, "Mr. Bee, here is a fellow that has no place to sleep. Can we put him up for the night?"

Mr. Bee replied, "You know the rules, all men must be registered and go through the baths and have their clothes fumigated. It's too late now."

But my new champion spoke up and said, "This fellow looks clean to me and you know we have a spare cot that we can put in the boiler room for the night."

"Alright," Mr. Bee said, "as long as he doesn't go upstairs to the dormitory."

So there I was, all fixed up for the night, and was I glad. It was raining hard outside. Next morning after breakfast I was asked if I would like to help wash dishes. I said I would be glad to so I became a member of the staff at 67 Pender Street.

That evening, after all the work was done, I joined a group of staff members who were talking about current events and the conversation turned to religion. I said that religion was the opiate of the people, a quote from Karl Marx.

One man said that maybe religion was, but faith in Christ and the Bible were Man's only hope. I replied that the Bible was full of contradictions. He asked me to name one.

I was stuck because I knew very little about the Bible apart from the Ten Commandments. He said, "Don't you think it is wrong to condemn something you know so little about?"

## **A Change of Direction**

I admitted my error and he invited me to attend a Bible class conducted at 10 a.m. the next day. I said I would. That night at seven o'clock I was told to go to the shower. I was given a bag to put all my clothes in and they were taken to the fumigator, (located on the top of the roof) mainly to rid them of lice.

Some men were filthy and so all had to submit to this rule for the benefit of all. Next I took a shower under the watchful eye of Ron, the doorkeeper. When we were finished we were handed a flannelette night shirt and shown upstairs to a large area with rows of double tiered wooden bunks, each with a straw paillasse and grey, wool army blankets. I crawled into a top bunk.

## **A Converted Barn**

I found out the building had originally been used by Burn Packers as a barn for their horses. The ground level was for storing wagons and gear. The second floor, (which now housed the dining room, kitchen, storage and office) had been the stable.

You could still see the hollowed out planks that ran the length of the place for the conducting the urine from the horses to a tank. The upper floor, where we slept, had been the hay loft.

As I lay in bed, refreshed from the shower, I could hear the rain on the roof and was very thankful that I had a bed and was not wandering about the streets looking for a place to sleep. When you are destitute you appreciate simple benefits.

## **A Converted Sinner**

Next day at 10 sharp I was at the door of the manager's office where Mr. Miller conducted the Bible class. The lesson was a simple exposition of John 3:16, for my benefit no doubt. I was soon under conviction but did not want to give in. I admitted that I was a sinner alright but I didn't see how Christ could help me by dying for me - we all had to die.

Then I was told that Christ not only died but was risen again for my justification (Romans 3:24-26, 4:25). When I said I would like to know more about the resurrection of the dead, Mr. Miller gave me a Bible and told me to read 1 Cor. 15.

When I had finished my work after dinner that day I went to the library to be quiet and read the whole chapter. I could really see that faith in a risen Christ was mankind's only hope. Without resurrection faith was vain, that all were in sin and without a saviour.

I saw that the resurrection was the distinctive difference between Christianity and other religions and I also saw, reaching further, that I had been listening to the wrong people, i.e., the expounders of socialist/humanist philosophy and, above all, the evolution theory. None of these could cleanse my soul from sin (v.32) and much more.

I went back and told Mr. Miller what I had discovered and that I was now convinced that Christ had indeed risen from the dead and that He was our only hope. He said, “Then do you confess your sin to Christ and believe that He has power to forgive you your sin?”

I said, “I do.”

“Then,” he said, “let’s kneel here and ask Him to come into your life and make you the person He wants you to be.”

That was a very hard thing for me to do. I thought I could never do it but I realized that if I was to get spiritual help I must comply. So down I got and confessed my wretched state of mind and asked Christ to forgive and cleanse me from all my sins.

Mr. Miller quoted 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I arose from the floor and looked at Mr. Miller and his face was beaming. He prayed for God to bless me and encouraged me to read the Bible daily.

## **Reading and Learning**

I began to read my Bible at every opportunity and I attended the Bible class regularly. I marveled at the wisdom and knowledge revealed in the Word but I also found there were things I had to put right in my life and other things I would have dearly wished I could but could not.

As I read the Bible I began to realize how great a sinner I was and at times wondered how God could forgive me for some of the sins I had committed. I found by reading the books of the law I had committed a sin punishable by death. Of course I had been told by the evangelist when I was a teenager, “once saved, always saved. Remember,” he said, “you can never lose your salvation in Christ.” But I began to have doubts and would be very depressed.

## **Life in the Refuge**

When one takes a stand for Jesus Christ in a place like the Refuge you are put to the test. We were subject to ridicule and scorn because many thought we were just doing it for material

gain. But my wages were three meals a day, a bed to sleep in, and for washing plates and cutlery for 200 to 300 men daily I received the large sum of 50 cents per week. The rate gradually went up but the most I received was \$20 per month as clerk in the office.

There were other things I had to rectify. All the time I had been in the U.S.A. I had not written home once. It was a cruel and deliberate act on my part. The reason I did it was because I was in the States without a permit.

## **Bad News**

I realized that I had to write my mother and let her know where I was. When I received her letter I got a real shock. She said that Ernie had been killed in a logging camp near Sudbury, Ontario in the Fall of 1925 (the same time I had gone to the U.S. on the flip of a coin).

She further added that she had received a notice from the company Ernie worked for and a word of sympathy including a small cheque for wages due him. She wanted me to go and find out more about the circumstances, not realizing that I was so far away and in no position to travel.

I wrote the company and got the information that he had died as a result of a load of logs falling on him. For the first time in my life I was smitten with grief and a guilty conscience.

## **Am I My Brother's Keeper?**

One of the last things mother had said to me, the last time we saw her before we left England was, "George, take care of your brother."

I had been responsible for his running away from the farm and later, when he joined me as a young man of 19, I led him into many harmful and wicked practices. God brought this to my mind now and I was so overcome by remorse and sorrow that I completely broke down. I could not control my emotions and the tears flowed so freely that I could not carry on my job but went to the darkest corner of the boiler room where I cried like a lost child.

I was in that condition for hours. Finally the manager was told of my hiding place and came and tried to console me. I was eventually able to control my feelings and take my duties. I found some relief in the activity but I could not eat and finally went up to my cot where I sought to be alone with my feelings. I looked to God to show me that my peace of mind must come through the realization that my grief could not bring Ernie back again.

## **“Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out.” Numbers 32:23**

My hope was that he had turned back to the Lord when he knew he was near death and that he would commit his soul to the One who had died on Calvary for his sins and mine and all the rest of sin sick humanity. I hoped that some time in the future we would be reconciled. He was a sad, lonely boy and perhaps God, in His mercy, took him out of this veil of tears to a better land.

After some months as dishwasher, the office clerk quit and Mr. Miller asked me if I would like to take the job. I had to work with Mr. Bee who was a converted alcoholic and had an unpredictable temper. He was difficult to get along with at times and could be most caustic and superior in his dealings with subordinates. But he was necessary to the running of the place and was in charge of all the accounts.

I stayed about a year on this job and then asked for a transfer and ended up assistant to the head cook. We got along fine. He had worked for some of the large hotels and clubs but was getting too old to cope with the demands of the trade and was glad to get the job with the Refuge.

His name was Ken and he had all the proper clothes, hats and knives appropriate to the profession. He taught me a few “tricks of the trade” and I tried to talk to him about spiritual things but he always had a way of changing the subject.

There were a couple of riots in the place while I was there. At a given cue some of the men would rise up from the tables and tip over the contents of the dishes on the floor. The moment that happened the hanging doors at the kitchen dropped and then the men pelted the walls and windows with heavy china mugs. They made an awful racket for about 10 minutes, though it seemed longer. Then they all made a hasty exit, (for they knew we would notify the police right away) leaving us to clean up the mess.

This happened about three times while I was there. The word would get to city council who would call Mr. Miller to explain why such a thing could happen. Usually after a lecture from some of the aldermen he would be instructed to improve the meals and offer small luxuries such as toothpaste, socks and even tobacco, which would be given on a merit system.

As a result conditions improved after every riot but that was not what the instigators wanted and eventually they succeeded in having the place closed down. The men were issued a scrip so they could lodge in the cheap hotels, four men to a room, and eat in the cheapest restaurants where they could get one full meal and coffee and toast or a doughnut per day.

Actually they were far worse off and they were really the victims of a liaison between restaurant and hotel owners and radical groups of trouble makers.



All the while these things were going on I was trying to adjust to my situation in the light of the leading of Jesus and the apostles. I saw much going on that did not seem to jibe with the gospel message and I was at difficulty some times to explain to fellows I was witnessing to how I could continue working for the society when that organization was only interested in keeping the men off the streets and out of sight of the public as much as possible.

I was accused of being a stooge for the management and at the same time I was talking to the manager privately and trying to get him to take a more charitable attitude to the men rather than classify them as idlers as he automatically did.

His attitude was that the men were all in want because of their laziness. I pointed out to him that they had little opportunity to work and that he knew that we could always get some men to work for 50 cents a day at cleaning and renovations.

Once while I was there we took over an empty warehouse and cleaned and painted and moved all the furnishings from Pender Street to the new location on Hamilton Street. We set up everything, ready to move into, in a matter of two weeks and none of the men received more than 50 cents a day working three hour shifts a day. They worked with a will and even the manager was pleased with the results.

About this time I became acquainted with the Enefer family. Their daughter Maud came to some of the gospel services that we had on Sunday evenings. She got to know our Bible class members and invited us to her parents' home in Cedar Cottage.

## **Baptized**

There were about eight or ten of us. Nine of the men in the group were baptized one evening at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Vancouver in February, 1932. It was the largest space our sponsor could get and drew a very large audience. We were a bit of an oddity, coming as we did from the Refuge.

As the spring approached I became increasingly restless. My zeal for the gospel was dimming. There were many disappointments both within and without. A young man I had led to accept Jesus as Saviour got involved with the evolution theory through an instructor at the day school where Joe was improving his English and maths. Joe was a French-Canadian.

The instructor not only taught Joe about evolution but also put a lot of bad ideas in his head about Christian friends, saying we were only out to deceive him and make use of him for our own ends. What he had that we should want was a mystery to me as Joe was penniless and on relief.

Joe finally disappeared and I don't know what happened to him. I hope he finally realized it was the evolutionist that was deceiving him.

## Leaving Vancouver

Along about April two of our fellows had saved enough money out of the meagre pay allowance to buy an old jalopy for \$100. It had taken most of their money and they were looking for a third person to buy the gas. It seemed like a good opportunity for me to get away so I said I would go with them.

During the next month we got tools, bedding, provisions for several months, cooking gear, work clothes, boots, etc. Most of the stuff we got from Mr. Miller at cost or less. Strangely, he was not upset at losing three of his men but was quite pleased that we had the initiative to strike out for ourselves.

Mr. Miller had lived on a farm in Saskatchewan and still had the pioneer spirit. Finally as the day drew near to leave, the Enefer family put on a party for us. The room was packed with well-wishers. There was no doubt in my mind that they were some of God's choice people.

## Departure

One day early in May, George Smallwood and Frank Wieb pulled up to the rear door of the Hamilton Street warehouse (which had been converted into a residence for homeless men) and began to load up the back of the car with food, tools and bedding. We had quite a big load and I had trouble fitting myself into the small area left for me.

Finally, when all was ready, Mr. Miller and the entire staff came out to give us a roaring send off. We headed for New Westminster to pick up a drivers license for "one dollar and no questions asked." They issued us a permit that allowed us to drive anywhere in B.C. for life! I am sorry I lost mine. It would be proof of how far we have come in government control over the citizen's purse.

## Day One

Leaving New Westminster behind we took the Dewdney Trail to Agassiz where we camped for the night at the school ground. We had a tarp for a shelter and a ground sheet and army blankets to keep warm. (By the way we payed for all the things at the "Pogy" but at a very modest price, thanks to Mr. Miller's ability to get all the supplies at rock bottom prices.)

## Day Two

The second day we were up early and after breakfast of eggs and bacon, caught the early ferry across the Fraser River to Rosedale, then on to Hope and the Fraser Canyon. Progress was very slow as the road was narrow and winding. We camped at, or beneath, Old Alexander Bridge. It was a hair raising experience to descend to the camping spot as the road was full of twists and bends.

We were all impressed with the rugged beauty of the area but we had to keep going and were not sure that we were going to make it as the car was old and well worn. We had trouble with the motor overheating and had to stop occasionally to patch a tube. However luck was with us, or should I say God was protecting us? We had all been very well instructed in these matters under Mr. Miller's and Rev. Leeman's guidance. We were all baptized believers, though perhaps not too firmly grounded in the Truth, but we did believe in God's protection.

## Day Three

We made it safely through the Canyon to Ashcroft. Turning north the road became a gravel surface with ruts. We had camped in Cache Creek in an old log cabin and had our first experience with pack rats. Frank had been in the Caribou before and told us to protect all our small items or the "rats" would take them even though they were of no use. How like some people who clutter up their houses with lots of useless things!

After driving into the chasm, which was worth the trip, we went through Clinton, an important stopping place in the horse stage days. The old Clinton Hotel, a log structure, was standing and still in service then.

## Day Four

The road had lots of turns for no apparent reason. One person said it was because the road builders followed the caribou trails! Well, we passed 100 Mile House, the site of a religious sect just started by Lord Cecil Martin. Then came Lac La Hache and Lone Butte.

At 150 Mile House we turned left to go to Williams Lake, which was a divisional point for the P.G.E.R. (Pacific Great Eastern Railway or "please go easy" as the locals called it). Williams Lake was a shipping point for the cattlemen of the area, which extended to the Chilcotin west of the Fraser River.

We camped outside the town, on the meadow which later became the air field. We picked our shelter near the trees and started a fire on which we began preparing a meal. We had a

visitor, an Indian fellow, who asked where we were from and we asked him to have something to eat. We shared with him and after awhile he said goodbye. When we packed our gear away there was one pound of butter missing. I hope he had some bread to put it on. If he had asked we would have given it.

## **Williams Lake**

Next morning we went to the government building in Williams Lake to make inquiries about land available. They showed us a map of the area and there were quarter sections available within six miles, but we did not receive any encouragement to file a claim. We found out later there were already several people doing that who ended up applying for relief.

They told us that the land was mainly used for grazing cattle and not suitable for farming. However, we decided to look at the land and decide for ourselves. We drove the old car up the hill behind the town. On top was a plateau which was wooded but had several large meadows.

George and I decided we would file a claim but Frank said he wanted to go to Barkerville and do some prospecting. So we parted. Frank took the car and it broke down. He sold it for junk, which he did on his own decision, but he gave us half the money. He got \$15 which, with \$7 of mine, was all the cash we had. But we had a good stock of grub and all the tools.

## **The Cabin**

We did not wait for a claim to be granted but started right away to fell trees suitable for a log cabin. The spot we chose was near the road. Across the road was a small pond, our source of water and sometimes a duck for dinner. After the logs were ready I was able to borrow a team of horses from a neighbour to skin the logs to the building site.

Then the hard work started lifting the logs into place. At first it was not too bad and we laid the biggest logs on the bottom rows. But when we had to lift them above our heads it was almost too much. George was a small man, about 5'3," a city boy who had done no manual labour, and he had a hard time adjusting to country life even though he wanted to.

## **The Bunny Hop**

While we were working on the cabin we continued to camp outside. We would have a good fire going in the evening and would sit with our backs to one of the felled trees watching the sparks fly. One night when the moon was shining brightly we heard a big thump and then another. It seemed to be coming from the other side of the log we were leaning against.

I crept to the end of the log, the shotgun in my hand. Peering around the butt end I was surprised to see a bunch of rabbits sitting in a circle and a big buck jumping up and hitting the ground with his hind feet, hence the sound. He was apparently calling all brother rabbits to a hoedown. We did not disturb them and they left shortly.

Eventually we got the cabin up. We flattened poles for the floor and covered the roof with more poles, called pancheons, then put a layer of sods on top. With two small windows and a door in I left George to take care of the place while I went haying for a rancher at 140 Mile House. I worked from the middle of July till mid September and made \$45 which was spent mostly on food for the winter.

Back at the cabin there had been a big storm and the water had come through the roof and drenched our supply of flour, beans and rice. George had not the forethought to cover it with a tarp. The flour had a layer of hardened crust but inside it was fine. We reclaimed what we could.

## **A New Roof**

I realized that we would have to have something better than sods to keep us dry. There were some fir trees that had been felled by a previous settler who had left to go to the First World War and had never returned. They were dry but would they be suitable? Cedar is the usual wood for shakes.

I decided to give it a try. I was able to borrow a maul and a frow, an iron tool for splitting the wood. It worked and so with a lot of labour we put on another roof over the sods and, as a result, we had warm as well as dry shelter for the winter.

We set our attention to cutting an ample supply of wood for fuel and were well prepared to sit out the long winter to come.

## **Frank Returns With a Friend**

We had no money for a stove. Up to now we had done all our cooking on a camp fire but with winter approaching we had to have something to put heat into the cabin. I got a small oil drum from the dump and cut a hole for a smoke stack and made a door in one end. We were able to buy enough stove pipe to finish the job and then we took a five gallon oil can to make an oven which we set on top of the stove.

We were getting a bit tired of eating bannock three times a day and baked bread was an agreeable change. Surprisingly the bread was almost always good if we could manage to keep the dough warm enough overnight, so we took it to bed with us.

For companions we had a pup and a kitten. We cut a hole in the door for them to come and go as they pleased. We had no trouble housetraining them.

Frank arrived just before dark one evening. He looked tired and much thinner than when he left us. He had travelled from Horsefly that day, about 35 miles. He had sustained his strength by stopping frequently to fill up on wild strawberry leaves.

Well we filled him up and loaned him a blanket. He made himself a bed by the stove and was soon asleep, but not us. His snores kept us awake most of the night. Next day he went into town and came back with a friend. I don't know what his plans were but I told him, "You can stay for the weekend then you will have to go. We do not have enough provisions to keep you any longer." He accepted my ultimatum without protest and said they would go to Vancouver and winter on the pogy.

## Winter

Snow came to stay in November and we got about two feet of it. But though it reached 30 below we were comfortable. The days were mostly sunny and at night the sky was so bright with stars. With the snow on the ground it hardly ever got real dark.

We got magazines from the coast and we both did a lot of letter writing. Mr. Miller and Rev. Leeman kept in contact writing letters of encouragement. Sometimes we played cards and we both read our Bibles. I had gotten away from Christian friends but could not get away from God's Word. I had started to smoke again and the habit got a stronger hold on me than before.

Sometimes I would roll a cigarette while I had the Bible open on my knees and it bothered me. When I got short on tobacco I would search the cabin for a cigarette butt. Some people say there is no harm in smoking but I know it is a harmful and bad habit. No one fully committed to the Lord should smoke. It not only harms the body, but it also defiles the temple of God "which temple ye are." I Cor. 3:17.

I am sure it affects our thoughts and feelings and unfits us for Christian service or fellowship. I continued to smoke until the day of our marriage but never in the company of Christians. I did not want to impose on them the discomfort of my habit.

We varied our diet, which was mostly carbohydrates, with Cottontail Rabbit, Blue Grouse, as well as duck. Once, in desperation for some meat, we killed a porcupine. Once was enough. It taste like the pine bark on which it lived in winter time. An Indian, who dropped in for lunch, was given some, left and never returned.

## Christmas 1933

As Christmas drew near there wasn't much prospect of anything to change the monotony of our diet. But a week before the holy day I received a fruit cake from Mrs. Miller and then a pudding from my mother in England. Then George got a card and two dollars.

We went to town right away and bought a dollars worth of beef stew, 50 cents for fresh vegetables and got a bottle of Logan's Wine with the rest. We decided to share with two of our neighbours, Louie, a former member of the Cold Stream Guards Regiment, and a 60-year-old widower.

They both were glad to have dinner with us and we made a big beef stew which we soon disposed of, then the cake and a hot pudding, preceded by a mug of wine and finally lots of coffee.

Afterward we sang carols from the Redemption Hymn Book. Then we told stories of our past and expressed hopes for a better future. Louie had an interest in wild plants and flowers and had actually discovered a variety which was not supposed to be in that area. Sending his findings to a magazine that featured plants and flowers he was surprised to receive a letter from a doctor of botany commending him for his account.

Bill, the other man, had driven his team north after the death of his wife. He couldn't bear to stay where everything kept reminding him of his loss, so he loaded all his possessions on his wagon. He was fortunate to get a place abandoned by its owner and still in good condition. There was a well and barn for horses and a meadow for hay and pasture all fenced in. He was quite comfortable and seemed contented with his lot as much as could be expected of him.

## Pleasant Valley

A half mile north of us was a valley which extended west a mile or so to William's Creek. In the valley were four families. At the head of the valley was Ed LaPlante who had a substantial house. There was a young couple with a three year old daughter and eight month old baby. They were from the prairies and were housekeeping for Ed.

There was also a young fellow from Vancouver named Stanley, a red head who lived in cowboy hat and riding boots. He was the first person we met on our arrival and when we mentioned that we were Christians he said, "You ought to be shot."

I was a bit surprised but replied, "If we all got our just desserts we would all be dead. But Christ died for us so we could have peace with God and man."



Lower down the valley were the P.P. Parker family. P.P. was an ex-streetcar conductor and was attempting to make a living with a few cows. Actually he was dependant on a pension. Mrs. Parker was more business-like and managed the house well.

I stayed with them a few months in the spring of '35 and found her to be a good cook. They had a son Bill, in his thirties, who was a bit strange. He spent most of his days in the chicken house and would let no one else in. After one look inside I was content to let him have it-the place was filthy.

Just above them on the hillside lived the Schoonovers, a young couple with one small girl. They had married and then homesteaded right away. She helped with all the building. He laughed at us and said, "You fellows have built a nest and haven't a bird to share it. I caught mine first and had her help build our nest."

On the south side of the valley was Jim Christopherson. He also farmed and had a widow and her two grown sons to work for him. Later he married and Mrs. Owens and her family moved to the Beaver Valley near Horsefly. At the bottom of the valley where it widened out were the Kinsey family. They were market gardeners and sold their produce in Williams Lake and did quite well.

They had a boy and a girl at home. Winnie had the largest and bluest eyes of anyone I have ever seen and was quite attractive to the young men. One winter the Parkers had a house dance and I had the pleasure of dancing with her. It was one of the two times I have ever danced and it was fun.

## **Mr. Fox**

Hansford Fox was the wealthiest man in our area. He had a barber shop in Williams Lake where he charged 50 cents a haircut. The price was steep for the times but he had the only shop and as it was before the days of long hair for men, peer pressure was to have your hair fairly regular so he did well.

He also had a brother who took care of the farm. He was a gentle, old man, just the opposite of his brother who was sharp, critical and contemptuous of his poor neighbours. He put a sign up at the head of the trail down the hill to town: "But for me you bums would starve."

However he was civil with me, maybe because we did occasionally get a haircut. Mr. Fox called me in one day as we were passing and asked if we would like to clear five acres of bush land for fifty dollars. We looked at the site and accepted. He wanted every tree cut down and anything that would make a fence post saved and the brush piled and burned.

So we started the next day. It took us six weeks to finish the job. I think he was surprised that we had done it so fast and came out to check it over very carefully before he would give us the final payment. I think he was quite satisfied but he was a man who wanted more than value for his money. The money put us through the winter nicely. George was able to buy some jam and a clock. Before that we had no way to tell the time. Being without a clock we were controlled, like the beasts and the birds, by the sunrise and sunset.

One morning I awoke at daylight. I got up, leaving George to make our breakfast. I went out and started to cut poles to make a fence around our little clearing, as we planned to have a little garden later on. A fence was necessary to keep deer and cattle, (which sometimes grazed the area) out.

After working 40 minutes or so old Bill came by on his way to town. As the custom was he stopped to pass the time of day. When people meet up country they stop, take out the tobacco, roll a cigarette, light up, then talk for few are in a hurry. That way you get the news and add to it. George came out to say breakfast was ready and seeing Bill asked the time. "Five o'clock," said Bill.

George was upset. He said to me, "You've gone work crazy, you'll have us up at midnight next." Hence the clock. It had an alarm and George set it for what he thought was a civilized time to arise and nothing could get him out of bed before it rang. It didn't bother me because I was usually up before then anyway.

One day we had a visitor-a man and two teenage boys out for a spin. His name was Taylor and he was the Indian agent. Unfortunately for him his car got stuck on a rock in the middle of the road just outside the door. He wondered if we could help get the car free. We were glad to help and with the use of a pry we soon had him free. He thanked us and said if we could get rid of the rock he would see that we were paid so we said we would take care of it.

It proved to be a much bigger job than we anticipated. We dug around but could not move it. The only solution I could come up with was to dig a bigger hole along side of it and roll the rock in. This we did. The next time Mr. Taylor came by he looked at the place where the rock had been but asked no questions. Perhaps he was satisfied that the road was safe for his car and didn't care how it was removed.

## **Ron and the Boys from Vancouver**

As a result of our cooperation with the authorities we were given a job clearing right of way for a new road into the valley. The money from this kept us going until haying time. Meanwhile we had a visit from Ron Burditt, Jess, Joe Clarkson and Stan. I don't think they were very impressed with the accommodations we had to offer. They only stayed a couple of days and went back to Vancouver.

## **Riskey Creek. Chilcotin**

When haying time came I went to work for R.C. Cotton at the Riskey Creek Ranch. Mr. Cotton was an Englishman. The rumour was that he was the son of a titled man and he must have been a wealthy one too as there did not seem to be much shortage of money or material comforts.

The ranch was situated in a pleasant valley and had about a section of land that could be irrigated from Riskey Creek. Besides alfalfa it produced wheat, oats and vegetables. After haying was finished I was offered a job for the winter feeding cattle and cutting wood for the fireplaces and stoves, and also for fence posts. I stayed until the middle of February and left because my toes had all been frostbitten and were quite sore.

## **Prospecting**

My partner had stayed with the Christophersons and wanted a change so we packed our blankets in pack sacks, got a free miners license and took off for the hills. We journeyed as far as Prince George and went to a canyon where men were panning for gold. Three fellows had moved all the rocks from a creek bed, piling them up like a wall. They were scraping the creek bottom and putting it into a flume.

They were doing a lot of hard work on the chance that they might uncover a pocket of nuggets and loose gold flakes-a slim chance. They were dependent on welfare to grubstake them and travelled twenty odd miles to Prince George once a month to get their relief cheques. But I suppose they were better off doing that than laying around some town. At least they were getting lots of exercise and fresh air.

We stopped at a homestead one afternoon and were asked to stay for supper. The people, a family of five, seemed to be hungry for company. They asked me all manner of questions. "Where are you from? Where have you been? What was it like in Prince George, Barkerville?"

We had packed a .32 Winchester rifle with us but had not seen anything to shoot. Prospectors were allowed to shoot game for their own use. So our host invited us to go with him on a moose hunt. He said there was a willow meadow about a mile away so we went with him and his ten year old son. We saw no game but the boy showed us an upturned stump that he had slept under the year before.

He had been berry picking with other members of the family and got separated. He didn't worry and headed for home but went in the wrong direction. As darkness approached he saw

that the stump would offer him some protection and ate the berries he had picked and then went to sleep. He must have been very tired for that is where his father found him the next day.

They were friendly folk. The wife was a good cook. They had meat, vegetables and fruit, milk cows and hens and a comfortable log cabin. They insisted we stay the night and gave us the boys bed to sleep in. It was a tanned moose hide lashed between two poles. We had a most comfortable night's sleep.

## **Bill Miller**

Another man was working a claim higher up the hillside. He had a lot of holes dug and would just dig far enough to get to bedrock for panning then estimate how rich it was and whether or not it was worthwhile to develop. He was a seasoned miner and had prospected for gold all over the northwest and up to the Yukon Territory.

He said he had hit it rich several times and lost it by high living and bad investments. He hoped to strike it rich once again and had plans to put his gains into a paid up annuity because he was getting too old for this kind of life. A year later I read an item in the newspaper that Bill Miller, discoverer of the P.G. Gorge Placer claim had been killed in an airplane crash in northern B.C.

His advice to us was to go back east, get a job, marry and settle down. "I've given my life to looking for gold, I've followed all the main streams, been starved, soaked, frozen and miserable most of the time and for what?"

## **Crossing the Fraser**

Next morning as we were deciding whether we should push on a homesteader came down from the upper flats where he was trying to farm and provide for a family of five. He was very nervous and said he had to cross the Fraser River but needed help.

He had a ten year old boy with him and he wanted us to help paddle a dugout canoe across the river. "Would we help?" We saw this as a chance to speed us on our way to Barkerville which we wanted to see on our way back to Williams Lake so we agreed.

Well the dugout had seen better days. It rode in the water lopsided and one gunnel was only a couple of inches above the water line. The river was running high. We got in the canoe and it wobbled crazily. We each had a homemade paddle.

The homesteader sat in the bow, the boy behind him with George and me in the stem. Our skipper said we didn't have to do much until we came to the whirlpool then, "when I say paddle,

paddle like hell or we'll all end up on the bottom.” Our canoe was moving quite fast now and we could see the whirlpool ahead, an immense circle of water.

To look at it would make one dizzy so I looked away. Then our skipper yelled, “Paddle for all you're worth” and we all dug in with a will. I didn't think we were more than five or six minutes in this situation when all of a sudden we found ourselves in a quiet back eddy. We were all winded by the extra exertion but happy to have crossed safely.

It was a mile up to a small store on the highway between Prince George and Quesnel. The homesteader went into the store, ordered a half pound can of Pilot tobacco and immediately opened it up and rolled a cigarette. That is all he bought. He had risked his life and ours just to get a smoke. It sure made me do some serious thinking about the wisdom of smoking.

His nerves settled, he and the boy started back. They said they would have no trouble going back as the water above the eddy was quieter. We said goodbye and shouldered our packs and started walking south.

## **Homestead Hospitality**

Late that afternoon a flatbed truck passed us, stopped and as we carne along side the driver asked us where we were going and if we would like a lift. We said yes and so we climbed on to the deck, put our backs to the cab and he took off. We rode for about an hour and the driver slowed and turned into a driveway. “Where are you going to spend the night?” he asked.

We said, “Under the first cedar tree we can find.”

He said we were welcome to stay in the barn, “There's lots of hay, you would be more comfortable there.” We were glad to accept although we had been sleeping out for about a month by this time. We proceeded to spread our blankets in the hay mow and a boy carne and told us that supper was ready and to come right away.

We went up to the house, a frame shack with only a layer of tar paper for insulation. When we stepped inside the driver, a man in his twenties, asked us our names then introduced us to the rest of the family; his father a man of sixty who had recently lost his wife, a big red haired girl who evidently had the job of housekeeping, the boy about ten, two girls eight and six, and the baby three years old.

There was not much furniture, only a long homemade table, a long bench on either side, an arm chair for the dad and a kitchen chair for the girl who now began to ladle out bowls of soup. Most of the ‘bowls’ were coffee cans. She put a big pan of hot buns, just out of the

oven, on the table. There was farmers butter but only a couple of knives, which were passed around. Fortunately there were enough spoons of various sizes for everyone.

The soup was macaroni boiled in milk. The kids all dug into it like it was the “broth of the gods” and surprisingly it was good. Afterwards the adults all had tea served in 1/2 pound tobacco tins. When everyone was filled to satisfaction the “dishes” were cleared off the table. The father took an old violin and played a few tunes passable well then the little ones were hustled off to bed and the adults talked about the hard times.

It seemed that the father had owned a printing shop but due to the expenses of his wife’s illness and the Depression he had lost it and moved the family out here where they could cut wood to sell. The young man was quite bitter for the state of things. I tried to encourage him and urged him to have faith in God. The father agreed and on that note we all went to our respective beds.

In the morning before we could slip away they came and invited us to breakfast, a generosity they could ill-afford. To show our gratitude we gave the children our spare change and bid them all farewell.

## **Barkerville and Wells**

We soon got a ride and were taken to Quesnel and started out at once for Barkerville. On the way we passed a pioneer farm situated on the Quesnel River. The owner sold us some eggs and butter and told about the good old days when his farm was a stopping place for the stage coach and teamsters and he could sell everything he raised for top prices.

We went through Wells where a hard rock mine was struggling to keep alive, then on to Barkerville. (Today Barkerville is a great tourist attraction but when we were there in 1935 there were not more than a dozen or so residents and most of the houses, stores, theatres, saloons and one church were in a very dilapidated condition.)

We went out to William’s Creek where the most gold was taken. All there was to show for the labours of the miners was a large area where all the stones had been individually handled, washed and left as a testimony to the sweat and labour. A very drab picture.

We didn’t stay long and on the way back we visited a creek where men were hydrosluicing the hillsides, taking all the soil and rocks that would move down to a long flume where the aggregate was washed over a griddle with the hope that they would find enough gold to cover expenses. It was the hardest kind of work that the men were doing but at the time there was not much choice. There was so much unemployment.

Not only were the men ravaged by toil but the hillsides were being stripped of every living thing and nothing was left except the bare rocks. Man in his seeking for fortune will destroy everything including himself.

We passed a man working a bank beside the road. He would shovel gravel into a rocker and using water from the roadside ditch would work the rocker to extract any dust that would cling to a strip of blanket.

I asked him, “Can you make much?”

“Oh, enough for flapjacks,” was his response.

## **Back Home**

At Williams Lake we met one of the fellows from the valley. He said the Works Department were looking for men to improve the road way up the valley and would we like a job? His name was Percy, a real character and just one step ahead of the law, but a likeable chap, so we went to work and the pay was better than haying. We had a bunk house erected near Christofersons and they boarded us for a dollar a day.

In fact when the job was finished we took a timber lease nearby and got a contract from the P.G.E. Railroad to cut and deliver a thousand rail ties. We had to build a pole shack and while we were doing that we shared a tent with a fellow named Ray Collins.

## **Cutting Ties**

Ray was cutting firewood for the Christofersons and was glad to have our company. We had to sleep on the ground which was frozen and had only some cardboard and a tarp to lay on. This barely sufficed to keep us warm so we put up the shack in record time. We built a double wooden bunk, made paillasses out of sacking and filled them with hay. We were quite comfortable then even though the mercury dipped to 30 below at night.

Cutting ties is extremely hard work, especially swinging the broad axe which has an 8” blade and weighs about 8 pounds. It is used to flatten two sides of a log to the thickness of 8” and they must also be 8” wide at least and with a smooth, even surface.

It is backbreaking work when you have to maintain your balance on top of the felled tree while you work your way along its length, chopping in to the right depth the full width of the



blade. By the time you reach the end of the tree you find it difficult to straighten up. Then you turn around and go back chopping the other side.

My companion could never master this job so I let him do the limbing and bucking the trees into tie lengths. We lived mainly on a diet of pork and beans which I prepared every night putting the beans to soak. In the morning we put them on the stove to cook after a breakfast of porridge and pancakes. We stoked the fire and left the beans and pork to simmer on the stove. At noon they would be done just right. With a table spoon of molasses and half a can of tomatoes they taste pretty good and they were certainly full of energy.

## Deer Hunt

But one likes a change so one day I took the rifle and went across the valley to the opposite side which was facing south. The deer congregated there in winter as there was lots of willow to browse and clumps of Jack Pine where they could rest in daytime. I was walking along a trail parallel to such a patch when I disturbed a young buck.

He was alone. He stood, about thirty yards away, trying to locate me. There was a windfall between us that partly hid him and probably prevented him from seeing me. I had to stand on tiptoe to get a look at him. I raised the rifle and took aim at the back of the front leg and pulled the trigger.

He went down but immediately jumped up and took off. I soon lost sight of him and made my way through the trees to the clearing beyond to look for tracks and blood. There were many tracks and no blood spot. I followed some tracks for about an hour and finally turned, disappointed and also concerned that I had wounded an animal that would be in great pain and eventually bleed to death.

As I neared the place where I shot him I saw a spot of blood. I looked for more and carefully worked my way back toward a small evergreen. I thought I saw a movement - stopped and looked and there, lying down under the limbs of the tree was my deer. He was facing me. I took careful aim and this time I shot him between the eyes. I congratulated myself on having found him but when I opened him up I found the inside of his belly full of blood. The first bullet had hit him in the upper hind leg and had severed an artery.

It almost made me sick but I cleaned him the best I could. It took about an hour for me to drag him back to the cabin. I was tired out and had no appetite for deer meat that night. Fortunately George had no faith in my hunting abilities so he had the standard pork and beans ready.

## Shipping the Ties to Town

As winter began to wane we decided we had had enough of tie cutting. We hired Ray, who had a horse, to skid the ties out to the road handy for loading onto a truck. It cost 5 cents a piece for skidding and 10 cents a tie for a man to truck them to the railroad. After two weeks we were notified to be at the railroad where we met the estimator.

He said we had 500 good ties and 50 seconds. Our cheque for the lot was \$230. Ray received \$31 and the trucker \$62 leaving us \$130 for all our hard work. We decided to make firewood of trees downed and left because of being either too big or too small. I traded four cords to the hardware man for \$16 in trade.

## My Partner Decides to go Home

About this time George got a letter from his folk urging him to come back home. I asked him what he wanted to do and he said he would if he had enough money. How much it would cost he didn't know but thought it might be about \$100. "Well," I said, "we have \$100. If you really want to go, leave me the rifle and tools, etc. and you take the money," and he did. I got one letter some time after telling me he had a salesman's job and was getting married to his old time girlfriend.

I stayed and worked by myself, felling and bucking wood. I had a deal with a truck driver to take all the wood I could cut at \$4 a cord less \$1.50 for him. It took two days to cut a cord into 18" blocks. I could cut a cord of 4' lengths in a day for which I received \$1.50 but there was not too much demand for that length.

The hardest thing I had to do was fell the trees. I attached a bicycle tube to one end of the saw and spiked the other end to the tree I was falling. Then I drove my axe into the tree in such a way as to support the manless end of the crosscut and pulled on the other end myself. The tube would pull the saw back and I would keep that up until the tree fell.

The biggest tree I fell was 42" on the butt. One problem cutting fir trees in the spring and early summer was the amount of pitch. Sometimes I would hit a pocket of it which would gum up the saw. I was surely earning my bread by the sweat of my brow.

Early summer a man called to see me. His name was Dick Church. He had a ranch at Big Creek and was looking for men to go haying. Someone had told him about me and he wondered if I would come. The pay would be \$30 per month and board and if I could go now he would be glad to take me in his car. He had three other men that would be going with us plus two men already at the ranch and thought we could manage.

It didn't take me too long to decide although I had not thought of looking for a job. But I really wasn't getting anywhere and all I had to show for my work were blisters and callouses. So I locked the shack door, taking only my blanket and a change of clothes.

## **Big Creek in the Chilcotin**

It was a 90 mile drive over a gravel road, so Dick lost no time rounding up the other men and we said goodbye to Williams Lake and were off on the road that went as far as Annaham Lake. We crossed the Fraser River at the Sheep Creek Bridge and ascended the bank to rolling open range country with just enough trees and brush to make it interesting.

There are several ranches scattered in this part of the country. I had worked in '34 on the Moon Ranch at Risky Creek and it was said the owner started with nothing and at the time I was there had a thousand head of cattle. The Lee Ranch at Hanceville was operated by a man who had attempted to drive a herd of cattle to the Klondike during the gold rush days. He lost his herd and horse en route and arrived back home packing his saddle.

The boss stopped at Hanceville and we had supper. Mrs. Lee was no beauty but she could sure cook and that satisfied us.

We crossed the Chilco River and there is a big ranch there. The boss said, "We are on home territory now. We'll soon be home." It took an hour before we arrived at Big Creek and we were glad to find our bunks and turn in for the night.

In the morning my first job was to fix a mower. One of the cogs in the wheel was not making contact. There was a blacksmith's shop and a forge and so I took the defective cog out and heated it so that I could hammer it out. But I hit it once and it disintegrated. "What can I do now?" I looked around and found a bit of strap iron. After heating it I coiled one end until it was the size of the broken one. I cooled it off, put it back into the sprocket on the wheel and tried it. It seemed to do the trick.

I told the boss what happened and he said fine, but I wondered how long it would hold up under working conditions. It actually lasted through the season and it sure was put to the test because a lot of the meadows were reclaimed beaver ponds criss-crossed with old fallen trees.

Dick was experimenting with turnips and wanted my advice on how to grow them. He had read some farm magazines about the benefits of feeding turnips to cattle. I spent some time hoeing and cultivating but the soil was ill-prepared and hard and dry. But I did the best I could and hoped that he would not be disappointed with the results.

Later in the fall we harvested them. They were not much bigger than your fist. We put them in a trench and covered them with hay and earth. Later when we dug them up they were frozen and the poor cattle tried in vain to chew them and were in danger of swallowing them

whole and choking. Another job I did was to build a flume to carry water from the creek for irrigation.

## Sawmill

Dick was an enterprising man and had a portable sawmill with which he cut lumber for his own use and also for others. So we cut the lumber for the flume and spiked it together with 6” spikes. It was about 6 feet wide and a foot deep and ran through a dry creek bed. We could not allow more than 2% grade which we accomplished by adding a 112” metal slug to one end of the level and used it on all the longitudinal stringers. Some places we were as much as 5 feet off the ground but when the water was turned on it worked perfectly.

## Haying

Well finally we had to start hauling and stacking hay. There were three of us hauling it on “sloops.” Wagons were not practical because of the roughness of the ground. Everything went well the first week. We were working the meadows at the home ranch but after that we started cutting sloughs and beaver meadows which meant we moved all our equipment every two weeks or oftener.

We had a big teenage girl to do the cooking. Her culinary skills were limited and her imagination was weird. She made a rice pudding mixed with cocoa and as a result the stacker called for a strike but the rest of us were not that stupid so we told him to strike all he liked but we were going to keep working. It meant I had to take over his job, for which Dick was very grateful.

## Stacking Hay

We hoisted the hay to the stack with an A-frame made of forty foot poles. They were hoisted up by a team of horses and held in a slightly leaning position by a cable. Another smaller cable ran through a pulley at the apex of the frame and one end of the cable had a hook which was hooked into one of two slings on the sloop. The other end of the cable was attached to the doubletree to which the horses were hitched.

At a command from the teamster the horses moved forward, lifting the bundle of hay up to where the stacker could position it over the stack. A pull of a rope released the load where the stacker wanted. Then the teamster went for another load and I would spread the hay around until he returned.

I must have put up about three or four hundred ton. We hayed until late September when the hay was getting frozen and would not dry properly. The last stack I put up began to heat from the pressure and steamed like a locomotive. The hay from that stack was of little food value to the cows.

After haying we built rail fences around each stack to keep cattle and moose out. In the winter the cattle would be divided into two lots. The calves got the best hay and the breeding stock got the rest. As the hay in one place was used up we moved the cattle to another feed ground.

## **Feeding Cattle**

Feeding was done by taking a load of hay into a meadow, driving in a large circle and throwing off forkfuls of hay. It was interesting to see the calves kick up their heels as they charged out of the shelter in the woods making for the hay. I was alone for six weeks and I had my hands full. After breakfast, mostly oatmeal and coffee, I would hitch the team to a sleigh and drive two miles through the dark to get a load of hay, feed it to the calves and then put my team in a shed. I would take the bits out of the bridles and leave the horses harnessed as the leather would get so hard with frost it would not bend. The bits were hung up by the stove in the cabin.

## **A Bucking Bronc**

After a quick lunch I rode a pony, a wild horse that the boss had caught and broken(?). He would kick you if you were not careful and would buck every time I mounted him. To make matters worse the saddle was as cold as a block of ice. I rode five miles to where the big stock was. I would take two or three loads of hay to about three hundred head of cattle and make sure the water hole was open, for water was as necessary as hay. (By the way I had a second team that stayed at this feed ground.) Then back to my cabin as darkness descended over the land. It was a very cold, unromantic experience.

There was no comfort, I slept on a wooden bunk filled with hay. I had one blanket, my own-it was a Hudson's Bay four point and it was a good one. I never took my clothes off all the time I was out there. I did get some help for the last month as a young chap who had had diphtheria and was convalescing took over feeding the cows.

I had one break at Christmas when the boss came out and insisted that I come into the ranch. His sister was staying with him for the winter because his wife had gone to her parents home in Victoria to have a baby. Dick said his sister would be disappointed if I did not come as she had gone to a bit of trouble and was expecting me.

I said, “But the calves and the cows will be without hay for at least two days.” He said, “Give them a little extra and they’ll be alright.”

## **Christmas Day at Big Creek**

So Christmas morning saw me starting off on a seventeen mile ride to get my Christmas dinner. I arrived about noon. I don’t remember what I had to eat but I’m sure it wasn’t turkey. After dinner the boss offered me a drink. He was suffering from indigestion and also missed his wife, no doubt. I don’t know how they came to meet as she was a city girl and he had never been away from Big Creek except for a few years in the Canadian Navy during the First World War.

I asked him what he did in the navy and he said he was on the bridge as the wheelsman. It must have been quite a change for a ranch boy. Perhaps while stationed in Esquimalt he met his future wife. (By the way she had a baby boy.)

## **Dick the Wild Horse Hunter**

Dick had inherited the ranch from his father, and also a \$20,000 debt. That was a lot of money in the thirties. The bank was his boss, told him who to sell his cattle to and then took the cheque and arranged for his loan for the next year. The allowance was so rigid that he had to turn to other things to make a dollar. One of the things was leading a hunting party for big game; bear, moose and bighorn sheep.

He had a party while I was there all the way from Germany. They wanted bighorn and they got a couple. All they wanted was the horns so we got the rest and it was the best wild meat I had tasted. Another thing Dick did was hunt and kill wild horses. At \$2 for a set of ears he had made a sum of \$700 over a three year period.

The banks also set the wages he could pay a man but because of the fact that I had taken care of his livestock and took on responsibility for stacking he said he was going to pay me an extra \$5 a month. He had two very well bred saddle horses which he would ride furiously when in pursuit of a wild horse or an uncooperative steer. But he was a good man in many ways and treated me as an equal.

He also offered me the job of ranch foreman. He wanted someone he could trust when he was absent from the ranch, however it was not to be.

## Gus Piltz

About 5 or 6 miles further on the road where I fed the cows lived a bachelor named Gus Piltz. It was rumoured that he had jumped ship at Vancouver and made his way up to the Chilcotin country. He got a job on a ranch and took his wages in cows. When he had 40 head the rancher said he had to move so he took his cows and his horse and set out to look for a place. He found it—a large meadow with a stream running through and laid claim to all the land in the area.

Singlehanded he built a cabin and barn. When haying time came he helped the Churches in exchange for equipment to do his own haying. He became a regular visitor at Big Creek and became very fond of the oldest daughter. She apparently felt the same toward him. And then Germany and Britain became involved in war. The elder Church forbade Gus to see his daughter and went so far as to send the daughter to Seattle to live with relatives and so ended what might have been the real romance of that area. Neither one married.

I met Gus when Dick left mail for me to deliver to him. So after I fed the cattle I rode to his place. I had heard that he was a hard man to get along with so I thought I would just deliver the mail and hurry back home for a late supper. But he surprised me. As I entered the driveway to his cabin I saw a man riding toward me at top speed. He jumped off and greeted me in a friendly fashion.

I told him who I was and said I had his mail. He told me to bring my horse into the stable. He had lots of room and good stalls and we fixed the horses up with hay. He said we would water them later and so we went into the cabin. It was clean, with curtains at the windows and a bright table cloth which made things look homey. I almost expected a woman to pop out at any time.

He offered me some homemade brew just to warm up and set about getting supper, talking all the while. He said after supper we can get the news over the radio. But we just kept on talking until all of a sudden it was 11 p.m.

“Gosh, it’s past bedtime,” he said. “Let’s get some sleep.” By the way the supper was the best I had all winter. It seemed that Gus was a perfectionist in all he did. He did not like sloppiness or half-hearted performance and that is why few men could get along with him. We met a few times and discussed politics, philosophy, world events and religion. He said he was an atheist but there was a twinkle in his eye that belied the statement.

He went on to become one of the most successful men in the Chilcotin and in his will he left money to provide scholarships for worthy students. The last time I saw him he offered me the same deal as he had, that is to take cattle for my wages. I wasn’t sure that I wanted to work for him but I told Dick about it and he said he would be glad to make the same offer.



But it wasn't to be. The Lord had better things in store for me. After the cattle were turned out to the range we were cutting some lumber at the home ranch. I cut my arm while cleaning out sawdust that had accumulated under the saw (which was still running). The cut was superficial but because some of the fabric from my blazer got in the wound I got a bad case of blood poisoning. It was necessary to go to the doctor who put me in the hospital that day.

I was there for two weeks and when I was discharged I drew my pay and returned to Vancouver. I had received a letter urging me to come and assuring me that things were getting better. As I was still on compensation I thought it a good time to visit my friends.

## **The Roundup**

But before I finish my account of the Chilcotin I should tell you about the roundup I took part in, albeit a very minor part. I drove the chuck-wagon that had all our blankets as well as grub.

I think most boys have dreamed about being a cowboy and had very rosey ideas of what a cowboy's life is like. I can tell you it is more than riding over the wild prairie chasing after cattle and rustlers though both are part of cattle ranching. There is a lot of hard work like fencing, irrigating, cutting firewood for fuel and fences, fixing broken down mowing machines and repairing harness.

Today's ranches are a combination of farming and ranching and one must be able to tackle anything that needs doing. There were two common sayings: "never be stuck" and "that's good enough." The main idea was to keep things moving.

Well, as I have already said my job was to take care of the chuck-wagon and cook for a crew of three whites and three Indians. The Indians were from a reserve near the home ranch at Risky Creek. They were good riders and knew the area well.

The three white men were the foreman Ed Kinsey, a local small rancher who also did custom haying for the ranch, and a half-breed named Carl, a fine fellow and a good all-round rider.

I left the ranch after breakfast and drove about 15 miles over rough prairie roads to the first camp site. The country was a very pleasant mixture of open land with some clumps of trees scattered about. But the best thing was the bracing effect of the high country atmosphere. One seemed to be much more alert than when living in coastal areas.

My first job was to erect a tent and then prepare the evening meal, which I did over an open fire at sunset. The foreman and Carl arrived and we ate. Ed said, "Well we'll be up early,

before daylight and you will have to feed the Indians. Give them lots of steak. That's all they want."

Sure enough we were up at five. The foreman and Carl apparently had an invitation to breakfast and left me to get along the best I could. I just had the fire made and the Indians arrived. I had barely put the steak into the frying pan when one said, "That's good, turn it over." Almost before it hit the pan they said, "That's good, quick before it burns." The meat was barely warm but that's the way they liked it and that is all they wanted. I offered them bread but they wanted none of that as long as they could fill up on meat.

Ed came back to get the Indians and told me to pack up as we had a cabin made available to us by a friend and it would be nearer the roundup grounds. That was where the cattle would be brought together for separating into individual herds for about eight ranchers who were participating in the roundup.

All the ranchers in a given area shared government range land that was leased annually to them at a certain rate per head. It was a good deal for the ranchers as none of them had enough private property to feed cattle all year. Such land as they had fenced was used to grow alfalfa and grain crops which were harvested and stacked for winter use.

As I was driving to the new location a bunch of prairie chickens flew up into some tall poplar trees. I had a double barrel shotgun which I grabbed up and fired both barrels. Five birds fell. When I got to camp I cleaned, plucked and baked them in the oven. I made a dressing of bread, onions and salt and pepper with baked spuds and carrots. I had supper all ready when the men showed up.

There were only five of them so I gave each one a bird. The foreman was concerned that I had none but I told him I preferred steak. "These are good, you don't know what you're missing," he said. The Indians liked them too although I noticed they didn't eat the dressing.

There were only three bunks in the cabin so when it was time to go to sleep I wondered where everyone would sleep. Nothing was said until Ed announced "lights out." The whites got into the bunks and the Indians curled up on the floor. They each had a blanket and in the morning seemed to be as refreshed as the rest of us. I was told that they had no beds except the chief who had received one as a present from the ranch owner for favours past.

I talked to the Indians about what they thought of God. They said God was a good Spirit but the Devil made it hard for them to do good. They had been taught the Catholic faith by a priest.

They were simple people, good natured but not very industrious by our standards. They preferred the simple life and were content with the barest necessities. I think in many ways they are a happier people than us because they demand less and are not always striving to succeed.

## Separating the Herd

Well the roundup lasted about three days and the grub box was getting down. I had no bread to give the men for their lunch and substituted flapjacks, which they didn't appreciate. But we had lots of beef, about five pounds per day per man.

On the fourth day I packed all the gear into the wagon and started back to the ranch. I had to pass through the roundup grounds and stopped to watch. There was about 5,000 head of cattle and about 20 riders representing the different ranches. The procedure was to ride into the herd, pick an older cow-one used to the proceedings-and head her out. Some would go quietly, others would try to stay with the herd. But the cow ponies were smarter and would charge up and nip the beast on the rump and out she would go.

The rider would drive her to an appointed spot where other riders would take over. As the holding group grew larger there was less trouble. They didn't have to worry about the calves because they stick close to their own mother. It was the steers and heifers that were the most difficult to handle but they were eventually run down and quickly headed for their own part of the range.

Before sunset the cattle were all heading for their own winter feeding grounds, except two year old steers and any of the rest of the stock that were destined for the market. These were segregated and driven to Williams Lake.

## The Cattle Drive

I was surprised and pleased when Ed told me I would go along with the drive. It meant that we took the herd of about 300 head part way the first evening. A tremendous rain storm was raging and Ed was afraid the steers might stampede. But nothing happened.

As darkness approached the rain ceased and we let the herd graze. It was a good location and had been reserved for just this purpose so they were content. Ed told me to just ride quietly around the herd to keep them bunched together and he said, "I'll see you at 12 o'clock."

Soon I was all alone with my horse and the cattle. The stars came out and gave enough light so I could see to get around. I even sang to the cattle. Ed spelled me off at midnight and I rode back to the ranch to get some sleep.

Early next morning before daylight we had breakfast and three of us started back to the herd. "Just let your horse have its head and you won't have anything to do but stay in the saddle,"

said Ed-and he was right. The horse I had was a wise, old roan animal and he could read the mind of a steer and cut them off from trying to go anywhere but straight ahead.

We had to cross the Fraser River at Sheep Creek Bridge. One rider went ahead and with a little persuasion from behind the cattle were soon following. We made the crossing without mishap. About three p.m. we turned off the road into a feed lot where hay had already been spread for the cattle. Then we rode a little further up the road to a half-way house where we got supper and lodging for the night.

We had ten miles to go to Williams Lake and reached there about noon. Ed told me to go to the Lake View Hotel and get dinner and then go right back to the ranch as Tom, another ranch hand, was alone and needed me. I felt a little disappointed at not being able to see the sale and the loading of the cattle onto the boxcars that would take them to Vancouver. However, I did take time to see some friends and then set out for the ranch, a thirty mile ride which I made by midnight.

I was quite stiff and sore because the roan was an old cow pony and was quite stiff jointed so I had a rough ride. But we both recovered.

It is said that if you stay in the Caribou or Chilcotin more than four years you will probably stay for good. The country has its charms I must admit though making a living there may be hard and conditions harsh at times. But there's a corresponding feeling of independence, a certain pride in being able to take in stride all nature throws at you. But what I missed most of all was fellowship with kindred minds, communication with Christian friends, some of which I got through correspondence.

## **Time to Return to the Coast**

A friend in Vancouver, Ed Leeman, wrote and urged me to come back. "You always have a place to stay with us and things are picking up. There is more construction, both Ron and Stan have jobs at the Britannia Mines, you have been alone long enough so come on back."

I have told you of the accident that sent me to the hospital at Williams Lake. When I was discharged from there the doctor said it would take at least a month for the arm to heal completely so I would be on compensation. It seemed a good time for a visit to Vancouver and meet all the friends I had made there in 1931-1933. So I bought a ticket on the P.G.E. Railway.

It is a most scenic ride with steep hills on both sides of the Fraser. The train trip ended at Squamish where we boarded a ferry for Vancouver. It was dark when we arrived but the motor traffic was heavy and I found it quite confusing after the relative quiet of Williams Lake. I ducked into the first lodging I found on Carroll Street but didn't like the drabness of the hotel so I phoned the Leemans. Ed answered the phone, asked where I was and told me to come over

right away. They had a spare room I could have as long as I wanted. So I grabbed my suitcase and took a streetcar, glad to get away from that part of town which I found most depressing of anywhere I had been.



## **PART V - ON MY OWN NO MORE**

### **Partnership**

The Leemans, Ed and his wife, welcomed me with open arms. We talked quite late and then I was shown to my room which was on the third floor. The old Burnaby Central tram line passed by at frequent intervals and shook the whole house but I eventually went to sleep.

I had some money and as Ed had a rooming house he suggested I go in with him. I loaned him some money and when I was able I set to work. Ed was an ex-preacher and also had experience as a builder, in fact he could turn his hand to many things. I learned a lot from him; plumbing, electrical wiring, painting, rebuilding furniture for the housekeeping rooms he rented for \$15 a month.

But I didn't like being cooped up so I looked for other work. Canada Packers was going to build on Second Ave. on what was known as False Creek Flats. Up till that time it was mainly a cattle pasture. I went to the job site every morning for two weeks. Each morning the lineup of men grew longer and the foreman would come and select certain men and tell the rest to come back tomorrow. I found out that the ones hired were all referred to him by someone with influence. They would all have a letter of reference and without it you didn't have a chance.

### **The Brethren**

Meanwhile I was attending a Plymouth Brethren Assembly called the Parkway Hall on West Georgia St. opposite what is now the site of the Bayshore Inn. They (the Brethren) are great Bible scholars. They have no paid preacher or pastor but believe that all members, (that is the men) have the authority of the scripture to minister according to the degree of ability that God gives them.

One of their members was a neighbour of the Leemans. He had a truck and hauled paper products-everything from newsprint to wrapping paper. He often got me to help and always



paid me well above average. He was an example of what a Christian employer ought to be but he did not have steady work for me.

Another good man was a member of the Shantymen's Association and took me to some of their prayer meetings but I felt out of place with them. So I decided to take off on my own again and went to Vancouver Island. I took the ferry, operated by the C.P.R. at that time, to Victoria and then travelled north by train. I stopped off at all the sawmill towns-Comox, Cumberland, Ladysmith-eventually ending up in Port Alberni but could get no steady work at any of these places.

So I ended up in the fall of 1938 on a government relief project near Sooke. They were constructing a camp for the Y.M.C.A. and most of the men were building trails and bridges. I was in charge of building a Jog cabin.

## **The Cabin**

First we cut the logs and then hauled them to the building site by manpower. The dimensions of the cabin were 18' x 22'. We laid the heaviest logs on a stone foundation and fitted them with notched corners. We squared the inside with a broad axe. The roof was made of split cedar shakes on pole rafters.

After I was married I took my wife there to show her where I lived at the time we started corresponding with each other. We found the cabin was being used by the Y.M.C.A. as a pool room. By the way, we had lived in tents all that winter but now there were wood huts to house the campers.

## **A Change of Plans**

I came back to Vancouver in March, 1939 and planned to return to the Caribou in the Kiethly Creek area with a man I had met in camp. We had found a kindred spirit in many things and both of us being of an even disposition thought we could get along well with each other. Personality is an important factor when you are planning to spend six months together out in the sticks.

He had a placer claim which we would work on a fifty-fifty basis and if we were lucky might strike on to something good! But there was a different future in store for me-an unexpected invitation to spend a social evening with Christian friends.

## The Party

The party was to take place at Agnes Smith's apartment. Most of the guests were relations or friends. I was told by Ron about it and I was supposed to meet a single girl there who would probably like someone to see her home at the end of the evening. I don't know whether she was consulted about it but I got interested in Agnes and we seemed to get along so well that I was suddenly made aware that I was the last of the guests to take my leave.

At the door, when my hostess was bidding me goodnight, I surprised myself by asking Agnes if I could call on her again, soon. She said yes, again to my surprise, and I felt much elated. I don't know who took the other girl home but I was pleased by the way things turned out.

I started dating Agnes. I would spend Saturdays and Sundays with her family. We went to the park or beach on Saturday and on Sunday I walked with her to church. We would go to her parents place Sunday afternoon and enjoy their hospitality. They made me feel at home.

With encouragement from Agnes I applied for a job at Smith, Davidson and Wrights, a wholesale paper products distribution outlet. When they heard I had worked on a farm Mr. Wright, who was manager, asked if I knew all the plants. I said "No, but I know all the weeds." I thought I had blown it but I was told to wait outside the office and when the secretary came out and told me I was employed to help the gardener at Mr. Wright's place in Shaughnessy I was surprised. After six weeks there things were getting so he could manage without me so I was told to report to the warehouse the following morning.

By this time Al, the prospector, had taken off for the Caribou and I had settled down to a steady job and a steady date. Agnes and I had agreed to go steady. It really seemed like we were meant for each other and we got along so well. Even though there were two young girls Agnes managed to arrange for us to get to know each other in a personal way.

The first snag was when Ed Leeman, our Bible class teacher, heard of our plans to get married. He was opposed to it on scriptural grounds because Agnes had divorced her first husband on the grounds of adultery. The general feeling among fundamentalists at that time was that it was wrong.

So we separated for a while and I was most unhappy about the thing though we had talked it over and decided that it was better not to go against the general attitude of the majority of Christians who believed it was wrong for divorced people to remarry or for single Christians to marry divorced believers.

But within two weeks we were seeing each other again and soon began to make plans to get married in June of 1940. The war was now on and steady work was becoming a reality.

Although I was only earning \$16 a week we thought we could manage as Agnes had a house and we would not have to pay rent.

When we applied for a marriage license we found the decree of divorce had not been filed due to negligence on the part of her lawyer so we could not marry for three months. That was hard to take for we both wanted to spend our lives together.

## **Married**

The next setback was that Agnes' pastor refused to marry her. He too was convinced from the Bible that we should not marry. I think Agnes was quite upset by his attitude for, though he was kind and sympathetic, still was firm in his stand that, in view of what he believed, it would be inconsistent for him to marry us.

So we were married by a United Church minister in his study with Ron and Lillian and Fred Enefer as witnesses. There was a reception for family and close friends at the Enefer home and some gifts. The one I appreciated most was a \$10 bill from Ron. It was most helpful as I was down to my last \$5 in cash and we were going to Texada Island to spend a week with Maude and Roloph. He had a job at the lime works there.

We spent our first night at the house on James Street, which was to be our permanent home for the next nine years. Next morning we boarded a coastal steamer at the Union Steamship docks on Burrard Inlet. Our first port of call was Gibsons, then Sechelt. There were other stops including some where they just put mail and small parcels over the side to a waiting rowboat.

In the afternoon we landed at Blubber Bay on Texada Island. We had little difficulty finding Maude and Roloph's home but I was surprised to see it was a tent stretched over a wooden framework. We were met by Maude with her baby girl Lillian and ushered into the first area of the "house" which was a combination living room and kitchen. A coal and wood stove was on one side and a chesterfield on the other. There was a table at the back and behind the table a cardboard partition. Behind the partition was a single bedroom. I began to wonder where we would sleep and wished we were elsewhere.

There was no running water and the toilet was outside. I was not a stranger to roughing it but I wondered how Agnes would feel. If she was concerned she didn't show it but exchanged news from home and local happenings with her sister. Maude was having friends over the next day so she stayed up late to do some baking. We got the bedroom but it was so hot from the stove that we had difficulty sleeping.

The next morning the heat from the stove was welcome as it got quite cold at night after the fire went out. I went to get out of Maude's way as she was preparing breakfast and put my foot on something soft. It was some of Maude's baking, a matrimonial cake made especially in

honour of our coming. Well the week went by without any other mishaps. Going back to Vancouver at night we had a cabin and managed to get some sleep. When we arrived I saw Agnes to the streetcar and she went home. I went straight to work.

When I arrived that evening the two girls, Marion twelve and Carol eleven, were there. I wondered how we would get along. I soon found out who had a sunny and friendly nature and who had the opposite. Marion ignored me and continually came between her mother and me. She was determined that she didn't like me and went out of her way to be disagreeable.

This took me by surprise for when I was only a visitor at the home we got along reasonably well. We went to Stanley Park and to the beach on weekends. On evenings when the weather was nice we would go for a walk and I would buy them double-decker ice cream cones which they thought were great. I found out later that Marion was very loyal to her Dad and was his favourite. She wanted him to be the head of the family not me. When I found that out I tried to be more understanding but it was difficult at times.

When the girls became teenagers they started going to another church. I felt this was an affront to me as I had recently joined my wife's church thinking this would help us to feel more family-like. But the girls decided otherwise and their mum lay awake nights wondering when they would get home and worried about whose company they were in.

It meant that we had to start having their friends over for evenings and I thought they were a very light-headed lot. They were so forward, and to my way of thinking, rude. I blamed Marion and on one occasion told Agnes that either Marion would have to go or I would. She was quiet but a tear formed in her eye and rolled down her cheek. I never mentioned it again.

The girls were always anxious to go to work and that helped a lot as they began to buy their clothes and shoes. My wages were never big but we managed fairly well. I always had a garden which provided fresh vegetables.

One thing that helped to bring us together was the birth of a son. When we knew a baby was coming we were sure it would be a boy and had his name picked. It was to be Fred after his grandfather Enefer and also my favourite uncle Fred who died in the First World War. We were not disappointed and the baby was loved by all.

## **Freddy**

Freddy, as we called him, was a very good and healthy baby and thrived under the care of his mother and the girls. As Freddy grew he developed blond, curly hair which the girls loved to brush and shape. He had a quiet disposition and was easy to care for and I was very proud of him but at the age of three the curls were down to his shoulders and I was annoyed when

some passers-by exclaimed, “Oh, look at that pretty, little girl.” That was it. I took him to my barber and had the curls cut off and had the girls and the aunts all up in arms against me. But they all knew it was only a matter of time before it would happen. After all it was the ‘40’s not the ‘60’s and men and boys were expected to have short hair.

## **Ruth**

Ruth came two years after in 1944 and was a lovely baby. She too was named before her birth. Both father and mother agreed that the story of Ruth in the Bible was one of the best accounts of the importance of loyalty. We had both suffered by the lack of it in our own lives and I had heard a preacher say in a sermon about the book of Ruth that he had known many women by that name and had always found them to be good and faithful to their family and friends. This has also been true of our Ruth but she was also quite able to take care of herself as the boys found out when they went too far in their teasing.

## **Phyllis**

Phyllis followed in ‘47 and she was a bonny child. We had wanted a boy but were very happy with the child we got. We were going to call the boy Philip but changed it to Phyllis, a name which suited her as she proved to be an agreeable child and got along well with other children.

## **Two Weddings**

By the way Carol had met a nice young man at the Evangelistic Tabernacle, David Burr. We liked him but thought he was extremely nervous. It was one of those rare romances, love at first sight, Carol’s first boy friend. David was going to go to Bible school in Saskatchewan and wanted to give her an engagement ring. Mother said no as she was only sixteen and too young to think of marriage. But seeing the look of disappointment on her face said if they felt the same way when David came back from school she would agree. Well they did so they were married in August 1946 and if marriages are made in heaven theirs must have been.

Carol and David had a baby boy in December, 1947 just three months after Phyllis was born. They named him Philip. I don’t know why but he was a problem child and I am glad we had a girl instead of a boy if a name can have that much bearing on a child’s nature.

Marion had more problems with her romance. She was attracted to her girlfriend Olive Schofield’s brother who was overseas with the Canadian Army. When he arrived back home she brought him around to see us and we were not favourably impressed. He was very forward

and too familiar in his manner. We felt sorry for Marion but glad when he started going with another girl.

But Marion did not give up and eventually they were engaged. She wanted to have a big church wedding and me to escort her to the altar and give her away. I didn't appreciate the honour and offered to give her the money it would cost for the refreshments to help them buy some furnishings for the home. But she would not be put off and so I went through with the ceremony but felt very uncomfortable in a make believe situation.

It was good to have both girls married and someone else's responsibility. Not that we are ever entirely free from each other and, in fact, I am glad to say as time went by we became closer together and the girls accepted me as their father, addressing me as "Dad."

## **I Desire to go Back to the Country**

After the girls left our home I began to have an urge to leave the city and after some persuasion Agnes agreed I should look for a farm during the year of 1948. I visited many areas from Vancouver Island to the Okanagan. Some places were unacceptable because of the buildings, others were unaffordable. I was surprised at how price for land had jumped since the '30's. I wanted to change our plans and get a half acre in Burnaby but Agnes said "No, we agreed to a farm and we are going."

The farm hunting was left up to me. I said we should put the house up for sale, sort of burning our bridges behind us. She agreed and we did. We were very surprised when the house sold in a short time and the people wanted to move in right away. They paid in cash and it looked like a lot of money, \$4,500.

Well, where were we going to move? Marion said she had room for her mum and the two girls. Minnie, Ron's wife, said Freddy and I could live with them. So we stored our furniture and moved. That was October and no one realized how long it would be. 1948-49 was a bad winter with lots of snow making it hard to look for land. As time went on the unnatural situation of the family split in two led to dissatisfaction. Freddy missed his mum and the others were too crowded in a small apartment.

So Agnes delivered an ultimatum-get us a place where we can be together as a family should. That was on a Sunday. The next morning I started for work as usual with my lunch box. But when I got to the streetcar stop I changed my mind and went the opposite way. I went into a little corner cafe on Marine Drive, ordered a cup of coffee and picked up the morning News Herald.

Turning to the “Farms for sale” ads I read, “Farm for sale in sunny White Rock area. 15 acres, three-bedroom house on cement foundation, plumbing and electric lights, etc.” So I caught a bus for New Westminster and transferred to a White Rock bus. When I arrived I found the Len Sulley Real Estate office. A man asked me what he could do for me and I showed him the ad. He said, “Let’s get into my car and we’ll have a look at it.”

We went to Nichol Road and he turned pointing out places along the way that were for sale, none of which looked right. Reaching Brown Road we turned to the right and as we crossed a brook at the bottom of the hill I saw a white framed house sitting on a slight rise surrounded by fruit trees. I thought, what a nice spot and was pleasantly surprised when he turned in the driveway and stopped.

We got out and he introduced me to Captain Rochford, a pleasant man who took me through the house. I was so pleased with what I saw I said I would like my wife to see it too so we called Fred Enefer and asked if he could get Agnes and drive out to see the place. He agreed and the salesman took me back to White Rock and bought us lunch.

Later we went back to the Rochford place and met Agnes and her dad. Agnes liked the house, that was all she was interested in, so we wrote out a cheque for one thousand dollars. We all went home together and felt happy that the search was over and that we would be in our home by the end of the month. Everybody back in Vancouver was surprised at how quickly things came to a climax after six months of uncertainty.

The day we were to take possession of the farm was the 29th of March, 1944. Alec Barber drove a flat deck truck with some of our possessions on it including a six-week-old Collie pup named Trixie who rode in a butter box. Dad Enefer brought Agnes and the three children. We were all waiting in the yard for the rest of the furniture.

It was a nice day. We noticed there were some swallows starting to build nests in the bam, a sure sign of spring. The pear trees were beginning to bloom and spring flowers were opening up. The air was fresh and clear of the smoke and fumes which pollute the city’s atmosphere.

## **The Williams**

About eleven o’clock a man drove in and introduced himself as Jack Williams, a neighbour just down the road from us. He invited us all for lunch. They had only been living there a few years and had come from Saskatchewan. Their house was just a shell, one big room which they said was ideal for holding Sunday school in. Their bedrooms were in the attic which was reached by a ladder. Their living quarters were quite sparse but they were happy people, rejoicing in the Lord and thankful for what they had. They were always willing to share with others and often had a destitute family living with them.



We got settled and took part in the Sunday school. About 20 children from the neighbourhood and a dozen adults attended. It was all the church most of us got. We were without a car the first year and had to order groceries by phone, which were delivered once a week from Sullivan by truck.

We had a telephone, one of just two in the district. Many of the neighbours would come to use ours and it helped us to get acquainted with a lot of people in a hurry. There were three elderly bachelors in the area, all living separately, all slightly strange but harmless and self supporting.



## EDITOR'S CONCLUSION

At this point Dad, rather abruptly, ends his account. It seems as if the Muse deserted him and the inspiration to write further was gone. With his permission I will attempt to bring the book to an end by giving a brief summary, from my memory, of life on the “farm.”

### Earth, Air, Fire and Water

I remember, as a child, sitting around the kitchen table at lunch time listening to the radio. In the days before television the radio was a major source of entertainment and no show was more popular with us children than Kiddie's Carnival. One song which was a frequently played “hit” described different things you could be when you grew up and had a verse about farming which went:

You could sit in the sun all day  
Or milk the cow or mow the hay,  
Take a walk in the woods with the old blue jay  
If you were a farmer.

Alas, life on the farm was hardly that idyllic although it seemed like a pretty fair description to us kids at the time. The attempt to wrest a living from the farm at Elgin was a failure. Fifteen acres was hardly enough land to support a profitable dairy herd and the soil was not sufficiently fertile to sustain a market garden. For Dad having a cow meant rising up extra early every morning to milk her before starting the long drive into Vancouver to “begin” a day's work. Then at the end of the day after the long return drive the cow (Broadway at first and then Daisy) would have to be milked again.

In the spring and summer months gardening chores were added to the work load. And Saturday would be the day for building fences, chopping wood, digging wells, picking fruit, castrating calves, building sheds and cutting grass. And for what? There were chickens, pigs, cows and mink and, in the final analysis, they probably all lost money.

And yet money earned or money lost may not be the only way to assess the bottom line. If there is wealth in experience then, in a way, the farm made us all rich whether we grew up there or were frequent visitors. Of course that is easy for me to say. Most of the work, by far, was done by Dad and Mum and we kids were undoubtedly the beneficiaries. There was more than one Saturday, however, when I resented having to weed the garden or put in fence posts when other kids were playing ball. It was only later in life that I realized how important it was to learn the value and joy of work.

## *Earth*

The ancient Greeks believed that life was comprised of four elements-earth, air, fire and water. To me they were like the cornerstones of our universe at Elgin. The earth, for us, was not the rich, alluvial farm land of the “flats” but the rocky, acidic, heavily treed land where our farm was located. The Mud Bay Flats were formed, I suppose, by silt deposited over thousands of years from what must have once been a great river. It was ideal for dairy herds and vegetable crops. The earliest settlers to the area had no difficulty in deciding which land was the most desirable. The latecomers, like Abraham, were relegated to the less desirable and less fertile high ground.

Still, there were compensations. We could sit at the kitchen window, for instance, and watch a white tail deer make its way on stick-like legs across our field to the barbed wire fence. Then, hesitating only briefly, it would leap the top strand and disappear in the woods beyond Brown Road.

One thing for sure-nobody starved and in fact few families ever ate better! From the first Transparent apples that fell from the little tree in the spring until the last Northern Spies were wrapped in paper and carefully packed in wooden boxes in the cellar under the kitchen we enjoyed all manner of fresh fruits and vegetables. To my mind nothing I have eaten since can compare to the taste of corn on the cob, fresh from the garden, that seemed to constitute the main course of nearly every supper from August until late September or October. (Maybe this is partly because I spent so much time weeding it for the majestic sum of ten cents a row).

## *Air*

Dad remembered how clean and pure the air of the English countryside was compared to the smoky, sooty London of his childhood. Vancouver was never as bad as that but I remember the first day we arrived at the farm. It was a beautiful day and the air was warm and full of the smell of blossoms.

There were always birds in the sky, the swallows that flitted in and out of the old barn and, way up high, the hawks that appeared in the spring with a sharp eye for newly hatched chicks. They were magnificent as they circled and soared overhead and we couldn't quite bring ourselves to hate them even though their intentions were larcenous.

One year Mum got a book about the stars and their constellations. We all went outside on clear evenings trying to locate the hunter, the dog and the bear and ended up marveling as much at the imagination of the ancient astronomers as we did at the galaxies.

## ***Fire***

One of my earliest memories from Elgin was of the forest fire that broke out, I think, the first year we were there. One of the old bachelors who lived up Archibald Road was blamed for it as I recall. Apparently he had left a small bonfire smouldering when he left for New Westminster that morning. When he returned the woods between his place and Nichol Road were all ablaze. Earl Ready told me how his family were armed with baseball bats to knock away sparks that threatened to settle on their roof.

Donny Fairholm and I walked up Archibald Road the next day and saw the old gentleman with his shovel trying to smother smoking ashes. It seemed like such a futile effort. I think he died of a heart attack shortly thereafter and we wondered if it was because of physical stress or an overwhelming sense of guilt.

The night the fire raged out of control was a frightening one for us children. I can still see the flames which became quite visible as it grew dark. Looking through the window from Ruth and Phyllis's bedroom it seemed as if the blaze would destroy everything. Dad comforted us and eventually convinced us it was safe to go to sleep.

## ***Water***

Water-there was either too much of it or not enough. One year the Serpentine and Nickomekl Rivers overflowed their banks and swept over the flats. Water was up to the tops of the fenceposts. On the other hand a frequent occurrence in the summer was a dry well. The water truck would deliver a huge tankful for, I think, five dollars.

Dad had to dig an additional well for the cattle and I remember the water diviner pacing back and forth over the big field with his vine maple crutch in hand, eventually discovering a spring in the corner furthest from the house.

## **Life on the Farm**

We learned to saddle and ride a horse, to feed calves and milk cows. We may not have appreciated all the chores we were called upon to do (I especially hated tamping fence posts) but one job we all looked forward to was haying. For me it was the closest thing to fun work has ever been. For one thing it was a real communal effort. We depended on the Williams for the

use of their tractor to cut, turn and finally to haul the hay to the barn. Jack and Norman Williams, Dick Statham and sometimes the Fairholms constituted the haying crew. Once Gibby drove the tractor and we have the picture to prove it. I think my first responsibility was to balance the load as the men on the ground pitched up forkfuls of hay. As the load grew ever higher it required full concentration just to avoid being toppled to the ground by the swaying load.

Then there was the trip to the barn and off-loading the cargo into the hay loft. All the kids would hop on board for the ride. The dustiest job was standing in the loft and spreading the hay to the back as it was thrown in from the wagon. Naturally this honour fell to the kids. As dad discovered on the prairies the adults were not anxious to change places.

In the evening, coated with dust and seeds and seated in the back of the dark green, '47 Mercury pickup, we would drive to the "dam" where we would slip easily into the warm waters of the Nicomekl River. There Ruth, Phyllis, Bill, John and I (probably Frances and Carey too) learned to swim. We achieved other important milestones there as well; the first time we jumped and then dove off the bridge and the first time we swam across the river. No English Channel swimmer ever touched the shores of France with a greater sense of accomplishment than we felt when we reached the far bank and crawled up the dyke to rest after our first "marathon."

Then we would drive home and, just before it got too dark, make our way to the barn with sleeping bags and pillows under our arms. Nestling into that most comfortable of beds we would gradually feel the cold seep out of our tired bones and muscles. Through the large open window we watched the sky slowly fill with stars and with the sweet smell of the freshly cut hay in our nostrils we slept.

In the autumn there were always bonfires in which we sometimes roasted Gravenstein apples or potatoes. One year I remember we rolled up newspapers into the shape of giant cigars and puffed away choking and coughing on the hot smoke and feeling very grown up somehow.

It was also the time for splitting and piling firewood. Dad always did the splitting, swinging his big, double-bitted axe with the same remarkable accuracy he needed when cutting railway ties in the Caribou. I remember helping with the piling. One year, for some reason, it was decided that instead of stacking the wood in orderly piles we would just throw it in the shed. It was much easier than piling it but somehow my pleasure at getting away with less work was tempered by a sense that it shouldn't be that easy, that Dad was somehow letting his standards down. I don't think it bothered me for very long.

As the nights grew longer and colder we spent more time inside. Before the arrival of television we played checkers and other board games in the evenings. One year when Dad was taking a First Aid course we learned how to tie slings, apply splints and perform at least three kinds of artificial respiration-all skills which, I am glad to say, I have never been called upon to use.

As Christmas approached there were concerts and parties at William's Sunday school and at Elgin Hall. Every year we would go into Vancouver to Aunt Minnie and Uncle Ron's for the family party. I'm not sure what we looked forward to the most, the gifts or aunt Minnie's root beer. Once Bill and I each got pocket knives for our presents and the day before Christmas I cut my finger with it. Somehow I managed to get back to the house without fainting. I have never liked the sight of blood, especially mine.

## Ice

Usually there would be a week or two when it would get cold enough to skate. First we used the frozen "puddles" in the large field which lay between us and Williams. Poor drainage may have rendered the land as marginal pasture but to us kids it was a major asset. Then one year we discovered a huge dugout pond on old Mr. Bolton's land just behind the Kenny's place. It was like having our own stadium and I was sure with so much ice at my disposal I had an NHL career in my future. Some of us spent every available hour on the ice and we didn't always wait until it was very thick either. I recall hearing the "ping" of the ice cracking with each stride. You had to skate fast because if you stopped or fell you would almost certainly go through. Luckily it was not deep-at least I don't think it was!

Skates then didn't have much padding and our feet always seemed to freeze. Coming home for lunch or supper we would lie by the stove in the living room moaning with pain as our feet thawed out. But as soon as we had finished our meal we couldn't get back to the ice fast enough.

My biggest regret about our winters is that they were too short and mild, a strange complaint perhaps. But one winter there was enough snow to harness up Charlie to the stone boat. The whole family piled in and we cruised up and down Brown Road in our one horse open sleigh.

## The Dinner Table

Supper times were often a memorable experience. With so many of us crowded around the little table all trying to talk at once it could get very noisy. Occasionally Dad would bark and there would be silence for a minute or two but the peace and quiet never lasted long. One year Mum bought a selection of classical music albums from Reader's Digest and felt that playing them while we ate would have a calming effect. Alas the opposite was true. The louder and faster the music the louder and faster we talked until finally the experiment was recognized as a failure. On the other hand I now love classical music and that was probably my first introduction to the form so maybe it wasn't such a failure after all.



Many of our meals seemed to be composed mainly, if not entirely, of food that was raised and grown right on the farm. Often for dessert there would be bottled fruit or homemade jam on hot rolls or scones that would somehow be ready just in time. I don't know how Mum had the timing figured out so perfectly but it seems to me we would just have cleared the plates away from the main course when she would turn towards the stove and take the buns from the oven piping hot. Homemade butter and jam added the perfect finishing touch.

The house was "compact" to put it kindly and this was especially true as foster children were added to the fold. Then when you added Marion and Carol's families or the Duxburys, Williams, Stathams or Fairholms at Christmas it was fairly bursting at the seams. I don't remember feeling crowded but there were certain limitations. We shared bedrooms and as the water had to be heated from the wood stove there was only one bath a week and I don't think we changed our underwear much more frequently. When the well ran dry in the summer water was at a premium and every drop would be guarded jealously. It was then the outhouse came into use (for the boys) and the wash water from the ringer machine would have to be carried out to the garden for the tomato plants.

## Neighbours

We spent a lot of time outdoors and much of it at the Fairholms. Ernie taught us the essentials of baseball, hockey, basketball, football and soccer. We used a soccer ball for a basketball with a barrel hoop for the basket. The football was filled with hay because there was no inner tube. When you caught a forward pass the ball was so heavy it almost knocked you into the end zone. But the games were hotly contested, sometimes with most of the boys from the neighbourhood taking part. As it grew dark in the evenings there would be games of hide and seek or kick the can with one of the huge Douglas Firs near their house serving as "home."

## Advantages

At Elgin we enjoyed the advantage of going to a one-room school. Educational experts will argue that bigger is better when it comes to schools but I doubt very much that their arguments would convince anyone who ever attended Elgin Elementary. At how many modern institutions of learning can the students cross the road at lunch time to play in the woods and gullies? We used to scurry across the two great logs that had fallen from one bank to the other forming convenient, if scary bridges. On the playground we had to learn the diplomatic arts of dealing with the Haddaths and Heberts for our community was blessed with not just one but two families of bullies. Fortunately my second year at Elgin the older boys had moved on to Sunnyside and life was a little more peaceful. We also had Miss Stiles for a teacher and once she even came home for supper.

We also enjoyed the benefits of a one-room Sunday school where we were taught the great stories of the Bible. Irma Williams played the piano or sometimes the autoharp and we all sang choruses like:

The devil is a sly old fox,  
If I could catch him I'd  
Put him in a box, lock the door  
And lose the key for all the tricks  
He's played on me.

The old fox deployed all his trickery making it impossible to actually earn a living from the farm. And time, if not the devil, has played its tricks on Elgin. The gravel roads were paved, television arrived, we children grew up and moved away, developers discovered the area and began to cut down the bush in order to build big homes with even bigger mortgages. This is called progress and I suppose it is inevitable though in some ways lamentable. Ironically this made the farm more valuable as building lots than it ever was as agricultural property.

A visit to our old home today is not a trip back in time but more like visiting another planet. It is virtually unrecognizable as the place we spent our formative years. Many of the houses, farms and even trees that were familiar landmarks to us are gone forever. I dare say it has been some time since anyone spotted a white tail deer walking gingerly across their lawn or heard a ring-necked pheasant screech from the bushes or picked wild blackberries from the side of the road. Without our memories and a few photographs, there would be no evidence that these things existed at all. Such is the passage of time I guess.

No two people have the same finger prints and no two people live the same stories. Each of us will have our own memories of life at Elgin, both bitter and sweet. The devil may have used his tricks to prevent us actually earning a living from the farm but maybe he missed the point. None of us, I think it is safe to say, will ever regret that we grew up there. Each of us can be thankful for that spring day in 1949 when, for some reason, Dad decided not to go to work and ended up at the comer of Brown and Archibald.

Fred Hollingshurst,  
January 1995.