

Summer in Wynyard:

Growing up in small town Saskatchewan

by
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Author's note:

This story is a fictionalized account of my life growing up in small town Saskatchewan. While the events and main characters are true, within the limitations of my memory, some adaptations have been made for literary effect. For example, I made up Dad's battle as described in Chapter six.

Most names are true as I recall them although I did forget a few such as the friends I met going to Sea Island with the Air Cadets. These I made up. The spelling of some names may not be accurate and for that, I apologize in advance.

This book uses the British Imperial units of measure used in the 1950s where a mile is 1.6 kilometers and 60 miles per hour equals 96.5 kilometers per hour. Distance in kilometers have been added in brackets (kms).

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This book is dedicated to our grandchildren:
Emma and Keaton Gardener and Janaya Zelinski.
And to our children Jason, Deana and Jamie.

*Life is the making
of memories
and these are some of mine.*

Chapter One

THE TOWN

I sat in the back seat of my brother's car distracted by the muffled sound of tires on the gravel road and the occasional clunk of rocks hitting the underbelly. I had mixed feelings about leaving the farm for good. Going to town always had a magical ring to it. There were candy stores to check out, maybe a movie at the theatre and the pleasant hustle and bustle of people going about their business. This time however, I was going there to stay. I looked out the open window at nothing in particular as the fields of grain went slowly by. A light wind blew lazily through the wheat fields causing gentle ripples of changing colours on an ocean of grain. It was the last day of June and the crops were already changing from green to gold as they ripened. I laid my head back on the seat and wondered about life in Wynyard. I felt my eyelids slowly begin to close.

"Did you bring everything from the house?" Kasmer asked rather loudly over the noise.

"I think so," I replied as I shook myself awake. "Myrtle put my clothes in a flour sack and I packed a box of stuff myself."

I had five older brothers and Kasmer was the second oldest. He had taken over the farm last year when Mom and Dad moved out to a small house in Wynyard leaving me and my brother Leo on the farm to finish school at Evelyn. Myrtle, his wife, was always kind to me. Sitting at the kitchen table smoking one cigarette after another, she talked through a cloud of smoke about everything as if we were friends. But then she was only nineteen or so when she got married so I guess she wasn't that much older than me. Myrtle was quite short, very cute and comfortably chubby. Kind of like her parents who had a small farm close to Wishart about ten miles (16 km) south of us – she was short and stout. Her face was more round than square with an easy smile and sparkling eyes.

"How was school today?" she would ask sitting down beside me at the kitchen table.

"Fine," I would reply. Then I'd tell her all about my day at school and she would tell me about her day doing chores, cooking and cleaning up. We just talked.

I was in grade seven and Leo in grade eight so we were the older students at school. Eyelyne was a one-room school with kids from Grade one to eight although some of the brighter ones could take high school correspondence

courses for grade nine if they wanted. Grade eight kids were the top of the pecking order so I was a bit unhappy to leave after grade seven. I wondered what it will be like at the new school in Wynyard. Do the grade eight kids get to boss around the younger ones? Oh well, at least I will be one of the older kids in the school so I should be okay. I looked out the back window and watched the car raise two huge tails of dust that blended into a thick cloud as we sped along the gravel road.

"Looks like the crops are pretty good and the hay will be ready for cutting soon," Kasmer noted as he looked out the window. We were just passing Deakins' farm where we made hay each summer to feed our cattle and horses over the winter.

"I'll come by and pick you two up next week and you can help me make hay," he added looking over at Leo who was sitting in the front seat.

"Okay," I said from the back while Leo just nodded his head. I liked making hay. Being the youngest in the family, I usually got to drive the horses or the tractor while my older brothers did the hard work pitching the hay on to the wagon. On a hot day, Kasmer often took off his shirt when he pitched the hay and you could see the muscles on his arms ripple as he swung a fork load high up onto the wagon. He earned those muscles by working hard at the logging camps in Valora, Ontario over the winter. After harvesting was done in the fall, he would take off by train to Ontario with a few of his friends to make some money. When he returned in the spring, he told us that he would swing an axe or saw wood all day and pile the logs into four by eight foot stacks.

"We got paid by the cord. It was tough work but they fed us well and there was really no place to spend our money so we were able to bring home most of what we made."

Kasmer looked a lot like my Dad, tall and lean with high cheek bones, a broad forehead and angular face. Unlike my Dad however, he had soft brown hair with a distinct curl in the front. Dad had coarse black hair that thinned a bit and on his forehead. The other big difference was that Dad had lost all his teeth because of some really bad dental work. Sometime before I was even born he had an inept dentist pull a tooth then replace it with a false one. The only problem was that the false tooth was made of lead. The lead gradually leached into his jaw and almost poisoned him to death. After that, he had all his teeth pulled but never bothered to get false teeth. This gave his face a sunken hollow look and he rarely smiled. Kasmer, on the other hand, had pearly white teeth and a big smile. My sisters would kid him sometimes.

"He's a good looker," they would say and ask him about his girlfriends. Kasmer would just laugh it off and tell them he was too busy for girls. Sometimes when he said that, he would wink at me and I would smile back not really knowing why but feeling quite important all the same.

"Can I drive the horses while you guys load the wagon?" I asked.

"Why do you always get to drive the horses?" Leo objected as he turned

his head and gave me a dirty look. "I'll drive the horses and you can do some hard work for a change," he added rather smugly.

"You'll both do what needs to be done so be quiet," replied Kasmer firmly.

That ended the matter so I settled back in my seat. Kasmer seemed a bit more grumpy now that he was older, married and had taken over the farm. It seemed he was always working. Maybe that takes the fun out of life I thought. Actually, come to think of it, Dad was also like that. Not that he was mean or angry but he just seemed to be serious all the time. The only time I saw him laugh and have a really good time was at some of the parties we had with the neighbors. At the end of one of these parties, I remember sitting with Mom while my Dad and a group of men stood in the middle of the floor laughing loudly and passing around a pickle jar. Is that really pickle juice? I wondered.

"What are they drinking?" I asked Mom tugging on her sleeve.

"Quash – pickle juice," she said and laughed out loud. The other women around her also laughed and pointed at the men.

"The men are drunk and they think if they drink a bunch of pickle juice before they go to bed they won't get a hangover in the morning," one of the other ladies told me.

"It's a good thing we brought a lot of jars of pickled cucumbers for supper."

Mom added and they all laughed some more. "And a good thing we didn't clean up the table yet or that juice would be all thrown out!"

I liked pickled cucumbers but to actually drink the juice – no way I thought as I made a sour face and shook my head.

By now we had come to the crest of a hill and I could see the shimmering image of the Quill Lakes in the distance far beyond Wynyard. There wasn't much to see of Wynyard from this distance except for the tops of the grain elevators.

"How big is Wynyard?"

Kasmer scratched his head, "Oh, I don't know but it's pretty big, maybe a thousand people or so? And, it will get bigger as farmers around here like Dad move there when they are done farming."

"Wow, a thousand people all in one place. That's huge."

I thought about that for a moment looking at the lakes on the horizon. The Quill Lakes were a sight to see. They were huge and in two parts sensibly named Big Quill Lake and Little Quill Lake since one of them was larger. In the distance, they looked connected. They also merged with the sky which made them look even bigger.

"Have you ever gone to see the Quill Lakes?" I asked Kasmer.

"Why would I go there?" he replied sounding rather puzzled. "If I want to go for a swim we have our own sloughs on the farm and a couple of them are pretty big."

I wasn't exactly happy with the answer but decided to drop the subject. I knew the Lakes are much more than a slough on our farm and one of these days I planned to go there and see for myself.

The car came to a stop at Highway 14. The highway had a large stop sign and Kasmer looked carefully both ways before turning right. There were no cars around but apparently you still had to stop. Most grid roads around the farm had no signs at all so this was obviously an important road. It was a big highway and much wider. At the intersection we could see the Protestant cemetery on the left and the Catholic one on the right. We turned right towards Wynyard and drove a bit until we got to Main Street then turned left.

Wynyard's grain elevators dominated the skyline along the train tracks on the west side of town. You could tell Wynyard was important because it had large elevators, a railroad and a highway. Yes, it's a big town, I thought, and I'm going to live here.

The elevators collected the grain from farmers in the area then loaded hundreds of train cars for the long trip west to the grain terminals in Vancouver. From there, wheat was loaded on huge ship and sent to all parts of the world.

"Saskatchewan is the bread basket of the world," one of our teachers at Evelyne School told us. "The wheat you harvest here could end up as bread in England, spaghetti in Italy or even noodles in China."

We all looked at each other in some amazement and felt rather proud. While some farmers still used horses to pull small grain wagons, most now used tractors or trucks for hauling. My Dad never drove any vehicle but then he had six sons more than willing to do the driving once they got old enough. My oldest brother Frank convinced Dad to buy a 1949 Ford two ton truck to haul our grain. It was red with a green painted box and held a lot of wheat compared to the small horse drawn grain wagons. Last fall I got to drive the big truck as I took turns hauling grain from the fields to the granaries on our yard. I would drive the empty truck to the field where the men ran the combine or grain harvester and then my older brothers would take over and fill the truck with grain. They wouldn't trust me to drive near the big machinery but I didn't mind. When the truck was full, I would drive it back slowly to the yard where my other brothers would set up the grain auger and unload the grain.

Loading and unloading grain was fun once we got the proper machinery to do the hard work. Before we got the big grain auger we had to move the grain by hand. That meant shovelling until your arms gave out and your back ached. Now, you simply dumped the grain into a big box from a small door at the back of the truck and the auger did the rest. All we had to do was help move the grain here and there as needed.

I would play in the wheat as it was loaded or unloaded from the truck or granary. It was fun to walk up and down the pile and slowly sink or get covered

up to the waist by the grain. Sometimes, if you sank too far into the grain pile it would be a struggle to get out but we always did. Wheat kernels are round, silky smooth and fun to work with but barley was nasty. Barley is long and narrow with a spiked end that would pinch and stick to your clothes.

Shoveling barley was work but shoveling wheat could be fun although in both cases you had to deal with the dust. As we filled a granary, the dust would get so dense you had to scramble out the door or stick your head out the window just to get some fresh air. The main job in the granary was to move the pile of wheat into the corners and sides as it came in from the auger. You also had to make sure the granary didn't overflow. When one granary was full, we started all over again at another one. Making hay was okay but nothing like the fun of harvesting grain.

As we drove down Main Street in Wynyard I looked for the familiar places we used to go to when we came to town from the farm. The post office, movie theatre, the food stores, restaurants and a beer parlor were all on Main Street. Near the end of Main street we turned east down Avenue B towards our place. Dad bought a lot in Wynyard and later bought an unfinished house from Mr. Stern, one of the local businessmen, who owned a garage in town and some land and cattle in the area. Apparently Stern was building a house for someone who changed their mind so he sold it to Dad instead. Once Dad and my brothers finished building the house, they dug a dirt basement on our lot and poured a foundation to fit the house. It was too expensive to cement the whole basement so they left it as is with enough room for the furnace and utilities. Then they had the house moved to Wynyard and put on the foundation.

Our house on Avenue B had a very small driveway into the yard from the alley. As Kasmer turned into the yard, I noticed that the outdoor toilet was by the alley and about as far from the house as possible. Dad no doubt planned it that way. On the farm, the toilet was also a long way from the house making it particularly inconvenient in the winter. Dad seemed to think that toilets should be far from the house. He also insisted that animals such as dogs and cats stay outdoors although in the dead of winter the occasional dog or two would be tolerated in the enclosed porch.

My musing came to an abrupt stop as we parked the car and I saw Mom standing on the porch step to greet us. Unlike Dad, Mom was short with a heavy-set body that was kind of pear shaped. She always wore a long dress, a sweater and sturdy boots. It didn't matter if she was cooking in the kitchen or digging potatoes from the garden, Mom dressed the same. She had a large round face and coarse black hair with some silver streaks. She had a warm smile although her teeth were worn and somewhat irregular.

Her demeanor was soft and gentle. As a child, I loved to sit on her lap while she wrapped her big arms around me. "You're getting too large to sit on

my lap“ she would chide me. “When I get big like Frank“ I told her, “then you won’t have to hold me anymore”. She laughed softly while I snuggled even closer against her bosom.

By the time I was born in 1943 she was an already an older women in her early forties. She had twelve children before I was born and I was the last. Some of my brothers and sisters made a point of telling me that I was pretty lucky she decided to have thirteen kids rather than twelve. I’m sure they were just kidding but it made me wonder sometimes what would have happened if I wasn’t born? Would I be drifting in space like a lost soul waiting for someone to find me? Or, would I simply not exist? But, how could you not exist? It was all pretty confusing but I didn’t let it bother me. What really mattered was that Mom did have thirteen kids and I was one of them.

“Houdeh,houdeh,(come,come),” she said in Ukrainian waving her hands. “Bring your things into the house.” Mom always spoke to us in Ukrainian, with some Polish and English mixed in and we usually responded in English but we understood each other very well. When we went to school Mom and Dad insisted we learn to speak English.

“You are in Canada so learn to speak English and listen to your teachers,” Mom would say and wag a finger in my face for emphasis.

I looked around the yard and noticed how small it was compared to our yard on the farm. There was a large garden area along avenue B with a caragana hedge separating the garden from the road. On the opposite side we had a small shed with a large pile of wood stacked on one side to the top of the shed. At the farm, one of my jobs in the winter was to haul wood to the house. The wood pile on the farm was quite a ways from the house but here, it was very close. I looked over the house and it seemed a bit like our house on the farm. It had two stories with small windows although I found out later that there was one big window facing west from the living room. The big difference was the drab grey cement covering the house. Our farm house had a bright white finish over the mud and straw mix which covered the log frame and contrasted nicely with the black roof. This roof was brown and the cement siding looked rather drab.

“You’ll be sleeping upstairs with me,” Leo said as we entered the house. I guess he had already scouted out the living quarters. “Ed was here first so he took one bed. That means we share the other bed,” he added naturally taking charge of our living arrangements. While we both stayed at the farm to finish our school year, our older brother Ed had moved to town to start grade nine in high school.

Leo was an organizer and liked to take charge of things. Being the youngest in the family, I was used to being ordered around by everyone so I just nodded my head and followed him upstairs. We carried our stuff up the narrow stairs and looked around. Sure enough, there were two beds with a tall narrow window between them. Each bed was tucked into the space created by the A

frame roof. Leo dropped his stuff on the window side of one of the beds so that meant I had other side. I bent my head and made my way to the bed and sat down.

"It looks like the same bed we had at home," I noted as I bounced a bit on the bed to test it out. It was a spring bed with a metal frame and a soft mattress on top. They were quite comfortable except that everything on it tended to go to the center. Each person had their own side but very soon you would both be jammed towards the middle. When Ed moved out from the farm, Leo and I had the luxury of a bed for ourselves but now we were back to being bed partners. Many families had to make do with three or even four to a bed so two seemed pretty good to me. The upstairs room was also very similar to our farm house. There was a narrow stairwell leading to the top with no railings. The floor upstairs simply opened up at the top. Going up was simple enough but you had to be a bit careful going downstairs not to miss the top steps. With an A frame ceiling, the upstairs room offered a lot of head room in the middle but very little on the sides. Being the smallest in the family, I always got the outside of the bed so I learned to crouch when I went in and out of bed.

By the time we put our things away and checked out the rest of the open room we could smell Mom's cooking downstairs. "Come and eat," she called as she stirred some left over potatoes with butter and onions into a large hot electric frying pan. In the corner of the pan some big chunks of baloney were already heating up. Fried or cold, baloney was a great meal and we were hungry.

On my first night in our new home in Wynyard I realized that we must be quite close to the train tracks just north of our house. Several times that night I heard the sound of the train as it came to a stop at the station. First there was the mournful sound of the steam whistle as the train approached the road crossings then there would be the sound of the steam engine releasing pressure and the clang of a bell. After a while, the train would chug and clang as it started moving again. Then the sound would gradually get lost in the distance. I got to thinking that it would be pretty exciting to get on a train and go somewhere. That would be something I thought as I fell asleep.

Chapter Two

THE TRAIN

As luck would have it, I was barely settled into the new home when Mom told me she was going to Saskatoon and that I could come with her if I wanted.

“Saskatoon!” I exclaimed in total surprise.

“Yes,” she said, “we will go for a few days and visit our relatives then come back.”

“Holy cow, will we go by train?”

The CPR train and Highway 14 both ran east and west through Wynyard. The small city of Yorkton was about 80 miles (128km) to the east and Saskatoon about 120 miles (192 km) to the west so I figured we would have to use a train or bus for our trip since we had no car.

“That’s the best way to get there.” Then she added, “We’ll leave in the morning, stay overnight and come back.”

That night I went to bed early and listened closely for the sounds of the train. I tried to imagine what it will be like to be on a train. It must be noisy I thought.

“How come you’re in bed already?” Leo asked sarcastically as he came in the room and started getting ready for bed. “Oh, yeah, I guess you’re all excited about going to Saskatoon”.

“Yeah, kind off,” I mumbled quietly knowing that Leo might not be too pleased about me getting to go.

“Mom gives you everything doesn’t she? You always were mama’s little boy,” he added in a mocking tone. Then, giving me a firm poke with his finger, he added, “I guess it’s like they say, the youngest in the family is always spoiled.” With that he gave a big yawn, turned around and went to sleep.

I knew there was no point in arguing with my older brothers or sisters about anything so I just kept quiet and tried to imagine what it would be like to see Saskatoon. Wynyard was pretty big but Saskatoon must be huge. I tossed and turned for a while then I heard the train in the distance. The whistle sounded softly as it approached the town with a loud toot then a couple short ones and finishing with a long one. Then I could hear the gushing sound of steam being released from the mighty engine and the high pitched squeal of steel grinding on steel as it stopped. Tomorrow I will be at that station waiting for the train, I thought with a great deal of satisfaction. I had to force myself to go to sleep.

In the morning, I couldn’t wait to get going. Mom had packed a small

suitcase for herself and filled a cloth bag with garlic sausage, bread and some other stuff for lunch. I had my breakfast and waited outside ready to go. The train station was only five or six blocks from our house so we walked over and I sat down while Mom went to get our tickets. As we waited for the train, I noticed that the station was quite large and very sturdy. It had the pleasant musty smell of wood, paint and people. Everything seemed to be made of solid wood and stained a nice brownish red color. Even the benches and chairs blended in.

I jumped up and ran to the door when I heard the train puff and clang as it pulled to a stop at the station. It looked like a big monster with steam snorting out from the sides of the engine. The gathering area was large so people could get on and off the train easily. We went in the first passenger car near us which was only half full. I found a good seat by a window and immediately opened it. It was a beautiful sunny hot day in July and several windows were open to provide a pleasant breeze.

I heard the conductor yell out, "All aboard!" and soon the train let out a belch of steam and the steel wheels started to spin. The train gradually picked up speed and the sound of the wheels going clickity-clack got louder and faster.

It was something to hear the sounds and feel the mighty power of the train and I was smack in the middle of it. I hung my head out the window to catch the rush of warm air blowing through my hair. At every road crossing the train let out a mournful sound from the steam whistle. As we passed through the many towns and hamlets along the way, the train slowed down and blew the whistle but seldom stopped. When it came to a bigger town like Lanigan, it would stop and a few people would get on and others off. Sometimes I could see workmen hauling packages on and off the train then the conductor would yell out, "All aboard!" and we would get going again.

"Have some food," Mom called. "We have bread, sausage and boiled eggs."

I could smell the garlic sausage as she opened the lunch bag and my mouth watered. What a feast. After we ate I watched the countryside fly by as the jostle of the train made my eyes heavy with sleep.

"Wake up," Mom said tapping my knee. "We're almost there."

Mom's relatives met us at the train station and we jostled our way through the crowd to their car. The first thing that hit me was the noise and the crush of people. It was a while before the constant noise seemed to fade into the background. Mom did a lot of talking as we drove through the city but I was more interested in taking in the sights and sounds of Saskatoon. Yes, this sure is a big place I thought as we finally stopped at a small house with a large yard. All the yards were green with neatly cut grass. I wondered where were the gardens? Like most people in Wynyard, our house had a large garden and a small area of grass. Maybe people in the big cities don't have gardens? Or, maybe they hide them in the back yard?

"Come in, come in," a friendly lady called out to us as she opened the door. She took Mom's suitcase and told us to follow her up the stairs to our

room on the second floor. I tested the bed and found it quite firm. I looked under the bed and noticed that it seemed to have two mattresses one on top of the other. No springs. This must be like the bed Mom and Dad have at home. These people must be pretty rich to have a nice bed like this for a spare bedroom.

Once we settled in, we went down for a big supper and much talk. Mom and her relatives had a lot to talk about and they pretty well ignored me which was fine. When I got a chance to excused myself, I got up and wandered about the house for a while. Sure enough, as I had figured, there was a small garden in the back yard.

I got myself ready for bed but lay awake for a long time. The room was hot and I could hear the dull constant sound of traffic through the open windows. I thought back to my bedroom on the farm which was also on the second floor but without all the city noise. How do people sleep here I wondered as I tossed and turned until I finally fell asleep.

Being in a strange bed, I woke up early with the sunrise. Mom was snoring softly. I got up quietly and went to the open window. The air was much cooler now. The sun was just rising and I watched the rainbow colors of the sky change and disappear into a vast blueness. For some reason I loved the stillness of early morning. Even on the farm I sometimes got up at sunrise and watched the day begin from my window. It's going to be another great day I thought.

My gaze dropped from the sky to the streets below and to my surprise some people were already going about their business. Where are all these people going? And, in the background, there was the constant traffic noise of the city. As I looked out the open window at the ebb and flow of people and cars, I noticed something strange. The air was clear. All that traffic but no dust! I looked more closely at the streets and realized that the roads were all paved. What a great idea! Boy, we sure could use that in Wynyard. Where we lived, every passing car left a cloud of dust that gradually settled on our garden, house and yard. When the traffic got a bit heavy, there was a lot of dust.

"Breakfast is on," someone called from downstairs.

I could smell bacon and toast. I took one last look out the window then paused and listened. Above the noise of the city, I heard birds chirping and singing in the trees.

Going to Saskatoon with Mom on a train was wonderful experience. On the ride back I began to think of some of the trips we used to make to Wynyard from the farm. We usually went to town on Saturday once or twice a month and I would look forward to these trips. Dad would give me a quarter and I was free to roam Main Street and window shop for toys and treats. Leo and I sometimes checked out what was playing at the Vogue Theatre. If the movie looked good and we had enough money we would take in the matinee movie for a dime. When it was time to go home, Mom would gather us and

start looking for Dad and our older brothers.

“Go in and find your Dad. Tell him it’s time to go home,” Mom said on one of those trips. It was getting late and we were standing outside the Wynyard Hotel at the entrance to the beer parlor ready to go home. Beer parlors were strictly for men, so Mom dared not go in.

I opened the door and the smell of smoke and stale beer hit me. As I walked tentatively up the steps to the pub my eyes began to adjust to the dim light and I could hear loud laughter and the mingled noise of men drinking and talking.

“Who you looking for kid?” demanded a big man behind the bar. “You can’t come in here so tell me who you want to see.”

“My Dad, Pete Zelinski and my brother Frank,” I said looking around.

“Okay, I know them. They’re over there. Stay here and I’ll let them know.”

The man walked away through the crowded tables and I could see my Dad look up at him then look my way. They were at a table with some other men I didn’t know. He waved his hand at me then picked up his glass to finish his beer. Frank was there also and he had a few empty glasses in front of him.

“He said they would be out soon so get out of here and wait outside,” the man said rather gruffly.

I went out into the fresh air and the heat of the day and told Mom we would have to wait. She shuffled her feet and grimly shook her head.

“They always end up in the beer parlor while I have to stand around and wait,” she complained.

We stood on the sidewalk outside the beer parlor and watched as men went in and out the door. Soon Mom was joined by a couple of other women she knew who were also waiting for their men to emerge.

“My old man is going to get shit for this. I told him not to go to the beer parlor but he just couldn’t stay away. He probably ran into some of his drinking friends and they talked him into it,” one of the women remarked to my Mom. They were both speaking Ukrainian as usual but I could understand everything they said.

“Last week,” she continued, “I stood here for three hours while they drank inside!”

“Oy, Bozhe (Oh, God)” Mom replied as she looked at me sternly. “Are you sure Dad saw you?”

“Yes,” I said nodding my head, “Frank was there too and he saw me.”

“Good. They won’t be long.”

Just as she spoke, Frank and Dad walked out. I could see the relief on Mom’s face.

“Don’t worry Lena,” she said to the lady as we left. “Maybe he won’t stay long this time”.

“He better not, or I’m going to go in there and drag him out by his hair.”

Those trips were fun for me I thought as the train chugged along back to-

wards Wynyard. Not like Saskatoon. What would you do here and how would you find anything in a big city like this? No, Wynyard was big enough for me and I felt glad to be going home. I had the rest of summer to check out the town and get myself ready for school.

"I should go and see my school sometime when we get back," I told Mom as we walked home from the train station.

"Tell Eddie to take you. I don't even know where it is."

That evening I asked Ed if he knew where my school was.

"Of course I do. It's right beside my high school. How about I take you there tomorrow?"

Ed was a year older than Leo and quite different. He was more easygoing and liked to have fun. He was tall and thin like Dad but with a hearty laugh and a good sense of humor. In fact, it occurred to me that Ed, Kasmer and I seemed to look like Dad while Leo, Walter and Frank seemed to look more like Mom. Odd, I thought, that every second boy would be similar; three like Mom and three like Dad.

Ed was friendly and easy to be with. He would sometimes steal me a smoke or let me finish a beer he was drinking. He seemed to have a lot of friends like him who enjoyed having a good time and he would tell me about drinking, playing pool and chasing girls. He was more like a friend than an older brother.

"All I want is a good job so I can get a car and pick up some girls," he confided in me one day. "What do you think of that?" I said something about how I also wanted a car. He just laughed and slapped my back.

"You'll soon find out about girls and then you will understand why you need a car. Cars have a back seat you know." I looked at him rather confused but he just smiled and gave me a nudge on the shoulder.

We left the house next day to see my school walking towards Main Street but soon turned south along a number of residential streets.

"I'll show you how to get there. You can walk with me a couple times when school starts but then you'll be on your own. You need to walk home for lunch and get back before classes start so you can't waste any time. It's not nearly as far as Evelyne was from the farm so you can walk home for lunch." When we finally got there, I was amazed.

"There it is," Ed said pointing to a large two story building made of red brick and cement. The school was surrounded by a large playground with a few big trees scattered here and there.

"This is sure a lot bigger than Evelyne School," I said quietly as my jaw dropped.

"Yes, it sure is, but nothing like my school over there." He pointed to an enormous two story building at the south end of the open field. "That's the high school where I go."

We stood still for a long time as I looked in awe from one building to the other. Ed put his hand on my shoulder, "After you finish grade eight, you'll go to high school with me over there. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think. It's all so big."

"Well it's still just a school. Now, let's go and get something to eat at the pool room."

I wanted to ask him what I could expect at my school but then I realized that he never went to the elementary school in Wynyard so he wouldn't know much about it. We turned around and began walking back to Main Street.

We got to the pool room on Avenue B and sat on the bar stools. The stools were made of chrome with red plastic seats that could turn a full circle. Most of the plastic seats were cracked so they put some tape over the cracks and they were good as new. I spun around a couple times and looked around. The restaurant could only seat ten people or so but it had a poolroom attached at one end with a door separating the two areas. Sly Storozuk, who owned the poolroom and the restaurant took the order.

"What you boys like?" he asked from behind the counter.

"We'll each have a hamburger and Vico," Ed replied, without even looking at me.

I had no idea what that was. I watched Sly pull out some ground-up meat from a small fridge and shape a couple of patties with his big hands. He threw them on the hot griddle and the smell and sizzle fill the room. The smell made my mouth water and in no time at all I was eating my first hamburger. It seemed simple enough to make with fried ground beef covered in fried onions all packed into a bun so you could hold it in one hand. What an amazing and simple idea I thought. Of course we had ground beef on the farm but it was usually stuffed into a sausage or made into patties or meat balls. We never made a hamburger sandwich on a bun like this. The Vico was a blend of milk and chocolate and it tasted great.

I turned to Ed, "Hamburger and Vico, this is really good."

"It should be," he replied casually. "It costs a whole quarter."

A quarter is a lot of money I thought, but it was sure worth it.

"I'm going to check out the poolroom," Ed said as he got up from the stool. I stood up and followed him in through the open door. The poolroom was much larger than the restaurant. It had four large pool tables and a smaller one at the end. There were benches along the walls and a scoreboard for each table. Ed looked around but there was no one there he knew so he turned and we both left.

As we walked home, Ed said, "You're not old enough yet to play pool but I don't think anyone cares. Of course you can always go to the restaurant for a Vico and hamburger then sneak in for a look like you did today." He gave me a little knowing nudge on the shoulder and we both chuckled as I nodded my head. That was my brother Ed, letting me in on the secrets of life in Wynyard.

When we got home, Mom was on the phone. I went upstairs while she finished her conversation. Then she called up to me, "Come down here, we have big news."

Big news, I thought, what could that be? "I just finished talking to Mary and she wants me to come over to visit her in Kitimat. She even offered to pay for my ticket. Maybe you should come with me?"

"Kitimat! Where is Kitimat?" I asked rather excited at the idea of going on another trip. I ran upstairs and dug through my few books and found an old atlas with a map of Canada. I ran downstairs almost missing the first step at the top. I sat at the table and looked for a map of BC. Where the hell is Kitimat? I looked up and down the province. Mom was looking over my shoulder but she had no idea where to look either.

"There it is," I said finally pointing to a small name on the coast at the top of the map. "That's a long way north and on the ocean. How come Mary went all the way there?"

"To find work I guess," Mom shrugged. "Mary, Olga, Vera and Kasmer all went to Ontario to work for a while, now they go to Kitimat. You have to go a long ways sometimes to find work. Otherwise, I guess you stay home and milk cows."

Makes sense, I thought as I returned to the map and traced a line from Wynyard through Saskatoon to Calgary. No, we must go through Edmonton because Kitimat was quite a bit north of Vancouver. In fact, it was a long way north.

"Do you think I could go?"

"Sure," Mom said. "It's a long trip and I could use the company. Besides, who's going to look after you when I'm gone?"

Mom thought we would be away for a couple weeks this time so I had to do some packing. I found a small suitcase for myself and she packed a larger one for herself. A few days later, we boarded the train heading west.

As we settled in on the train, I asked Mom, "How long is this trip?"

"Three days or so" she said.

"Three days! Where do we sleep?"

"We sleep right here. It costs a lot to go on a sleeper car. These seats fold back a bit and we can get a pillow from the conductor."

I thought about that for a minute but soon forgot about it as the train started moving. It was nice to be back on a train and feel the rocking motion of the passenger car. This will be a long trip so I figured I should check out the train. I walked to the back and out on to the vestibule that connects the cars together. It was wide open there except for a barrier that was about shoulder high for me so I had a great open view of the country flying by. It was also quite noisy and windy when you leaned over the barrier but that gave me a pretty good view of the front and back of the train, especially when there was a curve.

When we got to Saskatoon Mom sent me out to get a couple sandwiches for supper while she held our seats and watched our stuff. I got two ham and cheese sandwiches and hurried back. Sure enough, I barely made it before the conductor called, "All aboard."

I wondered what I would see west of Saskatoon since this was new country for me. I had my eyes glued to the window as we went by one town after another. By the time we got to Lloyminster on the Alberta border the sun was low on the western sky and the clouds were turning a hundred shades of red.

"The country here still looks the same as home," I told Mom.

She just shrugged and showed no particular interest in my observation. I began to wonder why Mom was rather uninterested in travel. Then it occurred to me that she had done some serious traveling when she was young. She came to Canada from some faraway place called Galicia, in Eastern Europe when she was only seventeen or eighteen. That must have been some trip – all the way across Europe by train then over the ocean in a ship. After all that, she took a train from Montreal to Wynyard. I guess going to Kitimat must feel like a small trip. I also wondered why she never talked about her trip or her early life. Maybe someday when I'm older, I should ask her.

We'd been traveling for most of a day and all I saw out the window was endless prairie. Saskatchewan must be a mighty big place. I took out a comic book I brought from home and read it over again. By now it was getting dark so I drew the curtain on the window, pushed my seat back as far as it would go and let the rocking motion of the train put me to sleep.

Sometime in the morning I awoke with a yawn and for a moment I seemed lost in a strange world. Where am I? And what is that noise? Oh right, we're on a train heading west to BC. I quickly opened the curtain and was stunned to see something unbelievable. The prairie had disappeared and we were in a thick forest of huge green trees and bush everywhere. I had to get a better look. I walked quickly to the vestibule and leaned out over the railing for a closer look at the forest passing by. This was magic. Everything was so wonderfully alive and green. The rivers and lakes were emerald blue and crystal clear. "No mud and dust here," I murmured to myself as I drank in the sight.

After two more days of endless forests, rivers, lakes and majestic mountains, we finally arrived in Terrace, BC. My sister Mary picked us up at the train station. Kitimat was a new town connected by sea and a gravel road but there was no railway yet. She fussed a lot over Mom then turned to me and exclaimed, "Well look at that! You brought 'Kahoot' with you! My goodness he has grown – almost a man already." She leaned over and gave me a small kiss on the cheek and led us to her car.

'Kahoot' was a nickname I got when I was about four years old and chased around the farmyard by a rather aggressive bantam rooster. I was just standing there minding my own business and this damned white rooster came charging at me squawking and flapping his wings. Before I could gather my wits he

was jumping at me with his sharp feet and beak. I couldn't just stand there and get bit and clawed to pieces so I turned and ran as fast as I could to the house with the rooster hot on my heels. I finally reached the safety of the house and slammed the door shut. Everyone in the house thought this was funny as hell and they laughed long and hard.

"Kahoot!" they said to each other and shook their heads. Kahoot is Ukrainian for rooster and the name stuck.

Mary drove us on a dusty gravel road to her place in Kitimat. This is more like Wynyard I thought as I watched the dust behind the car. You could tell that Kitimat was a new town. In the midst of all the bush and rocks there were areas of development and construction - homes, stores and roads going up in all directions. Mary told us that Kitimat was built in the middle of nowhere by ALCAN to make aluminum. Making aluminum took a lot of power so they also had to build a dam nearby. The town was on the ocean which meant ships could haul everything in and out. However, it was a big problem to find enough workers to build the huge dam never mind getting people to live here and work in the smelter.

"Most of the people here are from Saskatchewan," Mary said as we finally parked in her driveway. "We have people here from all over the world: Greeks, Portuguese, Irish, you name it, but about a third of the workers come from Saskatchewan. I work in the post office so I know. Where else could all those dumb farmers go to get a good paying job?" she said with a laugh as we got out of the car.

"Well, think of it," she continued, "me, Walter, Frank, Joe and Jean, we're all here working and making good money."

Mary's house was a small but very comfortable trailer. She had everything you needed in a home - kitchen, bathroom and bedroom all cramped together.

"Kind of like a small house" I said to her. "What a great idea. A house you could take with you anywhere you want!"

"You can sleep with Mom on the hide-a-bed," Mary said to me. "There are showers and bathrooms close by. Come, and I'll show you where."

We walked outside to a rather shabby cold and dank concrete building that had several toilets and showers. Mom and Mary went to the ladies' room while I checked out the men's.

"This is very nice," I told Mary. "A lot better than the little outhouse we have in Wynyard."

"Yeah," she said with a grimace, "I always hated those outhouses - especially in the winter." Then she paused and took my hand. She leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Here's some money for you". She handed me a twenty dollar bill then added, "I'm glad you came with Mom". Then she gave me a real hug and I felt very much at home.

Before I went to bed that night I knew I had to hide my money some-

where safe. Twenty dollars was a small fortune and I didn't want to lose it.

In the early morning I was up and ready to explore my new surroundings. Kitimat was everything Wynyard wasn't. It was totally surrounded by mountains, rivers and forests. Right behind Mary's trailer was a steep rocky slope that must have been cut back to make room for the homes. We didn't have hills like that in Saskatchewan so I decided right then and there that I should climb that hill. It turned out to be much harder than I expected. I would take three steps up then slide down as the loose rocks and gravel gave way. After a few tries I gave up and decided to try again later. On my way back to the trailer I stopped at the bathroom to wash my hands and take a pee. As I entered, I noticed there were three boys about my age sitting on the floor smoking. I went to the urinal and tried to pee while they were watched me closely.

"Hey, you're new here? Where you from?" one of the boys asked.

I zipped up my pants and answered nervously, "I'm visiting my sister. She has a trailer in the park."

"Well come on over here and we'll give you a smoke."

I thought that was a bad idea but what else could I do but play along. I sat down on the floor with them and one of the other boys gave me a puff on his cigarette. I had smoked a bit once in a while on the farm so I took a big drag and inhaled. The boys looked at each other and seemed impressed.

"You guys live here?" I asked.

"Yeah, we're stuck in this dump. They even built a new school already so I guess we'll have to stay here a while."

We chatted for a bit then as we all got up, I noticed that one of the boys bumped me while the another one kind of brushed by me on the other side.

"Sorry bud, I guess I slipped on the floor." He laughed and went out the door. The other two kept talking to me casually but I had the feeling something was not right. Then the boy who left came back in holding my wallet.

"Hey, look what I found outside," he said with mock concern. "You should be more careful with your wallet," he added and gave it to me. With that the three boys laughed knowingly at each other and walked away.

I went into one of the bathroom stalls and locked the door. The buggers had picked my pocket and I barely felt it! They must have done this before because they were pretty good at it. I opened my wallet and saw that my pictures were still there. There was no money in the wallet because I had no money there. So, that's why they gave it back to me I thought – there was nothing in the wallet to steal! I unlocked the door and walked home. When I got there I took off my right shoe and checked under the insole to make sure that my twenty dollar bill was still there.

The next day I was up early determined to take on the steep hill. It took a couple tries but finally I made it to the top. I raised my arms in mock victory then realized I was up pretty high. The climb down was harder than the climb up but I made it. By then I was pretty dirty and sweaty so I went to the

washroom and had a shower. Thankfully, the boys were not around. I finished my shower quickly and rushed home. My brother Frank was taking me fishing today and I couldn't wait to go.

Frank loved to fish. He was my oldest brother and great at just about everything as far as I was concerned. When I was about five years old Frank took me out hunting on the farm and told me all sorts of stuff. Like how to shoot a deer, sneak up on ducks and geese, how to find your directions in the bush and why rabbits multiplied so quickly. As for the rabbits, he described in some detail how animals make babies then went on to explain how I was made.

"A man's sex is right here for all to see," he said grabbing his crotch. "But if you want to see a woman's sex, you have to find it. Oh, it's there all right but you have to find it."

It was clear he was not going to help me any further with this mystery so the answer was left to my imagination.

Frank came to Kitimat and got a very good job driving big trucks and heavy machinery. Farm boys grew up with all kinds of skills driving trucks and tractors, fixing buildings and so on. They could do all kinds of jobs in a place like this. But more than anything, Frank loved to fish. Once Mom and I settled in, he was over to visit and promised to take me fishing.

He picked me up in his old truck and drove down a narrow road to the Kitimat River.

"Is there good fishing here?" I asked.

Frank laughed, "There are fish here bigger than you."

"Are you crazy! Bigger than me?"

"Oh yeah, I had a salmon last week that played with me for three hours before I landed him. Forty pounds and this long," he said stretching out his arms.

"You get one of those, you best slowly let out the line and give me the rod or you might end up in the ocean."

He laughed at that but somehow I didn't think it was all that funny. Frank was big and strong like an ox so I knew he could land any fish big or small. As a little kid I remember him stepping in if there was a fight or argument at a dance. When he told someone to stop fighting they did. He would just stand there glaring at the trouble makers and they would back down. I never saw anyone challenge him and he became known as the friendly giant and peace maker.

We stopped by an open spot near the river and Frank took out his gear. I never fished before so I just watched as he got everything ready. He took out a small rod, put a spoon on it and showed me how to cast into the river.

"Hold the reel like this, take it back over your shoulder then throw it forward and let go." He cast the line a couple times while I watched then I took over and to my surprise, it was pretty easy to do.

“Good job,” he said. “I’m going over there to fish so good luck.” Then, as he walked away he added, “If you catch a fish, you can keep the rod.”

My jaw dropped. “Are you kidding?” I called out. Frank was already around the bend of the river and ready to cast but he heard me.

“No, I’m not. You catch a fish and the rod is yours.”

I walked as far as I dared into the river with my rubber boots. This was no small stream or lazy river like I had seen back home. This was a mighty river. I could see the water churn and swirl over large rocks and trees hidden below. The water was cold and strong – I didn’t want to trip or fall throwing my line. Yes, I thought, if I caught one of those big fish, it probably could drag me out to the ocean!

After an hour or so I got pretty good at casting but there was no luck catching a fish. Frank came back with a couple small salmon.

“Wow,” I said dropping my rod. “Let me see those.”

I held up the string admiring the fish.

“These will taste good for supper,” he said. “Where’s yours?”

“I got nothing.”

“Let me change the spoon and hook for you. Maybe that will help.”

With that he left me again to the silence of the river running by. Why is the sound of water so peaceful I wondered? Maybe another spot will be better? Just as I thought of moving to another spot, I heard Frank coming back.

“Time to go pretty soon,” he yelled out. “Do you have a fish?”

“Not yet,” I said as I tossed out my line. Then suddenly, there it was – a pull on the line!

“I got one, I got one,” I yelled as I scrambled to reel in my fish. By the time I had the fish close to shore Frank was there with a net and scooped it up.

“There you go,” he said with a broad smile, “your first fish. It’s kind of puny looking but it’s still a fish. We really should throw it back you know.”

“No way,” I said firmly. “I caught it and I’m taking it home to show Mom.”

“Okay,” he shrugged.

Then he slapped me on my back and added, “Well I guess you just got yourself a fishing rod.”

What a wonderful day this is I thought as we drove home. I can’t wait to show everyone my new old fishing rod.

Chapter Three

THE LOG CABIN

It was the end of June and summer holidays were about to start. Flowers were in full bloom and the trees covered with the fresh greenness of new leaves bursting with energy. The birds chattered and hopped from branch to branch as Eddie and I walked by on our way to school. Eddie Gudmundson lived down the alley from our house and we quickly became good friends after I moved to town. Like me, he was also in grade eight and we usually walked to school together. This was the last day of school so all we had to do was pick up our report cards and say goodbye to our friends. It was also the end of elementary school for us because next year we would be going to high school. High school, I thought, how amazing was that! Next fall I would walk up those big steps and go to the same school as my older brothers. The thought of it made me feel quite important.

"We'll be in high school next year," I said stating the obvious.

"Yeah and I'm ready for it," Eddie replied as we ambled along. "Eight years in elementary with the same buggers is enough. There will be a lot of new faces in our class next year."

"That's for sure." Then I looked at him, "Hey, you know what, my friend Alfred Kuros will be there. We could all end up in the same class. Wouldn't that be something!"

My pal Al was finishing grade eight at his one room school south of Wynyard. I knew he was pretty excited about joining me at the big high school next fall.

Eddie nodded as we entered the school yard. "That stone building sure looks like a fort or a prison or something," I noted. "I thought that the first time I saw it."

"Well it sure is built like a brick shithouse, that's for sure," Eddie laughed.

I had mixed feelings about the school. Grade eight had been a kind of a blur. Everything was new and rather confusing. On my first day of school last September, there were kids running and yelling all over the place in the school yard. I had never seen so many in one place before. It was kind of bewildering. I walked through the school yard by myself not sure where to go or what to do. The young kids paid me no mind but I noticed a group of older boys nudge each other and look at me carefully. Then they walked over to me. "Who are you?" one of the bigger boys asked, puffing himself up trying to look tough.

"Victor," I replied nervously. "I'm new here and going to grade eight. Where do the grade eight's go?"

"You'll find out soon enough unless you're as stupid as you look!" he said and they all laughed and nudged each other with satisfaction. One of the smaller fat boys had a smirk on his face and gave me a push on the chest just to see what I would do. I wasn't at all sure what I was supposed to do so I just stood there. At Evelyne School we all knew each other and I couldn't remember anyone getting into a fight. We had many disputes and arguments over games but the teacher or older kids kept us in line. Getting picked on for no reason at all was a new experience.

"Hey Victor, I thought that was you," came a familiar voice behind me. It was Eddie Gudmundson and his friends, the Howitt brothers, walking up to me.

"Hi guys," he nodded easily to the other boys. "This is Victor, my neighbour who just moved in this summer and he's in grade eight with us."

After an awkward silence, Eddie turned to me and said, "Let's go and I'll show you our home room."

The three ruffians shuffled about a bit and said nothing so I turned and joined Eddie and his group with some relief.

"Who are those guys?" I asked.

"Oh, they're okay," Eddie replied. "Except maybe for that little bugger who pushed you. His Dad is manager or something at the OK Foods store so he thinks he's some kind of big shot."

With Eddie and the Howitts as buddies, I quickly learned to fit in with the class and no one bothered me. Mr. Lipka was our teacher and the principal of the school. He was a big gruff guy who kind of reminded me of Frank. No one messed with him. The only thing really different was getting used to having so many kids the same age in one classroom. Back in Evelyne most grades only had one or two students so this was a big change. But, I got used to it and soon I was just like the others.

Now, just like that, the year was over and this was the last day of school. There was a lot of excitement in the air as we all settled down in our classroom for the last time. Mr. Lipka made a point of saying something special to each of us as we came up to get our report card. Of course, with my name starting with "Z", I was the last to get mine.

"I think you will do okay in high school," he said looking closely at me. "You have a few bright spots in you so stay in school and maybe you'll get somewhere."

I wasn't sure what that meant but I mumbled a thank you and left. He got up and slowly looked over the class. "Clean out your desks and don't leave anything behind," he reminded us. Then he paused and actually smiled a bit. "This was a pretty good class all in all. I might even miss some of you!" There was a murmur throughout the room and some of the kids gave him a little wave goodbye.

Then, he straightened out his shoulders and raised his hand for silence.

“Keep out of trouble and have a great summer holiday.”

With that, we all began to clean out our belonging and say goodbye to one another. Eddie, the Howitt's and I left together. Mervin pumped his fist in the air and yelled, “No more school, no more books.” Then we all joined him in yelling out the end of the verse: “And no more teachers dirty looks!”

We settled into a leisurely walk. Summer holidays were great. You had two whole months of doing anything you want. It seemed like such a long time yet we knew that time can fly by rather quickly.

“What you guys up to this summer?” asked Alan. Eddie scratched his head a bit, “Well I have to help Dad do some building and make some money. And, I'd like to work on that old Model A and see if I can get it started. Oh yeah, Vic and I were thinking of maybe building a log cabin over at my cousin's farm.”

“A cabin!” the Howitts echoed. “Good luck with that. That sounds like a lot of work,” Mervin noted.

We were nearing our house so the Howitt boys went their way and waved at us. They lived a couple blocks east of us on Avenue B. “Let's go fishing sometime at Fishing lake,” Mervin turned and yelled out.

“Good idea,” I called back. Then I added, “Oh yeah, I have a fishing rod.”

Eddie looked around at the clear cloudless sky. “Looks like it will be nice and warm. Good weather for us to start on the cabin. Now that school is over I can't wait to get at it.”

“Me too. Let's take the bikes and pack some stuff over to the site. By the way, I asked Al to join us if he can. He said the site is pretty close to his school so we could meet on the road near the coulee.”

“Great, I'll take a couple axes and a saw so we can at least start the foundation.”

Eddie was a natural builder. His Dad was a carpenter so Eddie probably learned most of that stuff from him. Also, he could borrow whatever tools we needed from his Dad to build our cabin. The idea of building a cabin seemed a natural thing to do with the whole summer in front of us. We had already taken a trip on our bikes to Eddie's uncle's farm about two and a half miles (4 km) south of town and did some exploring and rabbit hunting. I had an old .22 rifle from the farm which I took with us. We found some rabbits and took a few shots but missed. However, we had brought along a lunch so it was just as well we didn't hit anything. As we scouted the area, we found a nice spot in the forest near a ravine that was level and out of the way. We spent the rest of the day in the area and when it was time to go home, Eddie looked at me, “You know, we should build a log cabin here.”

“A cabin! That's a great idea but how do you build a cabin?”

“Oh, I think I can figure it out. It can't be that hard.”

So, for the next few weeks as the school year drew to a close we talked about the cabin.

"How big will the cabin be?" I asked one day as we walked home from school.

"We'll make it as big as the trees are nearby. That way we don't need to figure out how to join logs together. If we can find enough good trees ten to fifteen feet long then the cabin will be that big."

I thought about that for a while. "That makes sense. But we'll need quite a few trees to build it."

"Yeah, we'll have to cut down a lot of trees and they will have to be notched then lifted on top of each other. But we have the whole summer to do it," Eddie added optimistically.

This was starting to sound like a lot of work. "You know, I think we could use Al's help. His farm is not too far from there. He could come over with his bike and help us build it."

"Sure, we could use another set of hands when we start building. Does he live on the Stanley Kuros farm by the grid road?"

"Yeah, we got to know each other when I still lived on the farm. He will be going to high school with us next year. We like to play guitars and sing when we get together."

"Great!" Eddie exclaimed. "When we're done, we'll have a party at the cabin."

About a week later I was hanging around Paul's poolroom when Al came in and slapped me on the shoulder. "Hello Victor, what you doing?"

"Not much," I replied, "just watching these old farts playing pool. They sure make some good shots. How's school?"

"Oh, you know, school is school. I can't wait for high school though. How about you?"

"About the same. You remember Eddie Gudmundson who lives by our place? Well we plan to build a cabin at his uncle's farm down in the ravine by Nordra School. What do you think of that?"

"What a great idea!" he said, "I think I know the place. Nordra is my school."

"That's your school! Well then you know where to go. We plan to start next Saturday so come over in the morning and bring an axe."

"Ok, I'll meet you on the road by the coulee."

On Saturday morning Eddie and I were ready to go. We loaded some tools as best we could on the bikes and started off. By the time we got there, Al was waiting by the road. Eddie and I got off the bikes and pushed them into the bush to the site.

"What do you think?" Eddie asked Al. "This should be a pretty good place to build the cabin."

"Yeah, it's level with a stream close by and lots of trees around. It looks

good to me. We'll have to bring our guitars out here and a case of beer – then we could have a big party!"

Eddie nodded his head and laughed. "Yeah and maybe some hot girls so we could really have a good time."

"Now you're talking."

"Sounds good all right but there's sure a lot of work to do here before we have a party," I noted. They nodded and started looking for good straight trees to cut.

Building a log cabin is quite easy if you're prepared to do a lot of hard work. We took the axes and started chopping down the straightest trees we could find close by. Cutting the trees nearby had the double advantage of creating a nice open space for the cabin and saving us the hard work of hauling trees to the site. It took us half a day to get enough trees cut, trimmed and piled near the site so we could start building.

"Time for a break," Eddie said and we plopped down on the pile of wood.

"I got some baloney sandwiches. What you guys got?" I asked.

"I don't know. Looks like beef. Whatever it is, it tastes good."

"Anything tastes good when you're hungry," I added, munching away at my sandwich. Then I noticed Al wasn't eating. "What you got?"

"I never even thought to bring any lunch. What a toopiss head!"

We all laughed. "Well, we don't have time to kill a rabbit and cook it so I guess you better have one of my sandwiches," Eddie offered.

"Yeah, and one of mine."

"Uhm, tastes good," said Al. "Baloney goes good with beef."

We sat for a while enjoying the silence of the forest and proud of the pile of logs we collected.

"So, what now?" I asked.

"Well we have to put down the foundation logs for the cabin then notch the ends for the next layer of logs," said Eddie as he got up.

We laid out four larger logs to form the foundation and did some digging and tamping down to get them all level and square. Then we started chopping and chipping away at the ends to form a cradle for the next layer of logs. By late afternoon we had the walls up to our chest and it was time to cut out the door so we could get in more easily. But by then it was time to get on our bikes and go home. Al was anxious to get home because he had chores to do and his Dad was pretty strict about that. We stashed the tools inside the cabin and said goodbye to Al.

"See you in the morning," we yelled out as we started the long ride home. Going home was easier than coming out since it was downhill for about half the way. All we had to do was make sure the brakes worked properly and avoid the bigger pot holes on the road. It was very relaxing to cruise down the

long hill with the warm breeze blowing on our face. By the time we got home we were ready for a big meal and bed.

Sunday was church day at our house but I told Mom I couldn't go because Eddie was waiting for me and we had to work on the cabin. "A cabin?" she asked looking puzzled.

"Well it's more like a log shed or porch. Just a place for us to play in or stay overnight in the bush if we want to," I explained rather lamely. She just shook her head but did not press the point. I suppose she was used to having her sons skip church as they got older.

When we lived on the farm, we all went to the Polish church. Dad helped to build the church and there was no question about going to Sunday mass. It was about three miles (4.8 km) from our house so we always drove there with horses and then later, with cars or in the back of a truck. The young guys liked to do the driving but often stayed outside chatting away while we were at mass. After mass, we all had a chance to visit with our friends and neighbours then make our way home for a big dinner.

I thought about those days as we worked up a sweat paddling up the long hill to the cabin. When we got to the coulee we left our bikes and noticed that Al was not there.

"Maybe Al had to go to church with the family," I suggested. "Or he had chores to do. Anyway, we just as well get started."

It was great to see the cabin half formed when we got to the site and we were quite pleased as we inspected our work. Inspired with our progress we chopped, trimmed and hauled more logs to finish the walls.

When I was a kid on the farm, I would spend some time by myself in the woods around the house. There is a serene beauty in the silence of the forest. You could hear your own footsteps and the quiet sounds of birds and insects as they went about their business. It was the same in this forest around our cabin. I suddenly wondered why I had never thought of building a cabin at the farm. I paused in my work and thought about it. Actually, I guess I didn't need one. We had a couple sheds, a chicken coop and barn to hide and play in if we wanted to so why bother building a cabin? The granaries were the best place to play once the grain was taken out and sold. Come to think of it, those granaries were much like this cabin we're building except they were bigger and made of larger logs. Also, they were covered with a clay and straw mixture on the outside to fill in the cracks. The roof was made of sturdy boards and shingles. That made me wonder about our roof. I called out to Eddie, "What about the roof?"

Eddie dropped what he was doing and came over to me. "Well, we start by making an A frame at the ends with some trees then run a small log from one end to the other. Then we cut a whole bunch of small trees and saplings and lay them across to fill in the space. We should pack the saplings together pretty tight then cover the whole roof with a canvas, bang it all down

with nails then pile some clumps of dirt or grass on top to hold it all together. That should keep the rain out."

"I remember the roofs in our granaries were pretty solid and they also had cable lines connecting the walls. Was that to keep the grain from pushing the walls out?"

"Sure," Eddie replied. "There's an awful lot of pressure when you start filling the granary with grain. But we won't need that, our cabin won't pull apart and the roof will be fine. Also, we're in the forest so there won't be any strong winds around."

That all made sense to me but I still wondered about the door opening.

"What happens when we cut the logs for the door?"

"We'll leave the bottom two logs as is and the top two or three so the cabin will still be all connected. Just don't trip on the lower logs when you go in."

We took the buck saw and started cutting.

"These will make good firewood," I observed as we piled the short logs nearby.

"That's high enough. We can bend down a bit to get in and if you hit your head once you probably won't do that again!" Eddie said and laughed out loud.

"What about a door?"

"Why make a door? It's not like we're going to stay here in the winter and we can always put up a blanket if needed."

"That sound good to me but I guess we will have to finish it off next week. It's time to get home don't you think?"

"Yeah, and we need to get more stuff next time to do the roof."

It was getting late but we sat for a long time inside our new cabin just to rest and admire the work.

"This will be great," I said quietly breaking the silence. "Once the roof is in we should stay overnight."

"You bet, and we're going to have fresh rabbit and partridge for dinner."

With that, we got on our bikes and made the long trip home.

We took some time off from our project and lazed around home for a few days. Building the cabin was hard work and my muscles needed a rest. With nothing much to do I began to enjoy laying on the couch reading a book and listening to some music. We had a large couch in front of the big picture window and it became my favorite spot to laze about and read or snooze. Sometimes Leo and Ed would bring over their friends and we would all hang out at the house not doing much of anything. However, most of the time, we went our own way. Leo was always looking for a job to make some extra money like cleaning up someone's yard or the Vogue Theatre after movies. Ed liked

poolrooms even more than me so he was mostly gone with his friends. Also, he was getting to the age where cars and girls were more interesting than anything at home. In any case, they never bothered to ask me about my big project and I guess it never occurred to me to bring it up.

On our next trip, we worked the whole day to finish the roof. We sat a while looking at our cabin then I said, "Now that we finished the roof we can stay overnight so we have to figure out what to bring with us."

Eddie thought a while, "Okay but I guess what we'll need most for staying over will be a bed of some kind."

"I've got an old mattress at home we were going to throw out," I offered. "Maybe we could take that?"

"How the hell we gonna get it here?"

I thought for a while, "We can start taking over some pots and pans on our next trip. Then when we go for the overnigher, all we would have to take is the mattress and some fresh food for the day. What do you think?"

Eddie scrunched his nose and thought for a moment. "Let's get home and go to your place. I need to see this mattress. It won't be easy putting it on a bike."

We got home well before supper and went directly to my house.

"Hello Mrs. Zelinski," Eddie called out and waved to Mom as we walked through the kitchen and up the stairs. Mom and Dad's favourite place to sit was at the kitchen table right by the entrance which gave them a good spot to see everyone come and go. She waved back at Eddie and we went up the stairs. The mattress was rolled up in the corner of the big room so I pulled it out and it plopped open on the floor. Eddie looked at it with a calculating eye then rolled it up.

"I guess it will do but it's going to be a bugger getting the damn thing there."

We tried to bundle it up tightly but it kept popping open at the ends.

"I know," Eddie said. "Let's tie it up with ropes and try to lay it over the handle bars."

We wrestled with the mattress and got down the stairs to the porch.

"Sho za horoba (What the heck)," Mom said as we struggled to get the mattress out the kitchen and porch.

"We want to take this mattress to the cabin," I told Mom. "You said you were going to throw it out anyway."

"Ya ne znayu, harazd, tak i buty (I don't know, okay so be it)," she said shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head as she went back to the kitchen. I got a rope and we tied up the mattress at both ends then Eddie put it on my bike while I tried to keep it steady.

"Here goes," I said as I started down the lane.

The bike handled like a whale but after a while I got the hang of it and turned around back to our yard.

"If you can handle that I'll take the rest of the stuff. It's going to take us a while to get there with that load."

We waited a couple more days to make sure the weather looked clear and warm, especially at night, then we packed our stuff and started out to the cabin. We tied the mattress best we could on the handle bars and I made sure the bike didn't tip over too much on one side or the other. It was best not to stop for anything so we just went through the stop signs and the highway to the grid road. I was hoping we wouldn't meet any traffic or hit a big bump. The trip through town was a bit embarrassing as a couple people stopped and stared at me trying to keep my bike steady hauling the big mattress. The trip was slow but the gravel road was in pretty good shape although I had to keep a good eye out for tire ruts, holes, rocks and loose gravel. The hardest part was making it to the top of the hill but we finally made it to the coulee.

Eddie was loaded down pretty good as well with a heavy aluminium cooking pan, rifle, some water, blankets and other odds and ends we thought we needed. When we finally got to the cabin I unwrapped the mattress and dropped it in the middle of the cabin. I plopped down on it and tried it out.

"Feels good, this will be a lot better than sleeping on the hard ground."

"Good," Eddie replied. "I'm going to see if I can get us something for supper."

With that, he took off looking for rabbits and partridge. I put our stuff away as best I could in the cabin and started picking up kindling and dry branches for a fire. I cleared an area in front of the door and made a pile of dry moss and twigs and started the fire. Suddenly a shot rang out and then another. Instinctively, I ducked and looked around. I hope he knows what he's shooting at, I thought.

"I got him," Eddie called from a distance.

"Oh, good, bring it in," I yelled back. "Let's see what you got."

He came in holding his rifle in one hand and a rabbit by the hind legs in the other.

"Now what?" he said looking at me.

I looked back, "Well, it looks like one of us has to take the skin off. You know, dress the animal. I've skinned hundreds of muskrats but never a rabbit."

"Okay, in that case, you skin it and I'll go out and try for a partridge."

I got my pocket knife out and tested the blade for sharpness. It was pretty good so I sat on a log and started skinning. I had learned the art of skinning animals a few years ago on the farm. For some reason the early 1950's were wetter than usual. In the winter it snowed so much that we could walk on the road and grab hold of the telephone lines. It was a two and a half mile (4 km) walk to school so during the winter we usually took a horse and small sled. The horses made a crunching sound as they walked on the hard packed frozen snow and you could see the clouds of steam from their noses. After a while, the

horses formed ever larger icicles around their noses and we would rub them off when we got to school while they snorted in protest.

Then, in the Spring, all that snow melted and tiny streams and ponds turned into big sloughs and creeks that flooded the fields and roads. Sometimes our walking trails were blocked by torrents of water and we couldn't get to school until the water went down to a passable level. Of course my brothers and I were not that disappointed about staying home for a while when that happened.

All this water formed into dozens of small and large sloughs on the farm and surrounding area. The ducks and geese were having a great time and so were the muskrats. They multiplied by the hundreds all over the place. As fall turned to winter, you could see dozens of muskrat houses on the ice. When my older brothers found out that you could make a couple dollars for a good muskrat skin we all decided to become trappers. I guess muskrat coats and hats were in style and that caused a big demand for muskrat fur.

Trapping muskrats was not that hard. When the sloughs froze over, we walked on the ice to a muskrat house above the water line and broke into it carefully then set a trap inside. The trap was anchored to a log on the outside. Then, it was a matter of waiting for a muskrat to get caught.

Leo and I became the big trappers in the family. Leo was very good at setting traps and skinning and I was his junior partner. Every day or so we walked our trap lines bringing home all the muskrats we caught. At home we skinned the animals and stretched out the skins on a wooden board to dry. After the skins dried out, they were piled into a box and collected until the spring when we finally went to town and sold them. Leo did the bargaining and selling at the store so I didn't really know how much we made and he wasn't about to tell me. However, I was very happy to get my cut.

Our muskrat business ended almost as soon as it started because the wet season only lasted a couple years. Once the land dried out, the muskrats were gone. It was years now since I skinned a muskrat but once you learned, I figured you never forgot. I started with the inside leg of the rabbit and worked my way up. By the time I heard another shot in the distance, I had finished skinning the rabbit and cut a sturdy green willow stick to hold it over the fire. Eddie returned with a big smile on his face and nice partridge in his hand.

"I got the rabbit ready to cook but I hate plucking chickens so I think you're going to have to get that bird ready," I said.

Eddie shrugged, "Sure, I don't mind. It can't be that hard to do."

While Eddie plucked I got the fire arranged for cooking and went out a ways to find a supply of dry wood. When I had a good fire going we were hungry enough to start cooking our meal. I put the stick through the rabbit and Eddie did the same with the bird then we crouched near the fire to cook the meat. We kept turning it to prevent burning and to make sure it was done all over. It took a while but we really had nothing else to do.

"This is probably how the Indians and the pioneers cooked their food in the past," Eddie noted. "You kill it, cook it and eat it. No need for freezers, stoves and stores."

I thought about that for a moment, "Yeah, but nothing beats a burger and chocolate milk at the pool room." We both had a laugh at that.

When the food was ready we split the rabbit in half and started eating.

"The rabbit is not bad but it tastes flat, don't you think?" I said.

"Hey," Eddie exclaimed, "I brought some salt and pepper. That should make it better."

I salted the rabbit meat in my hand and sure enough it was much better. I did the same with the partridge and it was really good.

"I think the bird is better to eat," I observed. "What do you think?"

"I agree, but there's not much of it."

"This is how my parents must have done it when they got here back in the 20's," I said. "They built a cabin then shot some game for meat just to survive. Although I guess they could get some supplies from town if they had the money. You can't always count on a rabbit or deer coming by to provide a meal."

"Well the Indians did that for thousands of years, didn't they?" Eddie added. "Although they used a bow and arrow rather than a gun and lived in a teepee rather than a log cabin. They even lived through the winter without freezing. That must have been tough."

I thought about that for a bit. "Yeah, I wonder why the never built better homes for the winter like the pioneers. Even a mud hut would be warmer. But, on the other hand, you can't very well drag a mud hut around with you when you head out to hunt deer and buffalo."

Then, I added half in jest, "Speaking of deer, maybe I should go out and get one next time, then we would have lots of meat!"

"A deer?" Eddie looked at me. "Now that's serious hunting."

"Al and I went out hunting at our farm a few years ago with my brother Frank and we suddenly walked right up to a deer. Before I could say anything my brother aimed the rifle and shot the deer right between the eyes. I couldn't believe it! Just like that the deer fell over and was dead. We walked up to it but it was kind of small so my brother gave me his knife and told me to dress it while he went on to look for something bigger. Frank usually shot three or four deer in the fall to add to our supply of meat for the winter. Anyway, here we were, Al and I just barely ten years old and we had to 'dress' a deer."

Eddie was looking at me with some awe and asked, "What do you mean, 'dress a deer'? You mean you had to take the guts out and skin it?"

"Yes. Bleed it first from the neck, skin it, then cut it into chunks so you could carry it home."

"Wow," Eddie said shaking his head. "And you guys did all that?"

“Yes, we sure did. I used to watch my Dad butcher a pig or two every fall so I had a pretty good idea of what to do. Of course, with a pig you don’t do any skinning you just scrape the hair off the skin with hot water and a sharp knife. Also, we had a tripod on the farm to lift the pig or steer off the ground. Well, we had no tripod so we just cut the neck on the ground to bleed the deer then cut the belly open and pulled the guts out. But that was easy compared to trying to skin the damned thing on the ground. There was dirt and hair all over the place but we got it done. Then we hacked away to cut the deer into quarter pieces so we could carry home. It was messy as hell but we cut it into four chunks and put the pieces on our shoulders to carry it home. Mom and Dad were pretty surprised to see the two of us carrying all that meat.”

Eddie was shaking his head and laughing, “You and Al, covered with blood and guts, bringing home the bacon – so to speak!”

“Yes, it was pretty funny all right when you think about it.”

We both fell silent while we munched on the last of the meat. The meal wasn’t exactly tasty or filling but it was good enough.

When we finished, we decided to explore further away from the ravine but there were open fields on each side so we went back to the cabin and sat by the fire. As the sun set and the day cooled we stoked up the fire and watched it burn and crackle. After a while we both walked away from the light of the fire and watched the moon and stars in the sky.

I looked up at the sky. “You don’t see this kind of sky back in Wynyard.”

“No, there’s too much light in town to see the night sky properly.” Then he asked, “You must have had skies like this on the farm?”

“Oh yes, we sure did. Sometimes in the fall the night sky was just brilliant. I remember reading in the moonlight many times on the farm.”

We stood and stared at the night sky for a long time before we finally went to bed. It was a long day and the mattress felt very comfortable as we lay down to sleep in our clothes. Outside an owl hooted softly and the wind rustled gently in the trees as we fell asleep.

We were up with the sun, maybe even before it rose. It was cool, almost cold and the fire was out. We both went out for a leak then started packing.

“I guess we should head home and get some decent breakfast,” Eddie said.

“Yeah, some bacon and eggs, toast and hot coffee. That would hit the spot. I’ve had enough of this pioneer life.”

We both laughed and finished packing. We took back the things we had borrowed; the pan, blankets and the rifle but there was no way I was bringing the mattress back.

On the way home we talked about coming back to our cabin over the summer and we did a couple of times. But we never stayed overnight again.

Chapter Four

GITARS AND MOONSHINE

A wedding at the Legion Hall was in full swing as we arrived. There were some girls standing in a group near the entrance and they gave us a quick glance. We did the same except we took a really good look and liked what we saw.

"I'm going for the blonde," Al said as he took off before I could even reply. I followed him and asked one of the other girls for a dance. The girl was quite happy to be asked to dance but she seemed to have two left feet and we stumbled around the floor doing a bad version of the two step. Mercifully the dance ended and I quickly thanked her and left. Al must have had a similar experience because he was already standing by himself near the door.

"What a bust that was," he complained. "All she did is talk about how wonderful her boyfriend is. Who needs that?"

"Yeah, mine was a dodo also." I looked around for a bit then added, "I think we should get out of here."

Just as we turned to leave, I felt a slap on my shoulder and there was Clarence Lesprance,

"Victor and Al," he exclaimed. "How the hell are you guys?"

"Clarence, you old bugger, how the hell are you?" I replied with a big grin. "It's good to see you."

Clarence was a bit older but we had become good friends when I was still living on the farm. He was from a poor French Metis family who rented a house on Turner's farm close to Al's place. He was a good looker with dark hair and a swarthy complexion. When he smiled, his eyes sparkled and his teeth looked particularly white by contrast. We really liked him because he was always happy, fun to be with and shared our love for music. He liked to sing with us because we could play the guitar and harmonize with him. Now that we were living in town and going to high school, we kind of lost touch with him but here he was and it was good to see him. Besides, we also knew he was old enough now to drive and even buy us some beer if we had the money.

"You guys want a beer?" he said with a sly look.

"You bet," we both replied at once.

"Then let's go."

With that we all piled into an old car he was driving.

Al gave Clarence a nudge, "Let's stop at Victor's place and get his guitar then we can really party."

Clarence nodded. "Right on."

He drove to my place and stopped the car on the street while I quietly sneaked into the house to get my guitar. Mom was sitting at the kitchen table

as usual looking directly at me so I had to stop and explain that Al and I were going to practice for a while. She didn't seem to know what to say about that since it was almost ten o'clock already. I quickly left before she had a chance to ask any questions.

"That was close," I said when I got in the car. "Mom asked where I was going but I didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything and just left."

"Here, have a beer. That will make you feel better," Al said as we clinked our bottles and took a long swig. Sure enough, in no time I was feeling much better.

"So where you guys want to go?" asked Clarence.

"Let's go to Nordra School," Al suggested. "I'll show you my old school grounds. It's not far and right off the road but sheltered by the bush so one will see or hear us. We can go there drink some beer and play some songs." Then he turned to me and added, "Maybe we could go and see our old cabin in the bush?"

"I don't know if I want to go searching in the dark for the cabin, even though the moon is starting to look pretty bright."

"You guys have a cabin near Nordra?" Clarence piped in. "What's that all about?"

While he drove, Al gave him a short explanation of our summer adventure. Just as he finished, Clarence suddenly stopped the car and made a u-turn to downtown.

"We need some gas or we aren't going to make it back. You guys got some money?"

He turned to the Gulf Gas station while Al and I searched our pockets for some money. We finally found enough to put a dollar of gas in the car. Clarence had spent his last dollar on beer so we came up with the gas money which was certainly fair.

We drove south out of town for a few miles along a narrow gravel road enjoying our beer. The moon was bright and the evening nice and warm. When we got to the school, I took out the guitar while Clarence brought out the rest of the beer then we all sat on the grass. I looked around at the school yard then up at the bright full moon. I knew the first song we should sing was "Blue Moon of Kentucky". We didn't know all the words but we sang it several times anyway because it seemed like the right thing to do. By the time we finished the beer we had sung most of the songs we knew several times. Then, for a long while, we just sat there in silence, three friends enjoying our company and our beer. Finally, there was nothing left to do but go home.

On the ride home I thought about another party with Al under a bright harvest moon when we were still at the farm. I had learned how to play the guitar a bit by watching my brother. Kasmer and his friends would sometimes get together on Sunday afternoons and make music. He played an old guitar and they would let me sit nearby and beat a little drum as they played.

I must have had a good sense of rhythm because the guys put up with me and I felt pretty important. Then, my sister Jean noticed my interest in music so on a nice summer evening she took Kasmer's guitar and showed me how to play a few chords. I remember sitting in a poplar grove by the barn and watching her play and sing. Jean was a lot like Frank, easy going and very friendly. She even looked a bit like him with black hair, a large round face and soft dark eyes. I never saw her mean or nasty to anyone. She spoke with a gentle husky voice and it occurred to me that I had never heard her sing before. She sang me a short song and told me to watch her fingers. Then she gave me the guitar and helped me get my fingers right so I could play the chords.

After that it was just a matter of practice and watching how others played the instrument. Our family put on some dances over the summer and of course with many large families around there were always weddings so I got to listen to a lot of music. I would focus my attention on the guitar players and watch the chords they played then later I would try to play them at home.

At one of these weddings I met Alfred Kuros, who also liked music and guitars. We were about the same age and he lived on a farm about six miles (10 km) North of us on the road to Wynyard.

We made a point of getting a good spot close to the orchestra so we could watch the guitar players and try to remember the chords and songs they played. The orchestras played a lot of waltzes and polkas in three chords that were pretty easy to remember. Most of the country music on the radio was also based on three chords. Once we learned how to play in the key of C and G, we could play most songs. Hank Williams had a lot of songs like that. One of our favorites was his big hit, "Your Cheating Heart" which was easy to play and sing.

"Look at the way he plays the G chord," I nudged Al.

We were looking closely at the guitar player at the wedding and he was playing a waltz in the key of G but every once in a while he played the same chord in a totally different way. He would grab the neck of the guitar and hold down all the strings at once covering them on the third fret of the guitar. I made a fist on my left hand and tried to imagine which fingers covered what strings.

"If you make a fist like this," I said, "you still have five fingers but the guitar has six strings so how does that work?"

Al tried the same thing and we looked hard at the player as he changed from D to G.

"I think he's using his thumb to cover the top string so that leaves four fingers to cover the others," Al suggested.

"Yeah, but that still leaves five strings. Maybe the last finger covers the bottom two strings? We'll have to try that out."

Sure enough when we got home I tried the new G chord and discovered if you held the string pretty tight at the bottom and put your thumb over

the top, you could make a clean sounding G chord. The trouble was keeping the strings clear so you could hear them all. It took a lot of practice and kind of hard on the hand.

Then, it hit me - what happens when you move the hand back and forth along the neck of the guitar? I discovered that I could play all kinds of different chords simply by moving my hands up and down the neck of the guitar. I couldn't wait to show Al.

"Look," I said to Al the next time our families got together. I had Kasmer's guitar on my knee as we sat outside on the grass. It was fall and harvest was over. Dad was making moonshine again from the freshly harvested wheat and the still was brewing away in the tool shed nearby. I told Al that one of my sisters was planning a wedding in the spring so Dad had to get the moonshine ready. Sure it was illegal to make moonshine but you needed whisky for a wedding and who could afford to pay government prices at the liquor store? Making moonshine was a sure sign that a wedding was on the way.

"Did you figure out the G chord?" I asked.

"Yes, but it's hard to play it properly."

"And it's hard on the wrist to hold that key down for a while," I added. "But look at this."

I slid my hand up a fret and played the chord then slid it down a couple frets and did the same. Al was looking at me.

"What are you doing that for?"

"Because you can play in a different key just by going up and down the neck," I said. "Listen to this."

I started humming a song in the key of C and then played the F chord and G.

"The F chord is the same as the G chord except it is two frets lower," I said.

"By God you're right, let me try that."

He grabbed my guitar and we hummed the melody to "Your Cheating Heart" while he played in the key of C using the F chord on the first fret then moving his hand smoothly to hit the G chord.

"That's great," he said, "now we can play like those guys in the band!"

As we practiced there outside near the porch, the door opened and Al's Dad stumbled out. He managed to get to the nearest tree before he threw up. He sat down on the ground heavily and wiped his face. We looked at each other and realized there must be a pretty good party going on inside the house.

"They must be trying out the new moonshine," I offered with a laugh.

"Yeah, and Dad looks like he tried a lot of it!"

Al's Mom came out, took Stanley by the arm and led him to the carriage. My brother Kasmer came out also looking a bit unsteady as he helped Sofie and Al get the horses hitched and ready for the trip home.

"The horses know the way home," Sofie told us. "So don't worry. I'll get

the old man there safe and sound.” With that she picked up the reins and the horses trotted off.

With Al gone and the party over I sat and practiced a few chords on the guitar by the light of the moon. I could read a book out here I thought as I put the guitar down.

“Victor, check the moonshine before you go to bed,” my Dad called from the porch. I turned and waved at him but he was already going back into the house. I figured he’s probably drunk like Stanley and wants to get to bed. I was in no hurry to go to bed so I walked over to the shed and opened the door. The sweet humid smell of moonshine hit me. I waited for a moment to get used to the darkness and the smell then went over and checked the stove. The fire was almost out so I added some wood to keep it slowly burning into the night. That should keep the brew going. Then I checked the gallon jug and found it was almost full. I waited and watched as the gallon slowly filled then I put down a new gallon and stacked the full one in the corner. I let some of the moonshine drip on my finger and licked it. It didn’t have much of a taste but it sure had a bite.

By the time I was ready to leave the shed I had a rather warm and fuzzy feeling in my head. I checked everything again then opened the door and took a deep breath of fresh air. Somehow the full moon seemed a bit fuzzy and wasn’t quite as brilliant anymore. Then I noticed my legs weren’t working all that well so I kind of stumbled a bit towards the house.

“How come you can’t walk straight?” Kasmer asked with a laugh as I entered the house. I mumbled something about tripping over the porch step.

“Maybe you stayed too long in the shed?” he added knowingly. I wasn’t sure what that meant so I just shrugged and waved at him. I walked to my bed and lay down with my clothes on. Then I fell down and slept like a log.

That was probably my first drunk and I didn’t even know it. The thought made me laugh out loud. Clarence looked over, “What’s so funny?”

“Oh, nothing,” I replied. “I just thought of something funny, that’s all.”

I settled back and closed my eyes. Just as I was nodding off to sleep, the car came to a slow stop in front of our place. Al was fast asleep in the back seat. I got out and took my guitar from the trunk of the car and waved goodbye to Clarence as he pulled away.

Over the winter Al and I practiced quite a bit at lunch and the occasional weekend. On school days he usually walked home with me and Eddie Gudmundson and had his lunch at our place. Sometimes he forgot his lunch and would eat whatever I had. We often had soup or leftover meat and potatoes. But our favorite was a fried baloney sandwich. Mom would cut a thick piece and fry it with some onions. Add some mustard and it was almost as good as Stella’s hamburgers at the poolroom.

After lunch we would sing and play for a while then head back to school. By the end of the school year we were getting pretty good and had learned a bunch of songs. I had an old Stella guitar from the farm but Al didn't have one so we would take turns playing. Then we discovered that Leo was also interested in playing and he would sit in with us once in a while. Leo became interested enough that he decided he would get his own guitar. Unlike me, he had the knack for finding the odd job around town and saved his money. So, one day he came home with a nice big body electric guitar. It was blonde in color with nicely decorated pearl on the neck. It even had a proper guitar case. Al and I were quite impressed but Leo made it clear that this was his guitar so we couldn't just take it out any time we wanted. However, he conceded we could use it at home and we used it a lot - especially when he was away. It was great for each of us to have a guitar when we practiced.

By summer we were singing at parties. A party could happen at any time because they were fun and there really wasn't that much else to do in town. There was only one movie per week and a couple poolrooms but they cost money. The big cost for parties however, was for gas and beer. But even if you had some money you still had to find someone old enough to buy beer. Sometimes when there was a bigger group, we chipped in and bought a gallon of wine which was plenty for a party. Kelowna Red or Four Aces was a favorite and they only cost ninety nine cents for a gallon.

Dad gave us an allowance of one dollar every Friday and that had to last the whole week. His pension was only about \$55 per month so I didn't dare ask for more. However, sometimes Mom would have some extra grocery money around and I could count on her in a pinch. If you had the money and the beer, you could usually find someone with a car willing to drive you to the parties and dances. Al and I were lucky to have older friends like Clarence or my relatives willing to take us along for the occasional dance or wedding. However, it was our singing and playing at parties that opened a lot of doors for us. We were always welcome - as long as we brought along our guitars.

One Friday evening, Al and I were sitting at Paul's poolroom watching a bunch of guys playing pool. The place was full and all the tables taken so we just watched.

"Is there a wedding at the Ukrainian Hall?" I asked.

"Yeah, someone's getting married. Why, do you think we should go?"

"I hate to spend my last dollar on donation."

"Me too," Al replied. "But we can dance, have a shot of whisky at donation and then eat some good perogies and cabbage rolls so that's not bad for a buck."

While we thought about it a table came open and Doug Malenchuck was setting the balls for another game. His opponent lost so he was digging in his pocket to pay for the game.

"You guys want to play?" he asked looking at us. Doug was older than

us by a few years and a pool shark. If we played him we knew we would pay. Al and I looked at each other.

"No thanks," I said for both of us as we got up. "We're off to a wedding."

"I'd rather spend my money at the wedding then waste it playing that pool shark," Al said as we left.

This time, however the wedding was a bust. We found a couple girls for a dance or two but there was not much happening. We hardly knew anyone there and the band was not that good so we drifted out of the hall and called it a night.

"We'll save our money for a good wedding," Al said. I waved farewell and walked home.

The next day I slept in late then sat around most of the day on the couch and read a book. By late afternoon I had finished another Hardy Boy's book and thought it was time to check out the poolroom. As I entered Paul's Poolroom I noticed there was only one other guy there sitting in a booth sipping a coke. He waved at me so I walked over and said, "Hi, I'm Victor".

"Johnnie Chudic," he replied easily and extended his hand. "Looks like you and I are the only ones here so you want to play a game?"

"Sure, if you let me win! I don't know if I have enough money to pay if I lose. We were out drinking last night and I spent my money on beer," I added casually as if that was something I did any time I felt like it.

"Don't worry about that, I have money. I played a dance last night and made ten bucks."

"Ten bucks! That's a lot of money. How the hell do you earn money like that?" I asked in amazement.

"John Bashutsky asked me to play at a dance at Holar Hall. He plays the accordion and I played the guitar. He also had a fiddle player with him but he was no damn good. He really liked 'Rubber Dolly' so he kept playing it. I guess he didn't know many other tunes so he just kept playing the same old thing."

Johnnie broke the balls on the table then called a red ball bank into the side and made the shot.

"Nice shot," I said. "I play the guitar also. Maybe we should get together sometime?"

Johnnie sank a blue ball and called another red in the corner but missed.

"Sure, come over to my place after the game and I'll show you my guitar."

After he paid Paul Wasylenko, the owner, for the game, we waved goodbye to his wife Stella, who ran the restaurant at the entrance to the pool room.

"You boys stay out of trouble," she said hiding a smile on her face. "Don't be like those Bjornson boys and their friends. We had to kick them out of here last night."

"You know me Stella, I'm a good boy," Johnnie said and winked at me. "Where's those good looking daughters of yours?"

"They are home now but they will be working here later when it gets busy."

"She has a couple good looking daughters you know," he repeated looking at me as we left. "They live down the street from us. I'll show you the house when we get to my place."

We walked a couple blocks west on Avenue B to Johnnie's house and stopped at the door. Johnnie pointed across the street and a bit west to a white stucco house with a black roof and a single car garage in the front. "That's where Paul and Stella live. Did I tell you they have a couple of good looking daughters?"

"Yes you did, a couple of times already."

"Hi Mom," Johnnie said as we entered the house. "This is Victor, I just met him today."

I noticed Johnnie was smart enough not to mention we had met in the poolroom. Lots of people thought of the poolroom as a hang out for lazy farmers and bad kids. My Mom and Dad never complained about me going there but then, come to think of it, how would they know where I go? My Mom and Dad never went to the poolroom. Johnnie's mother nodded to me and kept sweeping the floor as I followed him to his bedroom. The house was very small. As I looked around I realized that it was even smaller than our place and they didn't have a second floor like we did.

"Here it is," said Johnnie as he brought out his guitar from a corner closet. It was a black narrow body electric guitar with a striking white plastic trim around the body. It was by far the nicest guitar I had ever seen.

"This is great!" I took it from him and checked the shiny guitar from every angle. I played a chord and listened to the shallow sound of the guitar.

"It's not as loud as mine but then it's an electric guitar with a thin body. Can I plug it in?"

Johnnie plugged in the guitar and set the volume low. I played a few chords while he went back into the closet and brought out a regular guitar and handed it to me.

"Try this one. It's probably closer to the one you have."

"Yes, that's more like it. Let's play something."

Johnnie started playing a waltz and I played the rhythm. Then, he started singing a song while I played along and did some harmony. We jammed for an hour or so then I got up to leave.

"Let's get together again and play," Johnnie said as I walked to the door. I was about to say sure but my eyes were set on a young girl sitting at the

kitchen table.

"You two sounded pretty good," she said smiling at me.

I was stuck for words. This girl was absolutely beautiful. Where did she come from? She was small with large dark eyes and silky smooth black hair with a hint of waves. I looked at Johnnie and realized he was also pretty good looking with dark wavy hair so this must be his sister.

"Oh, this is my little sister who's a pain in the ass," Johnnie said sarcastically. "This is Victor."

"Hi," I finally mumbled and quickly opened the door and left. I took a look backwards but the door was closed. Her image was frozen in my mind as I walked home. His little sister I thought. I had to see her again. I began thinking about how to arrange that. Then it occurred to me that all I had to do was to call on Johnnie again to play and this time I would be sure to talk to her. I went to the Paul's Poolroom three times a day for a couple days after that before I ran into Johnnie again. I guess he wasn't much into poolrooms as I was.

"You here again?" asked Stella as I entered the poolroom for the third time that day.

"Yes," I said sheepishly. "Did you happen to see Johnnie?"

"You missed him. He was here today but left about an hour ago. Why don't you just go over to his house and see him?"

"Hello Victor," came a sweet voice from behind the counter. It was Mildred, Stella's youngest daughter standing in front of the hot grill cooking a hamburger. Stella made the best hamburgers in the world but I was not here to eat and besides I was broke as usual.

"Hi Mildred," I said. "That burger sure smells good."

"Most of my friends call me Tillie. What you up to?"

"Oh, nothing much," I replied trying to sound casual. "I was just looking for Johnnie to see if we could play guitars at his place."

"Oh yeah?" she said with a smile on her face. "You probably just want to see his sister. She's a pretty good looker don't you think?"

My face went red as I fidgeted on the stool. I should have said something cool like, "you mean pretty like you?"

Instead I just looked at her and lied. "His sister, I didn't know he had a sister!" It was hard to keep a straight face.

"Yeah, they just moved in a while ago but we haven't met them yet and they never come here – except for Johnnie once in a while."

"Well I better get to work," she said as she picked up the hamburger and walked past me to one of the booths.

As I started to leave she stopped and turned to me, "Don't you and Al play guitars and sing?"

"Yes we do, how do you know that?"

“Oh, I know lots of things,” she said with that smug look on her face. She’s just like her mother I thought. “You pass him a hello for me next time you see him.”

Wow, I thought as I walked to Johnnie’s place. Tillie and Al must be dating or something. Lucky guy! I wonder if they are going steady? All the good looking girls in school seemed to have steady dates so it wouldn’t surprise me if Tillie had a steady. When I knocked on the door, Johnnie’s sister opened it and looked at me with some surprise which quickly turned to disappointment.

“Oh it’s you,” she said dismissively. “I’m expecting someone important to pick me up for a ride. I guess you want to see Johnnie?”

Obviously I wasn’t Mr. Important. Damn, I thought, she can’t have a boyfriend already. Not at her age? She was at least a couple years younger than me. But then maybe this somebody is just a family friend or relative.

“Hello Victor,” smiled Johnnie. “Come on in. I was just on the phone with John and I told him about you. He said if you want, you could play with us tomorrow at Evelyne School. What do you think?”

I was still in a muddle about his sister but I turned to Johnnie, “Are you serious? That would be really great! I can’t believe it.”

As the news sank in I even forgot about his sister for a moment. “I used to go to Evelyne School you know. It’s quite a ways from here. How do we get there?”

“You kidding! You went to Evelyne School? What a coincidence. Anyway, I can borrow a car and we can go together.”

“You drive a car!” Wow, I thought, I have a friend who plays guitar, drives a car and has a beautiful sister. Things are looking good.

“Can I come too, please, please?” exclaimed the sister.

“Maybe, but only if it’s okay with Mom. We can ask her when she comes home.”

He waved at me, “Let’s play.”

We picked up the guitars and played a few songs but I kept looking out the door to see if I could catch a glimpse of Johnnie’s sister. “What’s your sister’s name,” I asked trying to sound disinterested.

“Clare,” he said as he picked a tune. Clare, I thought. What a great name.

“Most of the stuff John plays will be pretty simple. Just keep an eye on my fingers if you get stuck.”

After we finished practicing some of the standard tunes Johnnie said, “I’ll pick you up tomorrow about 6:30. Make sure your guitar is tuned and bring along a couple extra strings and some picks. We’ll be making a lot of noise tomorrow.”

When I left I noticed with some satisfaction that Clare was still waiting for her somebody to come over.

"Goodbye Clare," I said emphasizing her name. She waved at me with one hand but kept her eyes on the window.

Next day I was all dressed up, had my guitar tuned and ready to go by 6 o'clock. I wore a white shirt and a light jacket in case the night cooled off. Most summer evenings were pretty warm but it could turn cool at night and we might play until midnight. I had spent some extra time adding Brylcreme to my hair to get the sides to mold back properly into a duck tail. You had to be careful though not to add too much of that stuff or it would leak slowly down your neck and stain your shirt and jacket.

"Kudy ty ydesh?" (Where you going?) Mom asked. I had already explained that I would be going to play at a dance at Evelyne School with John Bashutsky. She was quite surprised that I would actually play at a dance and even more surprised when I added that I would get paid some money. She knew the Baschutski family from our farm days so that was okay with her but I didn't bother telling her I would probably be pretty late. The door was never locked at night so I could get in anytime I got back without disturbing anyone. I heard the car horn sound so I quickly picked up my guitar to leave. "I'll be home pretty late," I called out and rushed off.

As I approached the car I noticed with some relief that Clare was sitting in the back seat.

"Hi," I said to both of them and sat in the front. Clare was wearing a white dress with black polka dots and some white ribbons in her hair. As I gathered my nerve to tell her how pretty she was, Johnnie punched me on the shoulder. "I'm afraid I have to baby sit again. My sister just had to tag along and spoil a good time but we can ignore her."

I mumbled something incoherent and turned to tell Clare how pretty she looked but all she did was stick out her tongue at both of us. "Oh shut up and don't worry about me. I'll look after myself."

What could I say? I couldn't be too nice to Clare in front of Johnnie. While I puzzled my situation Johnnie kept talking about one thing or another and driving the car rather recklessly over the gravel road. It was twelve miles (19 km) or so to Evelyne but before I knew it, we were there and Clare was the first one out of the car without so much as a glance at me. Oh well, I thought, maybe I can sit with her in the back on the way home and sneak in a kiss or two. I was starting to catch on to what my brother Ed must have meant when he told me that a car is important because it has a back seat.

As Johnnie and I tuned our guitars, John arrived with his family and came over to us. He nodded to Johnnie, "So this is the new guitar player. You must be Kasmer's younger brother."

"Yes, I moved to town a couple years ago and I'm going to high school there."

"I guess Wynyard School is a lot bigger than Evelyne," he replied with

a laugh as he got out his accordion.

"Yeah, I guess!" Then Johnnie asked, "What kind of crowd you think we'll get?"

"Should be good. At least I hope so anyway or we won't make any money. But the crops look good this year and the night is warm so there should be a lot of hopping and hollering when we get going."

By now a small crowd had gathered in the school and more cars were coming. The older ladies and children gathered on one side of the school and sat themselves down on a bench and some sturdy chairs. I looked for Clare and saw her with some younger girls gathered off to one side. The girls tried not to look directly at the group of young men clustered near the doorway who swaggered about and talked loudly to each other. The boys had no problem at all looking directly at the girls and nudging each others as they discussed the possibilities of the evening. When a new car arrived some of the men would walk out and there would be back slapping and greetings. Then they would gather around the trunk of the car and you could hear the sound of beer bottles being opened.

"It's a warm one tonight," I heard one of the boisterous men above the crowd. "I'll need a couple of these just to cool off."

A small group of farmers gathered in the evening shade and talked about the crops, cattle prices and the weather. A few sipped on a bottle of beer while others passed a bottle of rye whiskey around and grimaced as they took a hefty shot. "Man that's goes down good," one of them said to the others.

John had picked a corner for us to play in that had a small school desk on one side and a book shelf on the other. Johnnie picked the library side so I took the desk side.

"This looks like a good spot to play from," John said. "And if the Stotski's show up and get into a fight again this could be a good place to hide!" John flashed a huge grin at both of us and we all laughed. John was a bit shorter than me but he had a stocky build with a large expressive face. He had large farmers hands with scars and callouses rough hard work but he ran his fingers easily up and down the keyboard.

"The sun's going down so we better get to work," he said as he played a couple of scales and a loud chord on the accordion to get the attention of the crowd. He looked up and called out in a loud voice, "Waltz, in the key of G," and started playing.

As if on cue, the crowd was up on their feet and dancing. The waltz was easy to play, G to C to D – three chords and an easy one, two, three rhythm. I faced Johnnie so if any tune got a bit tricky, I could look at his fingers and follow. Sometimes we would call out the chords to each other and on the polkas we all stomped our feet. The floor bounce slightly as the crowd danced and the dust began to rise. Every once in a while someone would bring out a bucket and throw some cornmeal and a green compound on the floor to keep it

slick and hold the dust down. Most of the dances were in sets of three so when we finished a set we took a small break to rest our fingers while John decided on the next tunes. Meanwhile the crowd would drift away outside to cool off and there would be a lot of open trunks with a cluster of men standing around having a drink and talking.

"I hope the damn Mounties stay away," John said on one of our breaks. "They hear about these dances and sneak over to spoil the party. They don't come on the grounds, I think they know better, but they wait until people start leaving then catch them if they do anything wrong. I even heard someone tell me there are people out there trying to get the government to pass a law that would make drinking and driving illegal. Can you imagine anything so dumb!"

Johnnie and I looked at each other. As far as we knew it was fine to drink and drive as long as you didn't do both at the same time. I thought that drinking in a car was illegal anyway but what about drinking outside with your liquor in the trunk of a car? Everyone here seemed to be doing that quite openly – legal or not.

As we started another slow waltz I noticed that Clare was dancing very close to some guy who was whispering in her ear. They seemed to be having a very good time. Then, in the middle of the dance, they sneaked out the door! I looked at Johnnie with some concern but he was in his own world playing the guitar. I had to do something so when the set was over I nudged Johnnie, "Where's your sister?"

"Clare?" he said looking around, "I don't know. She said she could look after herself." With that he shrugged his shoulders and we started another set.

As we played a couple more sets my mind was unsettled. I kept looking at the crowd but I was really looking to see if Clare was back. I could see her in my mind's eye sitting in the back seat of a car smooching and drinking and then who knows what. I shook my head and tried to concentrate on the tune. I glanced at Johnnie and he gave me the eye and pointed his head. There she was. They were back on the dance floor snuggled up to each other again. The tune ended and John called out, "Last dance."

Everyone knew that the "last dance" was for your date, girlfriend or wife. This was the signal for everyone to sort out who was going home with whom. And there she was dancing with this guy right in front of me while I was standing there playing my stupid guitar. Surely Johnnie wouldn't let his young sister go home with a stranger, would he?

Finally, John finished the dance and said in a loud voice, "Good night and I hope you all had a good time." The crowd gave us a big hand and began drifting out the door.

We put away our instruments while John talked some business with

a couple men who were in charge of the dance. He came back looking pretty pleased and gave me and Johnnie a \$10 bill each. "Thank you boys; you did a very good job tonight." He turned to me and added, "That was nice guitar playing Victor. You have a very good sense of rhythm. If you want, we'll do this again." With that he bid us goodnight and left with his family.

As I picked up my guitar I noticed Clare and Johnnie were in a serious discussion by the door. Clare suddenly turned and left while Johnnie came back to get his guitar. He looked at me and said calmly, "Clare has a ride home. Let's get out of here and drink some beer."

Chapter Five

THE KISS

It was Saturday night on a pleasant summer evening. The sun had set but it was still light enough to see. The Ukrainian Hall was a block east of Main Street and there seemed to be a lot of cars parked there for a wedding dance. Al and I stopped at Sly's poolroom for a quick look since it was on the way. There wasn't much there for us just a few old timers playing golf. Golf was a pool game with two players per team. Each player chooses a colored ball as his shooter and the team picks a common ball to shoot at. The idea is for each team to take turns shooting to try and sink their ball into a designated pocket. However, the opponents try to do the same with their ball. When one team sinks their ball, they would count each shot until the other team gets their ball into the pocket. The points are recorded, then they would start all over again going for the next pocket. The team with most points loses. It was a game of finesse that could last a long time because each team would try and prevent the other side from sinking their ball by blocking – or hooking – their next shot. If you miss hitting your ball, there was a three point penalty. Golf was a very popular game with the older players. The younger guys however, preferred snooker where they could shoot hard and show off.

Al and I watched for a while then left. You could watch golf anytime but right now we were more interested in dancing with some girls. The wedding was in full swing. You could hear the hum of people talking and the band playing as we got closer to the door.

"The band sounds good, I wonder who's playing?" I asked.

"Maybe John Bashutsky and the Bodnarchuks since their farms are close together," replied Al.

"He's a damn good accordion player. I played with him a couple weeks ago at a dance in Evelyne."

"Yeah, you told me about that. And you made ten bucks. I still can't believe it," Al said shaking his head.

As we walked in we entered the exciting world of a Ukrainian wedding dance. A wedding in Wynyard was like a big home party except there were a lot more people and the room was much bigger. You didn't need an invitation to go to a wedding – you just went. Wedding invitations were formally sent out to announce the wedding to family and friends. However, no one ever checked at the door to see if you were invited or not. It was basically a public event and everyone was welcome.

The men were gathered in small groups talking loudly and sneaking outside for a drink while the women gathered in smaller groups to socialize and organize the food. The younger ones danced and flirted with each other while the kids ran around all over the place playing games and making their own noise.

Most weddings and dances on the farms were held in a granary or out in the open on a temporary plywood platform. At our farm, with nine older brothers and sisters, we had a lot of weddings and dances. My brothers would clean out one of the granaries and add a plywood deck at the entrance to give people more room to dance. The band usually played inside in case it rained but the people danced inside or out.

Inside the hall, music filled the air along with the buzz of a few hundred voices talking at once. Most of the music was not amplified although there were a couple microphones and speakers in the larger dance halls such as this one. The lead instrument was usually a violin or accordion and the player simply leaned into the microphone to be heard. Guitar players however usually had an electric guitar and amp which they carried with them. Somehow the sound was natural and balanced and you could easily talk to the people around you. Al and I made our way closer to the stage so we could get a good look at the players. The band was really going at it with a polka and the crowd was in full swing.

I poked Al, "Look at the floor bounce!"

"Yeah," he said looking at the crowd. "And I'm going to join them."

Al had spotted a pretty nice blonde walk in and he walked briskly to her. It didn't take them long to get on the dance floor. The polka was still in full swing and I could see Al and the blond in the middle of the crowd. Al was a pretty good dancer but then wasn't everyone around here? The dance finally ended and the couples drifted back to their friends. Dances were a family affair and the kids learned to dance early. Once you knew how to waltz, two-step and polka, you pretty well knew it all. The band started a waltz and the dust slowly settled. I spotted a pretty brown haired girl with a trim figure chatting with some friends and decided I should ask her for a dance.

"Can I have this dance?" I said to the pretty brown eyed girl.

"Sure, why not," she said easily and took my hand. What a beauty I thought. I held her a bit closer and the top of her head fit quite nicely on my chin. There was a gentle softness about her and she danced very well.

"Are you friends of the bride or groom?" I asked just to say something.

"No, Tillie and I just finished working at the restaurant in the pool-room so we thought we would drop by here for a while."

"You're Paul's daughter from Paul's Poolroom?" I was rather surprised.

"Yes, I'm Bernice and my younger sister is Tillie. She's over there talking to Al."

"I'm Victor. Al's a good friend of mine."

"Well aren't we all just a big happy family!" she said as she leaned back and gave me a look of mock surprise. As she looked at me with her large eyes and open mouth I felt the urge to give her a kiss. But I didn't. After all, we were just dancing. I wanted to say something clever and ask her for a date or something but my tongue was stuck so I just mumbled "Yeah" and tried to think. How can I ask her for a date? Where would we go? I have no money and no car to go anywhere. Besides we're at a wedding already so maybe we could just hang around here and dance, talk, have some food later and whatever. Suddenly the music was over so I walked her back to her friends and stood there awkwardly wondering what to do next as the girls looked me over.

"Well thanks for the dance," I said lamely looking at the floor and quickly left.

What a fool I thought as I made my way back to the corner near the stage; at least I should have talked to her a bit. Maybe I could have asked to walk her home but that wasn't too smart since I just met her. Besides, she was with Tillie, her younger sister. Her younger sister I thought. That means Bernice must be older than me and no doubt she has an older boyfriend who has a car and they go on real dates. There's no way she's going to go on a date with someone like me. I looked around for Al and saw him in the donation line with Tillie. Bernice was still sitting and talking with her friends and they all seemed to be having a pretty good time. From a distance, I took a long look at her. She's a natural beauty, all dolled up with make-up and nice jewelry. She is not flashy to stand out in a crowd but yet very pleasing to the eye. Once in a while I could hear her laugh as the girls talked. I should have stayed there and made small talk and told a few jokes or something but it was too late to do that now. I stood by myself for a while just looking at her and wondering what to do. Then, I left quietly out the side door of the hall which was open to let in the fresh evening breeze.

It was hard to get to sleep. My mind was fixed on the brown eyed girl called Bernice. What a nice name I thought, it rolls off the tongue. Victor and Bernice – sounds like a nice couple. Her image was firmly planted in my mind as I tossed and turned in the bed. Good thing Leo was still out so I had the whole bed to myself for now. Looks like I will be spending a lot more time at Paul's poolroom I decided as I gradually drifted off to sleep.

I was up earlier than usual the next morning eager for the day to begin. Mom had already cooked some porridge on the wood stove and left it on the side to stay warm. During the summer, Mom only used the stove on cooler days or early in the morning so it would cool off before the heat of the day.

"You're early today," she said as I got my porridge and milk. Dad looked up from his paper as I sat across from him at the table. He was smoking as usual and reading a Polish newspaper which he had mailed to him each week. Dad read his paper from end to end over the week and would sometimes tell

us about some of the more interesting world events.

"Look," he said in Ukrainian showing me a picture of the world from space on the front page of the paper. It seemed odd to me that Dad barely went to school yet he was able to read the Polish paper from end to end and seemed to know a lot about world events. Also, he spoke Ukrainian most of the time but only read the Polish papers. I should ask him about that sometime.

"They say here that this is a picture of the earth taken by the Russians from space but that can't be true because the world is flat not round," he said.

I stopped eating and looked at him curiously. I never really argued with my Dad about anything. Come to think of it, we never talked much either.

"The Russians sent Sputnik into space so they must have taken that picture when it was circling the world," I replied. "That shows that the Earth is round not flat. Why do you think it's flat?"

"Well if it was round we would all fall off, that's why," he explained and picked up an orange from the table. "See, anyone on the bottom of this orange would fall off."

I looked at the orange and thought that he had a pretty good point. Anyone on the bottom of the world would be standing upside down and should fall off.

"But if the world is flat, how come it turns and we have morning and night?"

He took the bottle of milk on the table and began turning it slowly.

"Look, the jug is turning like the sky but the milk remains still and flat inside like the earth. The world doesn't turn. The sun and the stars turn. Kopernik may be a famous Polish scientist but he was wrong."

Kopernik must be Polish for Copernicus the famous Polish astronomer I thought. Everyone knows the world is round but he had me stuck for words. My God, I thought, there's no way he can be right. Yet, what he said did make sense. Or, was he just pulling my leg?

"I don't think the world is like that," I said firmly as I resumed eating. "The picture in the paper shows you that the world is round not flat."

"Sure," he said raising his eyebrows. "That's what the government wants you to believe."

With that he returned to his paper. I shook my head and said, "Why would the government lie like that? And besides, if the world was flat people would fall off the ends wouldn't they?"

"Why would anyone go to the end of the world just to fall off?" he countered then folded the paper and went to his bedroom.

I looked at Mom rather bewildered, "What do you think?"

"Sho ya znayoo (what do I know)?" she said in Ukrainian and started cleaning up the dishes.

I waited until the late afternoon before I went to the poolroom. After my strange discussion with Dad I settled in my favorite spot on the couch and

finished reading one of the endless series of Hardy Boys books. It was hard to concentrate on my reading with Dad's ideas about people falling off the earth mixed with the picture of Bernice in my mind. When I was done, I grabbed a cold baloney sandwich and a glass of milk for lunch and told Mom I needed to go to the library to return a book. As I ate my sandwich I found myself taking a second look at the bottle of milk and wondered at the cleverness of Dad's explanation.

When I entered the poolroom my heart began to pound as I noticed that Bernice was working. She was busy getting things organized behind the counter while her Mom stood over the grill cooking one of her famous hamburgers.

"Hello Bernice," I said loudly to get her attention.

She turned with a surprised look, "Victor. I remember you from last night at the wedding dance. Where did you go? We all stayed for donations and had a couple drinks and some really good food."

"Oh, I guess I just went home early. It looked like Al was going to stay with Tillie so I left."

"That's too bad because all of us went over to Doreen's place for a while before we went home."

I looked puzzled so she added, "Doreen Wolitski is a friend of mine from the farm near Wishart. Her parents bought a house in Wynyard so their kids could go to school here. It turns out the house is just across the street from the Ukrainian Hall so we all went over there to see the place."

"Oh, did Al go there too?"

"Yes and that Al of yours seems to be pretty keen about Tillie," she said raising her eyebrows.

As Stella walked by carrying a hamburger to one of the booths she nodded at me, "Hello Victor. I see you know my daughter. Now she knows three Victors!"

I looked puzzled at Bernice so she shrugged her shoulders. "Yes, there's Victor Derinfeld from town, my boyfriend Victor Ukrainez from Tuffnel and now you. That's three Victors and one Bernice, whatever that means."

While I stood there stuck for words she looked away. "Well, it's getting pretty busy so I better get to work."

Three Victors I thought. Derinfeld I knew from high school. He was really smart and probably rich because his Dad owned a store in town. I was on the Yearbook Committee last year with him. I was the grade nine class rep while he was the big editor in charge from the grade twelve class. Nice guy from what I could remember but I think he graduated already so he's probably gone. Ukrainetz however, is from out of town so he must be old enough to drive a car. Then there's me, still two years away from even getting a driver's license never mind getting a car. Just as I figured, Bernice was going out with

older boys.

"Derinfeld is going to be a dentist and you know how rich dentists are," Stella added giving Bernice a knowing look as she wiped the counter. Bernice turned around, made a sour face in her direction and said firmly, "Not a chance."

That, at least, made me feel a little bit better so I waved a weak goodbye and went into the poolroom. As I watched some players shoot a close game of golf I thought of Bernice. She actually seemed interested in me. I should have stayed and gone to Doreen's house with them. It was my big chance to spend some time with her and I blew it. Oh well, no point in worrying about it. I got up to go home for dinner. On my way out I sat at the counter and Bernice came over. "Want anything?"

"Sure," I lied, "I'll have a coke." I didn't really want one but I knew that Stella didn't like to see anyone sitting at the counter unless they ordered something.

"How long you working today?" I asked just to make conversation.

"Til about six. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know," I said honestly. "Maybe I could wait and walk you home?"

"Well that would be fine except that I brought our car here so I'm going to drive home."

Drive home! You mean she drives a car already? Hell, that means she's sixteen!

"Then maybe you could drive me home," I said with a laugh without thinking.

"Sure, I'll be ready in a while."

I could not believe my luck. Bernice was going to drive me home! This was almost like a date. Sure, I'm supposed to be the one driving her home but, at least we'll be together in a car for a while going for a ride. Does it really matter who's driving? And, so what if she's a bit older. Why should that be a big deal?

We got into her parents' car and Bernice started driving me home. I told her to turn right on Avenue B to my place. I was hoping the trip would be longer but what could I do. I was thinking of saying something to break the silence when she turned to me.

"I'll be leaving Wynyard in the fall and going to finish my high school in Yorkton."

I was stunned. "What! How come? When did this happen?"

"Oh, Dad is quite old fashioned and he thinks I should go to Sacred Heart Academy, a private residential Catholic school in Yorkton, so that's that. Maybe he figures I might get in trouble here like some of the girls in high school last year," she added turning to look at me and arching her eyebrows. All the Wasylenko girls seemed to have that same cute knowing smile when they

wanted to make a point.

Yes, I thought, there were a few quick marriages last year that caused a bit of a scandal. Much to my regret, one of those who got married suddenly was my neighbour who was very cute and only a year older than me.

"I was really hoping to see you at school and the poolroom next year and all of a sudden – you're leaving," I said shaking my head.

"Oh, I will be back on holidays and some weekends. Yorkton is only eighty miles (128 km) away you know. Mom and Dad could use the help on the week-ends."

By now we were stopped in the alley behind my house and the car was running so I had to go. I have to kiss her I thought, I may never get this chance again, especially now that she is leaving for Yorkton. But, how do you kiss a girl when she's sitting at the wheel looking straight ahead with the motor running? Besides, on top of everything else, I had chapped lips. Yes, of all the times to have chapped lips! How can I kiss anyone with chapped lips? The hell with it I thought, I wet my lips thoroughly with my tongue and leaned over to her. To my great surprise, she turned a bit towards me. I kissed her lightly on the lips and quickly left. What a fool I thought as I waved goodbye and walked to the house. I steal a kiss with chapped lips – I doubt she will let me do that again.

For the rest of the week I buried myself in books and spent a lot of time with Eddie Gudmundson to keep from going to the poolroom. Eddie was always tinkering around with his Model A and I would hang around and watch.

"We're going to get this baby working yet." Eddie would say. "Then, when I get my license to drive we'll have a car." That sure sounded pretty good to me.

Then one afternoon, Al came by to see me. I was reading a book in my favourite spot on the couch when the door opened.

"Hi Vic, how you doing?"

"Al, good to see you. It's been a while."

"Yeah, Mom and Dad are in town for some shopping so I thought I would drop by and see you."

"Well great, we should play." I led him upstairs to my room. "Leo's working or doing something so we can use his guitar."

It was good to pick and play with Al. We sang our best songs, picked a few tunes and talked about stuff. When we were pretty well done, we put away the guitars and began to chat.

"Oh yeah," I said, "I heard you and a bunch of girls went to a party after the wedding last week."

"Sure did but where did you go? I was dancing and talking to Tillie then I looked around and you were gone. Did you go home?"

"Yes I figured I should since it looked like you and Tillie were going to

stick together like you were on a date or something.”

“Well we didn’t do much either but everyone decided to go to Doreen’s to see her house which is pretty close by. We took a look at her place and sat around for a while then everyone went home. Oh yes, Doreen invited us all to come over on Saturday for a party and they want us to come and bring our guitars.”

My ears perked up, “That sounds great. Do you think the Wasylenko girls will be there?”

“I’m pretty sure they said they would come. How about if I get Clarence to borrow a car and pick you up. We’ll take both guitars and Clarence can do some singing with us.”

“It’s a deal,” I was pretty excited about the whole idea. “That should be fun. And don’t forget to ask Clarence to pick up a case of beer. We can’t have a big party like that without some beer. Of course, we’ll have to come up with some money because Clarence won’t have any. I have a dollar, how about you?”

“I’ll chip in. If we get a case of beer then Clarence will be sure to come.”

Wow, I thought, I’m going to a party with Bernice – kind of. I just hope she doesn’t bring one of her boyfriends. After Al left, I got back to my favourite spot on the couch and picked up a book but it was hard to concentrate on reading. What was it about that girl that gets me all excited? She has a very nice way about her. Her smile was warm and inviting and when we danced, I could feel her tiny waist. Her hair was a golden brown and complemented her eyes. She spoke softly and had a good sense of humour. When we danced, she felt tiny and light on her feet. I had to restrain myself from giving her a really big hug.

By Saturday evening, I was eager and ready to go. I wore my best shirt and pants and even shined my shoes like they taught me in Air Cadets. The Air Cadets provided us with a complete uniform but we had to get our own black shoes and they had to be polished like a mirror. They even showed us how to do it. You took a cloth and some shoe polish and worked it in with a circular motion then take a clean cloth, spit on the shoes and wipe them hard to get a brilliant shine. Spit and polish they called it and it sure worked.

Since the evening was calm and warm, I took the guitars outside on the porch and waited for Al. Leo was not happy to lend me his guitar but I promised to polish two pairs of shoes for him so he agreed. As I sat there waiting I wondered why Leo was so careful about his guitar since he rarely played it. In fact, I wondered why he even bought it?

He loved to play and sing but for some reason he tended to skip a beat and that would throw us off. He was a decent singer but it was hard to play with him so Al and I tried to make sure we did the guitar playing and just let him sing. The guitar is basically a rhythm instrument like drums or a bass so you need a good sense of rhythm to play it properly. You can always learn new

chords but how do you learn to keep rhythm? It was a puzzle and I had no answer.

Suddenly I heard a car pull up on the side of the house in a cloud of dust. That was one thing about living right on a major street – you had to live with dust from all the cars that went by.

“All right,” I said as I put the guitars in the trunk of the car. “I see you got some beer.”

“You bet,” Clarence replied with his usual smile. “Let’s party.”

When we got to Doreen’s house, there were lots of people there milling about, talking and having some drinks.

“Hey, it looks like we got some music. Vic and Al brought their guitars,” Gary Johnson called out. Gary was one of Leo’s good friends and class mate. There were a couple others from our class but most of the crowd was from the Woltiski side and I didn’t know them. However, to my relief, Tillie and Bernice were there in the middle of a bunch of girls.

“Let’s have a beer,” Clarence said as he put a cold one in my hand. We clinked bottles and he added, “Bottoms up”. So we downed our beer, burped and slapped each others on the back like real buddies.

“Hey, there’s Al already schmoozing up to Tillie. Better get him a beer before we drink it all.”

We made our way to Al and gave him a beer.

“You’re one behind already,” Clarence noted with a wink. “So you better catch up.”

“Hi Bernice,” I said looking into her beautiful brown eyes. “It sure is nice to see you again.”

“Nice to see you too,” she said sweetly. “I hear you and Al will do some singing. I love music so I can’t wait.”

“Well, in that case, we better get ready to play. You ready?” I asked Al.

“Let’s get ‘er goin!” he replied and we walked over to our guitars.

As we got the guitars out and began to tune them up, the crowd got quieter and gathered in a semi-circle.

“Do the Everly Brothers,” someone yelled out. “You guys sound just like them.”

I looked at Al and he nodded. I did a quick three note riff that starts the song then we both hit the A chord and sang in harmony, “Bye Bye Love”, then another guitar riff, pum, pum, pum, pum, “Bye Bye Happiness” and just like that we were into the song. Jaws dropped and people nudged each other pointing at us and nodding their heads. There was no doubt we were an unexpected hit and everyone clapped and cheered as we play a couple more songs. When we sang “Dream, Dream, Dream” I made a point of looking directly at Bernice in the crowd and noticed she was singing along with us and swaying to the music. She even gave me a small wink which made me blush. It was a

wonderful feeling to see her and everyone else enjoying the music.

After playing most of the songs we knew, I put down my guitar. "I guess that's about all. Besides, I could use another beer."

"No, no, you guys keep playing and I'll get you a beer," piped up one of the guys I didn't even know. Sure enough, just like that we had a fresh beer in front of us and I thought this is pretty neat – to have a stranger bring me a beer for free. So we felt obliged to sing some more. Then we got Clarence to do a few songs and played along while a couple others tried to sing some of their favourite songs.

Finally, Al stood up and announced firmly, "That's it for me, my fingers hurt." So we put our guitars away and graciously accepted the thanks and complements from friends and strangers.

"You guys sure know how to put on a party. You'll be invited to a lot of parties after this," Gary stated emphatically as he patted us on the back.

We sat back for a while and sipped our beer while the girls began to make a big circle on the floor.

"Come on you guys, we're going to play spin the bottle so join us," Doreen called out. Doreen was a tiny girl but she had a large voice. The guys all looked at each other and smiled. "Okay, let's play." Who wouldn't? It was a chance to kiss a bunch of good looking girls without getting slapped. All the guys mixed in with the girls into a large circle that filled the room and someone put an empty beer bottle in the middle then said, "It's her place so Doreen should start."

Doreen spun the bottle and it pointed at a girl on her left. She looked past her, pointed to the first guy nearest to her and said, "I guess it's you."

Everyone clapped and made snide remarks as she got up and walked over to the guy and slowly kissed him. Now he took the bottle and made it spin to kiss the next girl and on went the game. Needless to say I was hoping against hope that I would get a chance to kiss Bernice. This time it would be a real kiss I thought and no chapped lips like last time. However, I had no such luck although I did get a chance to kiss Tillie once and a couple of other nice looking girls.

The game finally ended, the beer was gone and it was getting late so we knew the party was over. Some of the girls were concerned because it was dark and they had stayed too late. They began looking for a ride home.

"Tillie and Bernice can come with us," Al offered. "We should drive them home."

"By all means," I replied happy at the thought of driving Bernice home.

"Tillie also asked a couple her friends to come with us," he added. "I guess they live close to their house so we can pack the car for a short ride." Clarence was partly drunk so he didn't care how many girls we had to take home.

We put the guitars in the trunk and everyone began to pile in. There

was room for three in the front but there were at least five or six in the back seat. When I finally got all the girls seated in the back the only room left was on Al's lap so I squeezed in while he laughed and poked me in a few intimate places. I turned and gave him a mock punch and told him to behave. Then I noticed to my surprise that Bernice was sitting right beside us. I looked at her for a long time as the car slowly made its way to the first house. The car was dark and for some reason I leaned over towards her while she raised her head and we kissed. It was a long and wonderful kiss exaggerated by the slow gentle motion of the car. I was hoping it would never end.

"We're here," someone called out, breaking the spell. Two girls piled out of the back seat and went home so I could move from Al's lap and find my own seat very close to Bernice. I put my arm around her and we snuggled together for a short time then Tillie called out, "Here we are Bernice, time to get out."

I helped Bernice get out of the car and took as much time as possible saying good night. Just before she left she whispered in my ear, "I had a great time tonight." And with that, she gave me a kiss and melted into the night.

Chapter Six

LAKE TROUBLE

Before he came to Canada, Dad was a soldier in World War I. He rarely talked about it or his life before coming to Canada. However, as he got older, once in a while, he would tell us stories about his war years. Being a peasant soldier with virtually no formal schooling, he was not too clear on how he fit into the big picture of the world wide war which started in 1914. He knew that he was with the Polish army and that he only fought in a couple battles at the start of the war before he was captured and sent to a prisoner of war camp.

"I was with the mounted rifles," he told us one leisurely Sunday afternoon. We were all gathered in a semi-circle around his chair in the living room as he started his stories. Leo, Ed and some of his friends who happened to be visiting nearly filled our small living room.

"When we charged at the enemy, we learned to fire our guns with one arm and control the horse with the other. We also learned to control the horse with our legs in case we needed to use both hands to fire and reload."

There was a murmur or amazement among us as we contemplated the image of a soldier charging on a horse and firing a rifle. How could you hit anything? I wondered but didn't ask.

"How old were you when you joined the army?" Leo inquired.

"I lied about my age and they didn't ask too many questions I guess. I was about fifteen. They needed troops and most of us were more than happy to join since we had nothing much to do at home. Most of us were poor farm kids and the army gave you food, clothing and even some money so we were happy to join."

"What about your parents?" David interjected. David Kwasney was one of Ed's friends.

"I guess they thought the army would be good training for their sons. They didn't try to stop us."

"We were young and looking for adventure." He paused, "We soon learned it was no fun. In our second big battle, we were all lined up on our horses with our rifles ready to fire. There were over a hundred of us in three rows ready to charge across an open field at the enemy hidden in the bush at the other end. We could see some soldiers running about and calling out orders but their numbers seemed small so we were not too worried. Our orders were to charge across the field and clear the enemy from the bush. That would open the way for the infantry to advance safely behind us to the front."

"We had an officer in front with his sword drawn. When all was ready, he spurred his horse and yelled 'charge!' We all followed him and pretty soon the whole battalion was galloping at full speed. It was something to see. For a while I almost felt sorry for the enemy facing this fearsome charge. Then, as we got about two hundred yards from the bush, we could see what looked like hundreds fire crackers sparking and exploding from maybe five or six different places in the bush. But they weren't fire crackers – they were machine guns!"

There was a deathly silence in the room as Dad paused and rolled a cigarette. "I could hear bullets fly past me and hit the men and horses. In less than a minute we were cut down like wheat. All the horses and men fell in piles – one on top of the other. I was in the second row so I saw all this happen and tried to stop but it was too late. Once the first row went down, the second and third rows did the same."

He paused again and lit his cigarette. "My horse was killed and I was thrown into a pile of bodies. That probably saved my life. Then, there was silence. I was stunned from my fall but I got up slowly and wiped away some blood while checking for wounds. I looked around and there were maybe a dozen or so others trying to do the same while the rest lay dead or dying. A small number of enemy soldiers came out of the bush with guns pointed at us. They gathered the survivors into a group and marched us away and that was it. We became prisoners of war."

"So what happened after that?" I asked.

"I was a prisoner. There were thousands of us after that big battle. They broke us up into smaller groups and made us walk for weeks and months to different prison camps. Walking was not bad but food was always a problem. Sometimes we could find food in the countryside but the officers were too proud to steal. Once a group of us got a couple of chickens, vegetables and some fresh bread from a farmer and we made a nice stew. We noticed some officers watching and we could tell they had nothing to eat so we waved them over and they came running. We all had a very good meal together." Dad smiled a bit at that story.

While he sat back and smoked his cigarette, Ed looked at Mom, "Where were you during the war?"

"I was at home with the family. The boys all went to war but the girls stayed home and worked hard to keep the family going. You still had to look after the garden and do the farm work to get food. In the middle of it all, we had to deal with the war. First the Germans came through then six months later the Russians pushed the Germans back and they took over. I guess we were in between two big armies so this happened a few times during the war."

"Which army treated you better?" Leo asked. Good question I thought.

"The Russians were much better to us. They were more like our own people and spoke our language but the Germans were mean and had no respect."

As she talked, I remembered that Mom often referred to “Franz Joseph” with respect whenever she happened to mention him when she talked about the old country. She would say that his picture was everywhere and they all admired him. I didn’t know much about the war but I thought that Germany and Austria-Hungary were fighting together against Russia. Yet, here she was telling us that the Russians treated them better than the Germans! Maybe someday I’ll figure this out but meanwhile Mom started telling us a few other things about her life in the old country.

“Franz Joseph was a good man but we hated the rich “Pons”, the owners of the estates, who ruled over the peasants and generally treated us badly. Some were worse than others. For example, we would work for them in the fall picking fruit from their orchards. We worked like slaves all day for very little while they watched us like hawks to make sure we didn’t eat any of the fruit. Imagine, picking fruit all day and not being able to even taste it! Sometimes we were so hungry that we stole some anyway and ate it quickly. Then, as we walked home at night, we sometimes tried to pick the fruit that grew over the fence and on to the road. But even there, the Pons and their henchmen would chase us with sticks and we would have to run for our lives.”

She paused so we turned back to Dad. “What happened after the war?” someone asked.

“We all went back home but then the fighting started all over again. Only this time we had to fight for our own country.”

“You mean Poland?” Gus asked. Gus Madey was Polish and one of Ed’s good friends.

“Yes, Poland. I guess we just followed our generals. Our general was Polish and so were most of the troops so after we got home we formed a new army to defend Poland. Like us, the Ukrainians also wanted to create a country for themselves. That was fair enough, but they tried to take some of our land so we had to fight them. We also had to watch out for some of our other neighbors like the Russians, Hungarians and Romanians who tried to do the same.”

“Poland was a great country until the Russians, Austrians and Prussians took it apart piece by piece in the late 1700’s. The boundaries changed over time but the land was still the same and we continued to live as Polish people. After the big Peace Treaty in 1919, Poland officially became an independent nation again and it still is. However the Ukrainians were not so lucky. They ended up being taken over by the Russians and became part of the Soviet Union. So after all that fighting they ended up without an independent country just like they were before the war.”

It all seemed quite confusing to me but I began to understand why some older Poles and Ukrainians felt a bit snooty about each other. They no doubt remembered fighting over the border between the two countries. Of course they also spoke a very different language. Ukrainians used the Cyrillic alphabet which came from the Greeks and their churches had rounded tops like the

Russians. Poles used the Latin alphabet same as the English and our churches looked like many other European churches. However, there was never any real friction between the two groups in Wynyard and as for the kids; we couldn't tell one from another, so we all got along. Ukrainian, Polish, English or Icelandic, it made no difference to us.

Suddenly, there was a loud knock on the door and a voice called out, "Hey everybody, come see my boat."

It was Joe Borowski, my brother-in-law standing in the open door waving at us to come outside and see his boat. We dropped everything and went out to see a new sleek looking power boat with a big motor attached to the back.

"Bozeh, Bozeh," (God, God) Mom said as she slowly walked around the boat.

"Shcoh vy doomiesh!" (What were you thinking) she continued as we all stood in awe. A boat like this was for rich people and even they might think twice before buying something like that just to go fishing. And we all knew Joe was not rich. In fact, he and my sister Jean lived right across the street from us with their family in a tiny house that even made our humble home look large.

Joe had married my sister Jean when I was very young. The Borowskis were Polish immigrants who settled on a farm near the small hamlet of Wis-hart. They were a large family and Mom once told us that their father reminded her of a "Pon" from the old country who never got his hands dirty doing farm work.

"Maybe he thinks he's like those rich landowners in the old country - just giving orders to everyone else to do the work." I guess she was trying to make the point to us that Dad was never like that. Mom and Dad worked hard from sunrise to sunset and expected the kids to do the same.

Joe was one of several sons and he left the farm as soon as he could. He drifted about doing one job after another. Somewhere along the way he courted Jean and asked to marry her. My sister Jean asked Dad for advice and he told her, "Joe is a good man and a good man is hard to find."

It was hard to figure out how he reached that conclusion since Joe had no land of his own or even a steady job. Maybe he thought highly of Joe because he was Polish, or because he was a good looking guy and a smooth talker. Joe was handsome and always smiling. He was well built with deep blue eyes, an angular forehead and blonde hair with some gentle curls. Jean seemed pretty happy to marry him so we had a really good three day wedding at our farm. Then, a couple weeks later we did it all over again at the Borowski farm.

"I'm taking the boat to the lake and try it out," Joe said. "You boys want to come along?"

"Sure," we all yelled out.

"I'll take Leo and Victor today and we can take the others next time."

So with that, Leo and I quickly got into our swimming trunks and

jumped in the car. Wynyard was quite close to Quill Lake and there was a good road that led right up to the beach. The lake was huge but not good for anything. Some people claimed that in the 1920's Quill Lake was a popular place with cabins, good beaches and plenty of people. But that was when the lake water was fresh enough for fishing and swimming. Sometime during the drought of the 1930's much of the water evaporated leaving the alkali behind to become a salt water lake. That was really too bad because there was not much you could do at the lake except drive out there and look at it. That is, for everyone except Joe who thought a lake is a lake so why not use it?

We drove the boat on to the beach and backed it into the water. Leo and I waded out and helped push it off the trailer then we jumped into the boat. The water was brackish and you could see and feel the salt forming on our skin as the water dried off. It also tasted awful, but it was great for swimming. I didn't know how to swim properly but I found I could float along pretty easily in this water.

"Hey Leo," I yelled. "Look at this." I had slipped out of the boat and lay flat on my back floating on the water. Leo thought that was pretty neat so he tried it.

Meanwhile, Joe fiddled with the boat and motor until he was satisfied all was ready then he called out, "Get in boys and hang on, I'm going to let her rip."

With that he started the motor and we bounced and jumped over the waves. "This is the first time I took this boat out," he shouted over the noise of the engine.

"It's great!" we shouted back and gave him the thumbs up. Then Joe started showing off by swerving the boat from side to side and turning it hard so he could bounce over the wake. It was great fun until the engine fell off. The boat was running like a clock then suddenly there was nothing but silence! We were all stunned, especially Joe.

"My motor is gone! How the hell did that happen? Quickly boys, grab a paddle and start getting this boat back to land or we'll all drown."

As Leo and I paddled the boat, Joe directed us to go over the spot where he thought the motor fell off. We paddled around for a long time trying to see any traces of oil from the motor but no luck. Then Joe jumped into the water and dove down to see if he could find the motor. After a few attempts he gave up and got back on the boat.

"It's no use," he said shaking the water from his hair. "The water must be thirty feet over here. Let's get back to town and I'll see if I can get a diver to come out and find the motor."

With that, we paddled to shore and made the long sad journey home.

"That's an amazing story," observed Eddie Gudmundson a couple days later when I told him about Joe losing his motor. "Did they find the motor?"

"No he got a diver who looked all over but I guess the water is pretty dark and deep in places so they gave up. Now, Joe has a boat without a motor."

"A motor shouldn't fall off if it's attached properly with a safety chain."

I looked at Eddie, "A safety chain? You mean to tie the engine to the boat? I wonder if Joe knew about that?"

We fell silent for a bit then Eddie looked at me, "Speaking of lakes, have you ever been down to Little Quill yet?"

"No. Isn't it straight north of here?"

"Sure is, right there," he pointed north. "And it's not that far, I've gone there with my bike. Little Quill lake is the same as the big lake just smaller and connected by a little creek. I have a cousin who has a farm right on the lake so we just go through his land and there you are. We should go."

"Why not, I have nothing to do today. Let's go!" I said rather impulsively. This sure sounded like fun.

"Okay. Get some grub for lunch and meet me over at the Howitts. I'm sure they would like to come." Eddie took off down the alley to his place.

Within a half an hour we were on the road with our bikes. Mervin and Alan were more than happy to join us. We took the grid road straight North across the railway tracks towards the lake and when that ran out we cut across a couple fields until we finally hit the beach. The beach was completely empty so we walked around for a bit then sat down and ate our lunch. After lunch we wandered along the beach and tossed some stones into the water.

"Hey, look what I found!" Eddie shouted. He was standing near some bushes and waving his hand for us to come over. We ran over to him and there was an old boat sitting there.

"This boat probably belongs to my cousin or someone here who likes to go for a boat ride once in a while. It looks in pretty good shape and even has paddles," Eddie noted.

We all looked at each other knowingly and shouted, "Yes!"

It was pretty easy to carry the little boat to the water and just like that we were paddling into the waves. It was easy going because there was a strong southwest wind from behind pushing us offshore. It took no time at all to get a couple hundred yards from shore. We stopped rowing and sat in the boat enjoying our luck as the boat rocked back and forth along the choppy waves.

"You can see a lot of white caps on the water," Eddie said, looking around. Then he sounded a bit worried, "You know guys, the way the wind is picking up I think we should start getting back closer to land or we'll end up in Keroki on the other side of the lake."

With that Eddie and Mervin picked up the oars and started rowing back to shore.

"Damn, that wind is pretty strong now and it's pushing us away from shore. You can barely see where we started," Eddie was getting quite concerned.

"I think we'll have to row harder and take turns if we're going to make it back."

We all looked at each other trying not to panic but it was clear we could be getting ourselves into some big trouble. Then we noticed that Alan was throwing up over the side of the boat. This was getting serious.

"Seasick," Eddie told us after a quick look. "We better get him back to shore soon as we can."

With that, Eddie and Mervin started to row as hard as they could. Suddenly there was a loud snap as Mervin's oar broke in two. He held the broken oar in his hand and looked stunned.

"It broke in my hands just like that! One minute I was pulling hard then nothing."

I looked at Eddie and I could see the worry on his face. "We're in big trouble now," he said grimly.

"How the hell are we going to row with one oar?" I asked.

As we thought about that, I suddenly felt nauseated. Watching Alan throw up made me feel sick. I lay back and tried to hold on but the boat kept rocking back and forth on the waves. I had to puke so I leaned over the side and let go. My lunch came up as a gooey mess and floated away on the water.

"Great," said Eddie. "Now both of them are seasick. I guess it's up to us now. We'll take turns on the good oar. I'll do one stroke with the good ore and you do two with the broken one."

Eddie and Mervin worked hard but the boat seemed to stand still against the wind. Alan and I were lying helpless in the boat and it looked like we weren't getting any closer to land. Suddenly Mervin quit rowing and leaned over the boat and started throwing up; now three of us were sick.

Eddie took over both oars while the three of us lay in the boat. He kept rowing – once with the big oar then two times with the broken one fighting to keep the boat heading towards shore. How come he doesn't get sick I wondered as I watched him row? He worked like a horse for about half an hour while we lay helpless. Then Alan and I gradually started feeling a bit better. Finally, I was able to take a turn on the oars. "I'll take it now. You better take a break."

I took the oars from Eddie and noticed there was blood on the handle. I looked at him in awe and just shook my head. "You must be a real Viking or something you Icelander."

Thanks to Eddie we had held our distance from shore although we were now a long way east. As Alan got better he joined me on the oars. I gave him the broken one. "I think the wind is dying down," Eddie called out. Sure enough, as the sun started to set, the wind gradually died down and we were able to make some real progress towards land.

"It will be dark in a while and I wonder where the hell we are." Eddie searched the shoreline for any kind of landmark. By the time we reached shore it was dusk. Our legs were unsteady for a while until we got used to land again.

We looked around to get our bearings then Eddie pointed west to the

setting sun. "We'll head that way and try to find a farm and get someone to pick us up."

"What about our bikes?" asked Mervin.

Eddie looked at him sternly, "Screw the bikes. We'll come back for them tomorrow."

With that we entered the bush and now it was quite dark. We had to be careful. We continued blindly through the bush for about an hour then we came upon a dirt road.

"Great!" Eddie exclaimed as we gathered on the road. "At least we can make some good time now."

"Yeah," I replied. "But which way do we go?"

"It doesn't really matter. We should hit a farm either way." That was good enough for us so we followed him.

Sure enough, within a short time we saw a dim light from a farm house. We were tired, bruised and hungry but at least we had survived. Eddie knocked on the farm house door and a man came out cautiously and looked at us. "Who the hell are you kids and what are you doing out here at night?"

"Eddie Gudmundson and some friends," Eddie replied calmly. Then he looked closer at the old man, "Are you Toti Johannesson?"

The man looked back at Eddie. "Gudmundson did you say?"

There was an excited chatter in Icelandic from inside the house as a couple ladies walked up and grabbed Eddie by the arm and led him inside. They said a few words to each other in Icelandic and then went back to the kitchen.

Eddie gave me a nudge and said very quietly, "Looks like they are going to make us sandwiches."

I nodded. I knew Eddie could speak Icelandic. Toti collected himself and asked Eddie, "You remember Gudrun and our daughter Emily?"

Eddie nodded, "Yes, I think we met once or twice." Then he pointed to us, "these are my friends from Wynyard, Victor, Alan and Mervin."

"Well come on in all of you for goodness sakes. You look tired and hungry," Toti said and escorted us inside.

We came in and found a seat. The house was small but comfortable with all kinds of pictures and ornaments cluttered about. Like most Icelandic men, Toti was tall and lean with blond hair and very light skin.

While the ladies made sandwiches, Eddie began his story. Toti puffed on his pipe and listened politely. Occasionally he would lean forward and shake his head. When Eddie finished, he asked, "Where did you get a boat to go out on the water?"

"We found one on the shore," Eddie replied sheepishly.

"You mean you stole one from the shore, don't you? That boat belongs to Bertal Gillis. I'll have to go out to the beach tomorrow and find it". There was a long awkward pause, then he looked directly at us and added, "I hope you boys

learned a lesson today.”

With that, he leaned back in his chair and drew a couple large puffs on his pipe. We all nodded our heads and murmured, “Yeah, we sure did.”

Then Eddie asked if he could use the phone to call home and tell his parents we were okay. Meanwhile the ladies had whipped up a bunch of sandwiches and told us to come over to the kitchen and eat. We were all starved but polite enough to eat slowly.

“I suppose you will need a ride home,” Toti said to Eddie when he finished his call and joined us at the table.

“No thanks. There’s no need for that. My Dad is on the way to get us.”

“Well okay then but you know I wouldn’t mind. I haven’t seen your Dad for a while now so it will be nice to see him.” Then he smiled a bit and added, “Although I don’t think this will be a good time for a visit.”

We all nodded and looked at the floor.

I didn’t bother telling Mom and Dad about our big lake adventure. By the time I got home it was very late and they were both asleep. Next morning, I told them I was with Eddie and a bunch of friends and we simply forgot about the time. They gave me a bit of a look but let it go. Mom had other things on her mind, “Walter called us yesterday and said he is coming for a visit.”

“Walter!” I exclaimed. “He’s in Kitimat isn’t he?”

“Yes, of course. But he has a good job and bought a car. Now he is coming home for a visit. He should be here next week.”

I really didn’t know Walter that much. He was older than Eddie and the first one to go to high school in Wynyard. However, by the time I moved, he had quit school and started looking for a job. I guess Mary found him a job in Kitimat so he went there. That was a few years ago.

When Walter arrived in his new Ford car there was a big welcome. He gave us all a hug and settled in the kitchen while Mom fussed about getting some food ready.

“It took me three days of long driving just to get to Saskatoon. Some of the gravel roads from Kitimat to Prince George are pretty bad with all those big logging truck chewing up the road. I thought I would never make it but that Ford just hummed along with no problems.” Then he added with some emphasis, “I got an Ltd Special Edition Ford. That means they made a limited number of them and it’s a great car.”

Walter and Mom talked the rest of the afternoon about life in Kitimat, jobs, and how everyone in the family was doing. Walter was a lot like Mom. They always had something to say and enjoyed saying it. I didn’t have much to add to the conversation but it was nice to hear Walter’s stories. One story in particular caught my attention.

“I got hired by Comstock in Kitimat to drive a truck but all they really want me to do is play softball! Softball is a big sport there and as you know

I'm a pretty good pitcher. Anyway, they hired me to drive the workers from the bunk houses to the work site but my real job is to pitch and win games."

"That is amazing!" I exclaimed. "I remember when we had those games at the Polish church picnics. You pitched for our team against the Malinowski family."

"Yeah, and they had a hell of a pitcher as well. He was a Mountie I think. Those were good games and very close."

After some more talk, Walter went out to the car and brought in his suitcase. He told Mom that he would be going out for supper and visit some friends. He called me into the bedroom when he was ready to go. He was wearing a dark shirt and white pants that ballooned out at the knees then tapered tightly at the ankles.

"See these pants. This is the latest style. They are sixteen inches wide at the knee."

He stood there a while looking at the dresser mirror. "New car, new clothes and money in my pocket, that's what you get when you have a good job."

He gave me a big smile, reached in his pocket and took out a five dollar bill. "This is for you. I didn't have time to get you a present." With that he left.

For the rest of the summer after Walter left, I stayed home and spent most of the remaining days before school started reading books and listening to music. We had a large window on the west side of the house with a couch in front of it. It was a great place to sit or lie down like a dog and let the afternoon sun warm you. It also happened to be a perfect place to read a book or look out at Paulson's house right across the road.

Sometimes I would sit by the window and try to get a look at the Paulson sisters. They were both around my age and very good looking but for one reason or another they never came out to say hello or do anything on the yard. I sometimes thought that maybe I should just go over there on my own and say hello but I didn't have the nerve. I was the new kid in town and the Paulson girls seemed out of reach. I took my mind off the girls and got back to my book. This was the seventh or eighth book of the Hardy Boys series and they were in the middle of another big mystery.

When the lazy days of summer started in July I thought that reading some books might be a great way to pass the time. The town library was just a regular building down town but it was full of books - more books than I had ever seen in one place. The library at Evelyn School consisted of two or three bookshelves half full of old books nobody ever used. Here however, there were hundreds of book of all kinds organized neatly into categories. And you knew this was a special place because it was very quiet except for the occasional murmur or the creak of the floor boards as someone walked around the stacks of books. Where do you start and what do you pick? I wondered. Lots of books

looked interesting yet not interesting enough to actually spend time reading. I drifted through the aisles hoping to catch something of definite interest when a soft voice behind me asked,

“Can I help you find something?”

A prim and proper little old lady with white hair and a gentle smile looked me straight in the eye. “We have some interesting books for young people over there,” she offered. “Let me show you”. I followed her while she continued, “We don’t get a lot of teenagers here over the summer. I hope you feel free to come anytime and browse around. Ah, here is a section you may be interested in. The Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series of book are very popular. You should try one.”

I picked up a copy of “The Tower Treasure” by Franklin W. Dixon.

“Dixon really is not the writer but that doesn’t matter,” she noted. “Edward Stratemeyer was the creator of the series. Then, he had different writers do the writing for him under the pseudonym, Franklin W. Dixon.”

I had no idea what a “pseudonym” was but the book looked pretty good so I told the nice lady that I would take it.

Now here I was in the middle of another gripping mystery. The teenage brothers, Frank and Joe Hardy had stumbled into an abandoned house in their town and found a small bag of money hidden under the boards along with a bloody knife. Was this connected to the recent murder in town? The mystery was on and I was in the middle it.

I did a lot of reading over the summer and while I was at it I often listened to the radio. One day, as I was reading, I noticed that the radio was playing a live opera performance from New York. I thought that was odd and quite different. I had never heard an opera before but there it was, straight from New York to my house in Wynyard. Actually, there weren’t a lot of radio stations to choose from and CBC had good reception. It was mainly background music for me but once in a while, I had to stop reading and actually listen. In the middle of the opera they suddenly started playing some of the most wonderful music I ever heard. It was a song with two or three singers plus a full orchestra. They were singing in a foreign language but the harmonies sure sounded great. I put the book down for a while and just listened. Then suddenly in the middle of a really nice part, there was a loud knock on the door.

“Hello, knock, knock, anyone home?”

I looked up and yelled out, “Who’s there?”

“Al”.

I got up, turned down the radio and met Al in the porch.

“What you up to? Wasting away the day?” Al asked. “We should go to the poolroom”.

“Yeah sure, just let me change my shirt and get some shoes”.

“Bye, Mom,” I said as we left the house. She waved back at me and nodded her head.

"What the heck were you listening to on the radio? It was strange but sounded pretty nice."

"You ever heard an opera?" I asked as we walked toward Main Street.

"Opera? What's that?" Al replied, with a curious look.

"Well, sometimes, especially on Saturdays if I'm listening to CBC, they play an opera on the radio and it goes on for hours".

"Hours!" Al exclaimed. "How can a song last for hours?"

"Well it's not a song exactly although they do sing quite a bit but most of it is orchestra music and lots of people kind of talking in a strange language along with the music. They seem to mix up singing and talking but then you can't understand what they are saying anyway so I guess it makes no difference."

Al shook his head. "That sounds a bit weird to me. Besides, I don't listen much to the radio at home. The only time I like to have the radio on is in the car or truck when I'm trying to feel up a girl," he added with a smile.

"I haven't had a good feel for a while now except in my imagination," I admitted rather lamely. "You know that Peggy Paulson across the street from our house is pretty damned cute. I'd sure like to get to know her better."

"Well I kind of had a date with Peggy once," Al said with a smile.

"You did!" I was astonished. Yet, I believed him. Al seemed to be a lot better at getting girls than I was. He wasn't any better looking than me. In fact, he was kind of short with a large head topped with thick black hair. He kept his hair nicely slicked down with a curl on the front and a ducktail at the back. He also had a very good sense of humour and we spent a lot of time laughing at each other's jokes. But his real gift was in telling jokes using a fake Ukrainian accent. He would look at me seriously and say, "How you tink bout dat?" Or, if we had no money, "Don't worry Victor, cream check come tomorrow." But his favourite saying was, "You toopiss head" which meant, "You stupid head." When he got going on his jokes we would roll with laughter.

However, the big difference between us was that Al was more direct with girls. When he saw a girl he liked in a crowd he did something about it. When I saw a girl in a crowd I would sit there and think about how wonderful it would be for me to meet her.

"Yeah," he continued, "a bunch of us went to the drive-in with the Bjornson twins and three of us guys hid in the trunk to get in free. There were three or four girls in the car so after we got in, we all got out of the trunk and jumped into the car. Just by luck, I ended up beside Peggy."

"You bugger," I said. "That was some luck. What did you do?"

"Well, what do you think I did, I kissed her and tried to feel her up but she really didn't want to cooperate so we just ended up watching the movie."

"Isn't that the way things usually end up," I agreed, shaking my head.

By now we were at Paul's Poolroom. "I wonder if Tillie is working today.

Maybe I could get a free hamburger and coke,” Al suggested.

“Vico,” I said. “There is nothing better than chocolate milk with a hamburger.”

For me, whenever we went to Paul’s Poolroom, I always wondered if I would get to see Bernice but it looked like neither of the sisters was working today so we went into the poolroom. There was a table open. Al looked at me, “You got a quarter?”

“Sure, let’s play”.

The game was snooker. You have to sink a red ball first, then you try sinking a coloured ball that was worth from three to seven points. If you were good, the game could be over quite fast but we were average players so we took our time. Paul, the owner, never kept track of how long anyone played just the number of games played. He would count the number of times you racked the balls for a new game. So, we would sometimes put a bunch of red balls back on the table when he wasn’t looking and keep playing a bit longer. It was a fun way to kill time for a quarter.

Al made a shot, “There’s a wedding dance tomorrow night at North Hall. We should go”.

“Good idea but who do we get to drive us there?”

“We’ll just have to find a “toopiss head” to drive us that’s all,” and we both laughed.

Then just as we finished our game, Wallace Borowski walked in.

“Hello Victor,” he said giving me a wave.

“Hi Wallace, good to see you, this is my friend Al, you visiting Joe and Jean?”

He nodded towards Al. “Yeah, but just for the weekend.”

Wallace was Joe’s youngest brother but unlike Joe, very quiet and soft spoken. Joe was of average height and build but Wallace was short and stocky.

As we chatted for a while, I gave Al a quick look and asked casually, “You thinking of going to the wedding tomorrow at North Hall?”

“Maybe, why, do you guys want to go?”

I looked at Al again and smiled, “Sure do.”

He thought about it for a while. “Okay, come over to Joe’s place tomorrow around eight and we’ll go.” Just like that, we had our ride.

We met Wallace as planned and got in his car. He was quite talkative and seemed pleased about going to the dance. He also turned out to be a reckless driver. North Hall was about fifteen miles (24 km) south of Elfros on a gravel road. We noticed that Wallace was driving pretty fast and the car skidded rather dangerously at times on the loose gravel. Al sat in the back and I was in the front. I looked back at him and shrugged my shoulders as the car rocked from side to side. When we finally reached the hall, Al was not looking happy. Neither was I.

“That bugger is going to kill us if he keeps driving like that.”



Victor by Leo's car, a 1937 Chev Deluxe Sedan. c. 1960



Evelyn School - 1954

*L to R: Back row - Janet Kwasney, Ken Siedlecki, Leo Zelinski
 Centre row - Helen Popdenyetz, Victor Zelinski, Aladic Kwasney
 Front row - Mrs. Zachary, ? ? Norman Popadenyetz ? Sonia Dwenichuk*

Source: Elfros R.M. 307: From Prairie Trails to the Yellowhead. Vol. 2, Page 789



Mary and John McGeough wedding with (L to R): Victor, Kasmer, Leo, Frank, Walter, Ed, Jean, Olga, Vera. Middle row - Mom, Dad. Front row - John, Mary. 1957



Kasmer and his first wife Mrytle, 1954

Source: Elfros R.M. 307: From Prairie Trails to the Yellowhead. Vol. 2, Page 743



Victor wins 1st place in the 100 yard race at the UBC Stadium, Air Cadets summer camp at Sea Island, BC. 1958

The fun captions in these pictures were added in 1999 for Victor's retirement party. The originals were lost.





RCAC Summer Camp barracks



RCAC Squadron 568 Wynyard - Summer Camp 1960 - Sea Island, B.C.

Back Row: Victor Zelinski, Ken Pollen, Ivan Pawliuk, Wally Bzdel, Mr. Dennis Schwinghammer, Conrad Bzdel, Bill Morrow, Aaron Peturson, Michael Yashchyn, Alfred Kuros, Stuart Burns, Norman Worth, Alan Howitt, Bernard Latoski **Kneeling:** Ian Cummings, Derrik Toovey, Barry Shepherd, Victor Anderson, Mervin Howitt, Merv Worth
(Picture Credit: Garry Webb and Rosellen Bjarnason)

This picture was put on display in 2023 at the Wynyard Legion in recognition of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Air Cadets in Wynyard



*The VAD's:
Al, David, Aaron and Victor*



*The Troubadors Three
Wynard Advance
1966*





The Troubadors Three

We went in and checked the place out carefully noting all the girls who might be available and friends and relatives who might get us a drink or two.

"Hey," I poked Al. "There's Joe, my cousin. He's kind of a ding-bat relative of mine but I bet we could get a drink from him."

Joe was quite a bit older than me and I really didn't know him. He was from my uncle Anton's side of the family and all the men in that family were tall, lean and lanky. Joe was like that with a large face that featured a very prominent and rather bulbous nose. They also had a slow pace about them that made them look lazy. Actually, it occurred to me that Joe looked a bit like a hillbilly from some of the movies I had seen. In some ways, he even lived like one on a small ram shackled farm tucked away in the bush between Al's place and ours. However, he was always friendly and didn't seem to mind hanging out with youngsters like us. All it took was a couple slaps on his shoulder, some small talk and we were outside by his truck enjoying a beer.

"You boys should come over to my place sometime and bring your guitars. I hear you sing pretty good," he said as we finished our beer.

"That's a good idea Joe," I replied without conviction. "We'll have to do that sometime."

The wedding was in full swing and Adele Serota from Elfros caught my eye so we had a couple dances. When the music stopped, we were standing together making small talk when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around to see Leslie Magnusson from my class in high school. He had a sour look on his face.

Just as I was going to say hello, he tapped me firmly on the chest with his finger. "Stay away from my girl."

"What do you mean, your girl?" I said, rather surprised.

"I mean that she's going home with me so stay away from her."

This kind of challenge was new to me. Was he bluffing or were they really dating? How do you know? What he didn't know was that I didn't have a car so I couldn't very well drive a girl home anyway. I didn't think it was worth a fight so I just pushed him back with my hand and said, "Bugger off asshole." Then I turned my back on him and walked away.

Al was over in a hurry. "What's that Magnusson want?"

"He claims I'm dancing with his girlfriend."

"So, too bad, let's go over there and tell him to screw himself."

"Forget it," I said. "I hardly know the girl."

Suddenly there was a big scuffle at the other end of the room. Fists flew, men cursed and women yelled. Three or four guys were in the middle of the melee while five or six others were trying to break up the fight or move it outside. Gradually the cluster of men squeezed out the door and fell in a big pile on the grass.

"I bet it's the Stotskis," I said to Al.

"Yeah, they always get into a fight don't they?"

Just about then one of the Stoski boys came swaggering back into the hall with smirk on his face and blood on his shirt. As he walked by Al he gave him a dirty look. Stotski stopped and looked back. Then he pushed Al hard and said, "Get out of my way asshole."

Al was shocked and furious. "Come outside you bastard and I'll show you who's an asshole."

They glared at each other for a moment as I grabbed Al, pulled him away and pushed him outside while a couple of guys grabbed Stotski and held him back.

Al was livid. He found an empty beer bottle on the ground. He looked at me and said angrily, "If that bastard comes out to fight I'll give him a piece of this over his head."

"No need for that, Al," I replied calmly looking past him. "Here comes Wallace. Nobody will touch you if Wallace is around." I knew Wallace was a tough guy and a good one to have with you in a fight. The Borowski brothers were as tough as nails in a scrap.

"What you guys up to," he asked slurring his speech. "I guess its time to go home. You okay with that?" he continued as he led us to his car.

"Sure," I said. "It looks like the wedding is getting kind of nasty anyway."

"Yeah, the Stotskis got into a fight again," he replied, starting the car. "Last year one of them pissed me off so I gave him a good one on the jaw and he went down like a sack of potatoes. The trouble is there's a bunch of them in the family and they stick together like a pack or rats. Three of them jumped me and I had my hands full for a while until some of the boys got in there, pulled them off and threw them out of the hall."

By now it was clear that Wallace was not only drunk but his driving was much worse. "Hey Wallace," I said in a bit of a panic. "You better slow down before you go in the ditch or hit something."

"I'm fine," he said looking straight at me while the car swayed from side to side. "If anyone is in front of me they better get out of the way 'cause I'm either going around them or through them!"

I guess he thought that was pretty funny because he laughed out loud and stepped on the gas. I turned to Al and he looked about as scared as I was. Then I noticed there was a truck ahead of us and I could see that Wallace was gaining on it at tremendous speed. Doesn't he see that truck?

"Slow down!" I yelled but it was too late. I braced for impact as we hit the back of the truck with a loud bang. The truck shot forward from the impact while Wallace slammed on the brakes and stopped the car. There was dust and noise all around then suddenly all was dark and quiet except for the hissing sound from the broken radiator. I looked ahead and saw the truck taillights disappear into the night.

"He left us!" I said loudly shaking my head. "That truck didn't even stop to

see what the hell hit him. I can't believe it."

None of us appeared to be injured so we got out of the car to check on the damage. The radiator was hissing and leaking, the front wheels were at a funny angle and the whole front end looked bent and broken.

"This car isn't going anywhere soon," I said quietly to Al.

"I told you that bastard was going to kill us!" Al replied as we surveyed the damage. We looked at each other and I said, "At least we're all fine. We just have to figure out how to get home."

We saw a car coming towards us from the dance so we flagged it down and asked if they could take us to Wynyard. The first three vehicles we stopped all claimed they were not going to Wynyard so they said sorry, we can't help.

"You'll find someone from Wynyard don't worry," one of the drivers offered. Yeah I thought, easy for you to say. What if we have to spend a night out here?

Finally, an old beat up truck stopped and a voice called out, "Looks like you guys could use a ride." And then he laughed a bit and came out of the truck towards us. As he approached, I could see him clearly in the truck lights.

"Joe! You bugger." I said with some relief. "It sure as hell is good to see you!" And I meant it.

Chapter Seven

SEA ISLAND

Going to camp at Sea Island with the Air Cadets was the best part of summer holidays. This would be my third trip and I couldn't wait to go. Each year the officers picked ten to twenty cadets from our squadron for the annual summer trip to camp in the middle of July and I was lucky enough to be selected three years in a row. It was also fortunate the camp was free; otherwise I couldn't go. The camp was located at an old air force base at Sea Island in Vancouver, near the airport. It had barracks built during World War II that could house several hundred air cadets from all across Western Canada.

The trip took two nights and three days from Wynyard to Vancouver. We started on the open prairie with golden crops growing as far as the eye could see and finish at the west coast on the Pacific Ocean. Once we entered the Rocky Mountains, the landscape changed dramatically into a panoramic view of shimmering lakes and clear running rivers framed by majestic mountains. The mountains were green at the bottom then changed dramatically to many shades of blue and gray as you looked up. The higher ones were topped with a brilliant white snow cap.

Every cadet on the trip was issued a sturdy canvas duffle bag with a rope at one end. Everything you needed for the trip had to fit into the bag. "It will be great to see it all again," I thought as I finished packing. The view will be the same but I wondered about my new responsibilities. This time, I would be in charge of the squad. At our last assembly in June, I was promoted to Sergeant which made me the senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) for the trip. Lloyd Tein, our senior NCO, had graduated and was planning to join the Air Force. That left me in charge.

Our senior officers were Bill Minkin, an elementary school teacher and George Curliss, an Optometrist from town and Dennis Schwinghammer. Dennis was a big man, over six feet tall with a full round face and balding hair. He took me aside after the assembly to tell me he would be the officer in charge for the trip. He said that my job as senior NCO would be to keep an eye on the cadets, pass on orders from him and report any problems. "We have twenty cadets on this trip so that is a big responsibility. Some of the cadets may be your friends but on this trip you are in charge so don't be too friendly with them – if you know what I mean." He gave me a long look and I nodded.

He patted me on the shoulder, "Oh yes, sergeants and up will be staying at the NCO barracks at Sea Island. This is your third trip so you know the ropes and what it's like for a cadet. However, I think you will find things much more

interesting this year with the NCO's." Then he added, "You can call me Dennis most of the time except, of course, during formalities".

With that, he gave me a big smile and I replied, also with a smile, "Yes, sir."

Given my new responsibilities, I made sure I was at the train station early. I reported to Dennis and we chatted a bit then he handed me a clipboard with the list of cadets. Then, clipboard in hand, I checked with each cadet to make sure they were ready to go. The new cadets were pretty excited and some of the parents somewhat nervous. A few even asked me to make sure I would look after their son. I just smiled at them, "I've made this trip twice already and it was great. So, don't you worry, your son is in good hands."

I knew it sounded a bit silly but it seemed to work. Just before departure, I called the squad to line up and did a roll call while Dennis stood by and watched. When I was done, I added,

"We do a roll call every time we get on or off the train or bus." I spoke loudly for the parents to hear. "That way no one gets lost. Understand!" The squad murmured and nodded their heads.

"Attention!" I called and the squad snapped to attention. I made a right turn, marched smartly up to Dennis, saluted him and handed over the clipboard.

"All present and accounted for, sir."

"Very good, Sergeant, dismiss the squad and prepare to board."

By the time the train stopped for us in Wynyard it had already picked up a number of cadets from other towns along the way. We boarded the train, stowed our gear and picked a seat. Most of our cadets found seats together but since the train car was nearly full, some of us had to sit with strangers from other towns.

"Hey Sarg," I heard someone say. "Over here."

I looked back and saw a sergeant wave me over.

"I'm Dick Jordon from Yorkton," he said as I sat down. "Why don't you join me? I suppose you would like the window seat?"

"Don't mind if I do, Sergeant Jordon," I said with mock respects pointing to his stripes. Sergeants had three stripes on the sleeve. In the military, rank is visible and very important.

"Us NCO's have to stick together I guess," he replied with a wink as we switched seats. "You won't want to be stuck with a lowly AC1 for the next three days!"

"Good point. This train is usually crowded by the time it gets to Wynyard so thanks for the seat."

"Our senior NCO is a Flight Sergeant but he's a bit of a jerk so I didn't want to sit with him. He got promoted just before we left and I think the stripes went to his head. You seem okay though."

"I just got promoted also but I didn't ask for it. They pin the stripes on

your arm and that's that. Our squad leader last year was a Warrant Officer which is as high as you can go for an NCO. But he was a keener and plans to join the Air Force. My older brother Ed made Flight Sergeant on his last year and it looks like I will do the same. You'll probably get your badge next year as well."

"Sergeant is good enough for me. But, like you say, if the brass want to promote someone they just do it. The main thing is our stripes get us in the NCO barracks and I hear that should be pretty good."

After we chatted for a while I leaned back and stretched out. "I think I'll get some shut eye before we head to the mess car for supper."

As I closed my eyes I thought of the first trip on this same train two years ago as a rookie Cadet AC1. I had struggled on board to stow my duffle bag and noticed the train was quite full and all the Wynyard cadets were already paired up and seated.

I picked a seat by a stranger and said, "Hi, I'm Vic Zelinski from 568 Squadron in Wynyard".

"Les Goodman, from Saltcoats," he said pointing at his badge. Every cadet had the name of their town and squad number sewn on the top of the shoulder. We shook hands and I settled in my seat.

"You been on this trip before?" I asked.

"No. I just got my first wing like you. But we're a pretty small squadron so anyone who wants to go to camp can go I guess. I never bust my ass or anything. They asked and I said sure. How about you?"

"They pick about half of the squad so I guess I was lucky. I didn't do anything special either but I did attend all the meetings so maybe that got me in."

"You play cards?" he asked as he pulled out a pack from his jacket.

"Not really".

"No problem, I'll teach you a few games. We won't play for money yet," he added with a mock hard look.

By the time we hit Saskatoon I had learned a bunch of card games and the train was now full of cadets heading west. As the train stopped Les got up, "Let's go for a smoke."

"A smoke! You got a pack on you?"

"Right here." He opened his jacket and discretely showed me a pack of Players cigarettes.

Now this is the kind of friend to have on a long trip I thought as we went outside for a quick smoke and a walk around the station.

"Do you guys smoke at recess in school?" I asked hiding my cigarette and looking around for any senior officers.

"Sure do. But you have to be fast to get one done and make it back to class in time."

"Most of the time I just bum a smoke from one of my buddies. Two or

three of us would pass a cigarette around and the damned thing would get pretty hot when you smoked it fast like that so we had to watch not to burn our lips. Where did you get a pack?"

"I got my older brother to buy me a few for the trip. You got family?"

"Oh yeah," I said wryly as we got back on train, "I got family all right, lots of family."

By the time we got to Alberta the sun had set. We got ourselves ready for bed in our bunks. It was pretty nice to have a bunk bed – better than trying to sleep on a seat like Mom and I did on our trip to Kitimat. We also had real meals in the mess car so I didn't have to worry about bringing any food.

Les pulled out his deck of cards and we played a couple more games. "Too bad we'll miss the sights of Calgary. We should be in the mountains by breakfast."

Les and I had a great time on that trip. We became very good friends and I thought we would meet again the next summer but we never did. I shook myself awake and poked Dick on the shoulder, "Have you seen any guys from Saltcoats on the train?"

"Saltcoats? That's a small town east of Yorkton isn't it? I don't recall seeing anyone from there but you can ask around at supper time. Why?" Dick asked.

"Oh I made a good friend on my first trip a couple years ago and it would be nice to see him again."

"Well good luck. But if you don't find him, maybe I'll have to do!"

"Sounds fine with me," I said and stood up. "Let's go eat."

As we walked to the dining car reserved for cadets, I stopped for a moment to ask Dennis if the Saltcoats squadron was on the train with us. He looked at a long list and shook his head. "It doesn't look like it. There are a couple of camps each summer, so they might be at a different one."

"Okay, I'll do a roll call after supper and do a bed check once we get settled into our bunks."

"Right, and report to me when you're done. Then we can both sack out."

It was easy to sleep in our bunk beds with the train gently swaying and the steel wheels clacking on the rails. However, I was up with the sun and out on the vestibule between the train cars taking in the view and feeling the wind blow through my hair. The prairies had disappeared and I was looking at a thick green forest covered with a slight morning mist. A clear mountain lake came into view and I wondered what it would be like to take a swim in it. It certainly looked more inviting than the sloughs I used to swim in when I was a kid on the farm. Our slough by the house was muddy and the edges all grown in with grass, cat tails and scummy looking green algae. We swam in it once in a while but you needed a good washing with clean well water after you got out.

Even though this was my third trip through the mountains, I still marveled at the beauty of the Alberta Rockies and the BC forests and lakes. "This is something," I thought as I took a last look at the scenery then went back in

for breakfast.

"Hey Dick," I said as we settled into our seats, "Is this your second trip?"

"Yeah, why do you ask?"

"Well, I've been there twice and I wonder how come the weather is so nice in Vancouver? It seems to be warm and sunny every day. Maybe it's the ocean climate? But have you ever wondered why there are no mosquitoes and horse flies around?"

Dick thought about that for a moment while chewing on his bacon, "I guess they all went to Saskatchewan!" We both had a good laugh over that.

When we finally reached the train station in Vancouver, there were dozens of yellow school buses waiting to pick us up and drive us to Sea Island. Dennis went out and located our bus while I assembled the squad and took roll call. Then I saw him wave to me so I barked out some orders and marched the squad to our bus. When we arrived at Sea Island, we assembled again in formation and marched over to our barracks. Again, Dennis went out first and made sure we were in the right one. I dismissed the group and they went their way while I went looking for the NCO barracks. Dick was already there holding a couple bunk beds for us.

"I suppose you want the bottom bunk?" he said as we unpacked our gear. "I had a top bunk last year and I kind of liked it."

"Well, I was on the bottom the last two years and liked that so it's fine with me. I've never seen so many stripes in one place. There must be forty sergeants, flight sergeants, and even the odd warrant officer in the barracks," I noted as I looked around.

Dennis had told me that the program for NCOs would be quite different and he was right. We even had our own mess hall and recreation area. I guess they didn't want us mingling with the lowly cadets and corporals. There were special lectures and a number of short trips into Vancouver. And, we didn't just march around the parade grounds all day like the other cadets; we formed a precision marching squad led by a professional soldier.

He had us marching in formation then wheel, change direction or angle as a unit on command. They issued us with white lanyards, gloves and a 303 rifle with a shiny bayonet that we would put on or off as needed. On command, we learned to shoulder arms, slap arms, rotate rifles and all as a single unit. This was marching at its finest and by the second week, we were ready for the big show. Towards the end of summer camp, we performed our drills in front of all the officers and cadets on the base. The other cadets did a regular march past before us then they lined up in formation and watched us do our thing. And we did. When we were done, the cadets and officers gave us a huge cheer as we turned and marched smartly back to our barracks.

"Man, that was something!" I said to Dick as we sat on our bunks to change.

"Yeah, I think we hit it dead on and you could hear the oohs and ahhs from the crowd. It must be impressive to see a whole squadron snap to attention as one man then shoulder arms with those fancy white gloves and rifles."

I nodded and we lay on our bunks for a while enjoying the moment. Then he added, "This was something alright but just wait for tomorrow when we get to fly a real jet."

Yes, we all knew that the highlight of the whole trip would be to fly in one of the new CF-100 jets. In the last two years I had flown in the usual DC 3 propeller plane out of the little air field in Dafoe west of Wynyard. But to fly in a jet – that would be something else.

We went by bus to the airfield where a number of jets sat waiting for us. The jets looked surprisingly small but then they were fighter planes not for transport. We went in small groups to each plane where the pilot greeted us with a smile. The pilot looked small, young and relaxed. He wore a gray flight suit with all kinds of zippers and held his helmet casually under one arm. We were totally impressed.

"You boys ready for a ride?" he asked with a bit of a smile. "We made some room in the back for passengers but you can all take turns in the co-pilot seat. Just don't touch anything unless I tell you. We don't want to shoot any people in Vancouver do we?"

"No sir!" we all replied emphatically.

"I know you have all been briefed on proper protocols and procedures for the flight so let's get going. Find a seat and buckle up."

We all scrambled up the small ladder. I went for the co-pilot seat and buckled up. After he checked my belt I said rather lamely, "I thought it would be better to sit here on takeoff rather than the landing."

He gave me a bit of a surprised look, laughed quietly and asked, "What's your name kid?"

"Victor." He looked back at the others, "We haven't taken off yet and Victor here is already worried about landing!"

While everyone laughed and nudged each other, he added, "Don't worry cadets, this thing can fly and land by itself if need be. Now pipe down and let me get this thing going."

With that he flipped some switches and began talking to the tower for clearance to take off. He eased the throttle a bit and the plane started to roll smoothly down the runway. It was amazing how quiet the jet was compared to the old DC 3 propeller planes. After some talk with the tower he looked back and said, "Here we go."

The engines started to whine and roar then he released the brakes and we surged forward. We shot down the runway and up into the air. The plane climbed rapidly as we all gripped our seats and dropped our jaws.

"This is no DC 3," I said to the pilot hanging on to my seat. The DC 3

was an old World War II trainer with two propellers and room for six or seven cadets. It was slow and loud but this jet was fast and quiet. The pilot looked at me, nodded and gave me a thumbs up.

“When we get to 20,000 feet and about 300 miles (480 km) per hour, I’ll give Victor the stick and we’ll see what this plane can do. Did you all have a good breakfast?” he asked.

We all nodded then he added, “Well I’d rather not see what you had, so keep your barf bag handy just in case.”

We all looked around rather nervously and found our bags.

“Okay, it’s yours,” he said. “Take the control and get a feel for movement side to side and then up and down – but do it slowly.”

I took the control stick and moved it just a bit left and the plane fell immediately left so I over corrected and it went from left to right and suddenly a bit up. It was amazing how touchy the stick was! This plane was agile and fast like a race car or something. I saw the pilot give me the up sign so I pulled the stick back and it shot up too fast. Again, I over corrected down and we took a big dive.

“Holy shit,” someone shouted from the back. “This is some roller coaster!” I struggled to level the plane and noticed that my hands were sweating.

After a couple more tries I had better control but the dives were unsettling my stomach.

“Okay Victor, level off and I’ll take over while you switch seats.”

For the rest of the flight I sat at the back and enjoyed the view of the ocean and the Islands around Vancouver. Of course everyone had to try his hand at the control so we had all kinds of gut wrenching twists and turns, ups and downs. I could see most of us were feeling the effects so we kept our barf bags close. I started to think of our boat ride on Little Quill Lake and how sick I got. If one throws up, I thought grimly, we’ll all throw up.

We were more than ready to land when the pilot took over and went for the airport. After we landed we were all a bit wobbly and quite glad to be on solid ground.

“I’m proud of you all,” the pilot said. “No one left their breakfast on the plane.” With that, we said our thanks and headed for the bus. When we got on the bus, one of the guys said, “Yeah, I held my breakfast but I sure as hell don’t want any lunch for a while!”

The flight was the talk of the barracks. Those of us who were able to hold our breakfast were quietly very proud of ourselves but we did not make fun of those few who didn’t. We all knew it could happen to anyone.

We did very little for the rest of the day and tried to have a good sleep because next day we were going to Stanley Park to see an outdoor performance at the Theatre Under the Stars. The play was in an open theatre in the park in the evening so we would be gone until after dark. Our orders were to dress our best which meant pressing our pants and polishing our buttons and shoes. No

one knew what to expect.

"The only play I've ever seen is the Christmas concert in Evelyne School," I told Dick.

"Yeah, we had some school plays also but this should be something else with real actors and everything," he replied. "They said we would have an interesting program and they were right."

The trip through Vancouver was impressive. I thought Saskatoon was big but nothing like Vancouver. Everywhere you looked there were people and vehicles going in all directions. Finally the bus wound its way through Stanley Park to the theatre. I was very interested in Stanley Park because one of my relatives had promised to take me out from the barracks on Sunday and spend a whole day at the park.

"This is quite a place and it's right on the ocean. Look out there. There's open water but you can't see the end of it," Dick observed gazing out the window.

"Yes," I said, "This is quite a place - sun, trees, green grass and a blue ocean. What else could you want?"

"That's for sure," Dick replied, then added, "And no mosquitoes!"

When we arrived, the officers led us to our seats and reminded us again to behave. We were senior NCO's in uniform in a public place so there was no need to remind us but they did. The play was called "Kismet" and no one knew anything about it. However, it was great to see a live performance with professional actors so we all enjoyed the experience. At intermission we got up to stretch our legs and get some food. Just as I was leaving one of the officers pointed at me and waved me over.

"Sergeant, we need to take some pictures for the press so follow me." My buddy looked at me puzzled and I shrugged back.

"Yes," said a man holding a big camera. "He'll do."

"He will do what?" I wondered as I followed the officer and the man with the camera to the stage. Then, to my surprise, we all went to a small room behind the stage where the actors were milling about on their break. This is pretty neat I thought but I was still wondering why I was here. Suddenly I noticed the officer was talking to a gorgeous looking women dressed up in her costume. She had long black hair with all kinds of jewels and lace mixed in and her face was in full make up. She wore a lacy white dress with jewels like a dancer. I realized that she was one of the main actresses.

While I stood there, she came up and put her hands on my shoulders and smiled like an angel.

"Hi soldier," she said in a teasing voice, "you enjoying the play?" I was totally tongue-tied so I just smiled like a fool while she turned this way and that and fiddled with my tie. Then I noticed that the camera guy was taking one picture after another.

"I think I have enough," he said as he put away the camera.

With that, the girl of my dreams turned, blew me a little kiss and vanished.

"Come on soldier," said the officer emphasizing the word 'soldier' and taking me by the arm, "Time to get back to reality."

"Where the hell did you go?" Dick asked when I sat down.

"I was back stage with the actors," I replied trying to sound casual.

"Back stage? Doing what?"

"Well, you know, meeting the actors." I was rather enjoying myself.

"The actors! Are you kidding?" By then the play had started and my girl was right in the middle of it.

"No." I said, "I'm not kidding. In fact that was the girl I met and we had a nice chat." I knew that was partly a lie but to watch my buddies face was worth it. "Oh yeah, she blew me a kiss when she left." Dick was speechless and his jaw dropped. I noticed that some of the other NCO's were pointing at me and whispering to each other.

On the way back to the barracks I was the subject of some ribbing and pestered with questions.

Who did you meet? Was she a beauty? What did you talk about? How come you got to go? Instead of replying, I simply smiled and tried to act cool. However, her face stayed with me for a long time and it was kind of hard to get to sleep that night.

Next day, Eugene Stanish phoned to remind me he would be over on Sunday and take me out to Stanley Park. I told him that was great since we had been there already to see a play. This would be my last day in Vancouver so I wanted to make the most of it.

I met him after breakfast at the gate where he was waiting to sign me out. Eugene's sister, Frances, was married to my oldest brother Frank so it was okay with the brass for him to take me out of the base. Eugene didn't have a car so we took a city bus. We got on the bus and got to know each other a bit as we traveled to the park. Eugene struck me as a great guy. He was probably in his early twenties, average height and a slim build. He was good looking with curly brownish blond hair, sparkling blue eyes and an infectious smile.

"I guess you've driven through Stanley Park already to see the play but you need to walk through it to really appreciate it," he said as we got to the entrance. "We'll get ourselves an ice cream cone at the stand then walk."

"Great," I replied. Eugene paid for the cones and we leisurely strolled along the ocean walkway talking and enjoying the day. It was another sunny, warm day in Vancouver and hundreds of people were enjoying the park. As we walked, he told me a bit about his life since he moved to Vancouver. We walked a while then took a bus to the entrance of the Lions Gate Bridge. We sat there for a long time marveling at the bridge and the huge spruce and cedar trees. Some of them were at least eight or ten feet in diameter.

"I've never seen trees like this back home," I noted. "They are massive and some of them perfectly straight. Amazing!"

"Yes, I still shake my head when I see them," he replied.

We started the long walk down then found a place for a late lunch at the White Spot. We sat at an outside table but most customers drove up and ordered from their cars.

"They have car hops here," Eugene explained. "I guess it's like a drive in theatre except this is a restaurant. Kind of a different idea don't you think?"

"It sure is. It's kind of funny to sit here outside ordering food with all those cars around."

A pretty young lady took our order. I offered to pay my share but Eugene insisted it was his treat. As she left, it occurred to me that my sister Mary told me that she had worked as a car hop. I looked at Eugene, "I bet this is the same restaurant Mary worked in."

"Mary, Frank's sister? You really think so?"

"Yeah, I do. She said that she worked at the White Spot around Stanley Park as a car hop. A car hop, I wondered at the time, what the hell is that? Now I know. By the way, she and a friend hitch-hiked from the farm to Kelowna just to see some guy she barely knew".

"She did what! You must be kidding."

"No I'm not. Then, I guess she dumped the guy and instead of coming back home, she and her friend took a train to Vancouver. She told me they only had a couple dollars between them when they got here so they had to get a job immediately just to get some food and find a place to stay. I guess they got a waitress job that same day and made enough on tips to buy some food and a room for the night!"

Eugene shook his head and looked thoughtful. "That is amazing. I've hitched a ride or two myself, but what those girls did takes nerve."

"Mary is quite the traveler for a farm girl. She worked in Toronto for a number of years, Vancouver and now lives in Kitimat."

We talked some more and enjoyed a good leisurely meal. After that, it was time to head back to the base.

"You're lucky to live here," I said as we got off the bus at the base. "And I sure appreciate getting out of the barracks for a while, seeing the sights and eating some really good food."

"Well, you have a good trip back and make sure you pass a big hello to my sister next time you see her."

I promised I would and we parted. What a great guy to do this for me, I thought as he walked away. He spent a whole day with me, a distant relative and even bought me lunch. I knew this was a day I would remember.

For some reason, I found that the trip back is never as exciting as the trip

to. On our way back home, I had my last look at the magnificent forests and mountains as we headed east through BC and Alberta. I wondered when I would ever see them again. I'll graduate next summer, I thought to myself, so this is my last trip to Sea Island. What then? It was kind of sad to realize that I had to start thinking seriously about my future. One option, of course, was to join the Air Force. When I heard that Lloyd was planning to join the Air Force, I asked our senior officers if I should do the same.

"Sounds like a good idea Victor," Bill Minkin told me. "However, let me set up an appointment for you with Mr. Curliss. He's an optometrist so he can check your eyes. You need good eyesight to join the Air Force."

After my appointment, Mr. Curliss told me that my eyes were not quite good enough to be a pilot. "Maybe you could get in and get a desk job, but I don't think you will be a pilot." With that, I decided to start thinking of another career.

When the train pulled into Wynyard, the sky was overcast and it looked like rain. I looked up and around the sky from the window. There were dark grey clouds from one horizon to the other. "It looks like one of those gentle three day rains the farmers love to get – a million dollar rain they call it. Good for everything that grows."

"Yeah," Dick replied looking out the window, "And a good time for the farmers to come into town, relax and take a break. I think I'll do the same when I get home. You got any big plans for the summer."

"Yeah some, but I think I'll get myself a good book and waste a few days first." I got up as the train came to a stop and gathered my kit.

I looked at Dick and offered my hand. "I guess that's that,"

"It's been great Vic," he replied shaking my hand. "I guess I won't see you next year but maybe we'll run into each other in Yorkton some day."

"You never know," I said but I knew that was a long shot. I reached out and gave him a hug and walked out. Most of the cadets had made friends on the trip and they were also saying goodbye. It was nice to be home, yet it was kind of sad. I knew from past experience that we would probably never see each other again. We waved a farewell to our friends as the train left the station.

The cadets melted into the crowd of parents and family members getting hugs and kisses from their kin. It looked like the squad was in good hands so I picked up my duffle bag and walked home.

Chapter Eight

THE VADs

We were on stage and the hall was rocking. Smoke and dust filled the air. We had a big crowd on the floor and the band sounded good. Aaron was on the saxophone playing “In the Mood” while David did some neat harmonies on his trumpet and took turns on lead. I had the amp cranked to the max and pounding on the guitar. Al sat at the drums with his hair slicked back into a neat ducktail looking very calm and cool while hammering out the beat. We were the VADs and we were the hottest band around.

Sure, this was only Elfros, a small hamlet fifteen miles (24 km) east of Wynyard, but it had a big hall and the people loved to dance. We played most of the dance halls around Wynyard and Elfros was one of our favourites. Actually, it didn’t seem to matter which hall we played, we usually drew a decent crowd. “Forming a dance band was a good idea,” I thought as I looked over the crowd and pounded my guitar.

By the time Al and I finished grade eleven, we were looking to do more with our music than just playing for the occasional party.

“We should form a band and make some money,” I suggested to Al one rainy day in June. “The exams will be over next week and we’ll have most of the summer to do something – well, except for a couple weeks in July when we go to camp with the Air Cadets. I don’t know about you but I can’t seem to find a decent job around here. At least with a band maybe we could make some money and have a pretty good time doing it.”

“Sounds like a plan all right,” Al agreed. “I’m not keen on picking rocks and working the fields all summer.”

“Yeah,” I nodded knowingly. Whenever Al stayed out too late or came home a bit drunk, his Dad would make a point of waking him up at the break of dawn and say, “Time to get up and pick rocks!” Hangover or not, Al would have to get out of bed and get to work. I guess Stanley thought this was pretty funny.

“But a dance is a lot different than a party,” he added. “We’ll need drums, a violin player or accordion or something like that.”

“Actually, I was thinking more of a trumpet.”

“A trumpet? Who would play the trumpet?”

“David Proznick, for one. I play with him in the town band and there are some really good players there. I heard David and Valdi, our band leader, play some trumpet duets and they sounded pretty damned good. In fact they sometimes play a special piece or two with Jerry Dube on electric guitar and they sound great. Jerry plays “Wheels” just like the record.”

Al's eyes opened wide, "Wheels, wow! That's a great tune for the guitar."

"Yes, and he plays it without a single mistake. He has a Fender amp and a really nice Gibson electric guitar. He played at the Vogue Theatre at our annual Band Concert last week. You should have been there. It was something to hear. I talked to Jerry after the concert and he offered to lend me the guitar and amp for a while if I wanted."

"That would be great. I thought you guys were just a marching band in your fancy hats white uniforms. I saw you all march down Main Street and play at the July 1st parade last year. By the way, what do you play in the band?"

"I play the alto horn. It's a brass instrument larger than a trumpet but you hold it upright like a tuba. Eddie got me into the band a couple years ago and since he played 1st alto horn, I played 2nd. Eddie's a pretty good player but I'm not that good."

I thought for a moment then added, "David is a year behind us at school but I got to know him pretty well through the Town Band and Air Cadets. He's a really funny little guy and a good trumpet player so why don't we get him over to my house and try it out."

"Ok, but who's going to play drums?" Al asked.

"I don't know. We'll just have to find somebody."

Next day at school, instead of playing Ping-Pong in the hallway at recess time as usual, we looked for David and finally found him just as the bell went. David was a short, small frail looking guy with blonde hair and a large face sporting a rather prominent nose. His lips were full and kind of large – probably from blowing the trumpet. He was energetic and full of fun.

"David," I said quickly, "Can you meet us at noon? We'd like to talk to you about music."

David looked surprised and a bit wary. "Okay, I guess. I'll wait here for you at noon."

At the noon bell we met up with David and went outside. Al and I usually walked over to my house for lunch and as it turned out, David's house was only three or four blocks away from ours so we were all going the same way.

"Here's the deal," I said as we walked. "Al and I are thinking of forming a dance band and we were wondering if you would be interested in joining us."

"Sure," he said without much thought. "But don't you need a fiddle or accordion for a dance band? All I play is the trumpet and drums."

I nudged Al and gave him a look, "He plays drums."

I turned to David and continued, "Well can you play tunes like 'Roll out the Barrel' or 'In the Mood' and stuff like that?"

"Sure, I can do songs like that by ear."

"Here I thought you played the trumpet with your lips," Al said trying to be funny. David laughed out loud and shook his head. For little guy, he sure had a loud deep voice and a hearty laugh.

"Ok, bring your trumpet over to my house after school and we'll play."

When we got home from school, Al and I went upstairs and cleaned up a bit. Since my brother Ed graduated last year and moved to Saskatoon, I had a bed to myself. And, now that Leo was about to graduate, and go to Saskatoon, I would soon have the whole room to myself. I couldn't wait.

David knocked on the door and Mom let him in. He greeted her with some pretty good Ukrainian.

"Hello Mrs. Zelinski, yak sheh myish (how are you doing)?"

"Dobreh, dobreh" (good, good) Mom said and told him to go upstairs.

David got his trumpet out and played a few scales to warm up. "You want 'Roll out the Barrel'? Well, here it is in the key of A."

Al and I chorded as he played and we knew right away we had a winner. David knew all kinds of songs although some of them were just too complicated for us. He would say, "Jerry, plays this with me," and start playing. We would fumble around on our guitars trying to make sense of the tune and shake our heads. Finally we would put down our guitars and tell David to stop.

"Yes it sounds fine but we aren't fancy guitar players like Jerry so play something easier."

After we played for an hour or so we put away the instruments and talked.

David looked at us and asked, "So, what do you think?"

"The trumpet is great but I still think we need drums," Al insisted.

"I have drums. Valdi said I could use the drums from the Town Band if I wanted. I've played them a lot."

"Okay," I said, "But who plays lead when you play drums?" We all thought about that for a minute. "It looks like we need to get another player."

"Well, why don't we add a saxophone?" David suggested. "Then when I play drums the sax can play lead. Also, don't you guys do some lead on the guitars?"

I nodded my head, "Sure, I can play some in a pinch but I really like the idea of a saxophone - but who?"

David thought for moment, "How about Aaron Peturson? He's in my class. He plays sax in the town band and he's pretty good."

"I know Aaron a bit. He's a nice guy. Do you want to ask him or should I?"

"I'll talk to him and tell him to get together with us on the weekend. How about here on Sunday at 2 o'clock?" David got up to leave.

Al and I nodded and waved to David as he left.

"It looks like we might have a dance band," Al said nodding his head.

On Sunday the four of us gathered in my room and started playing. David and Aaron were naturals together. When one played solo the other would harmonize or take turns on the main melody. Not only were they good players, they were both small and energetic. Aaron was a bit taller with a round face and dark hair. He tended to stay in one spot when he played while David

hammered it up, moved around and kept the beat going by snapping his fingers with his right hand when he wasn't playing. David was a natural band leader and they were a good pair.

"Looks like we have a band all right," I told Al as we took a break. "However, we still need the drums and an electric guitar. We'll never be heard in a big hall without an amp."

We all thought for a while then David broke the silence, "I've got it. We have a Town Band practice at the elementary school next Sunday. Vic, Aaron and I will already be there. So, after band practice, we'll set up the drums and have a practice of our own."

"Good idea," I said. "And maybe I could ask Jerry if he wouldn't mind bringing his guitar and amp so I could use it. Then we would have everything we need."

After the Town Band practice on Sunday, Valdi reminded all of us not to forget our annual march in the Canada Day parade on July 1.

"You all know what we are playing for the parade so keep practicing and make sure your uniforms and hats are clean and ready," he said.

Al showed up just before we ended our band practice and Jerry was good enough to leave me his amp and guitar. The Fender amp weighed a ton but I knew it sounded good and had plenty of volume. I lugged it over to an electric plug and turned it on. It began to hum and crackle a bit as it warmed up. I looked in the back and saw the tubes lighting up inside.

David set up the drums and we all started playing some tunes with Aaron. I had to watch the volume on the amp because it had a ton of power. I set the amp at a comfortable level.

"That sound about right?" I asked Al and he nodded.

"Yes that's fine, but we need to get David and Aaron playing together. I'm not doing too much on this guitar if you're playing with an amp so why don't I try the drums?"

We all stopped and looked at each other. We all knew Al never played drums before.

David made a fancy roll on the drums, "What the hell, why not? Come over here and I'll show you how to play the drums!"

In no time at all, Al had the basics down. "Now, all I need is practice." Al was a quick learner and very big on practice.

It was time for us to go but we just had to try out the new combination. Aaron and David struck out a tune while Al beat the drums and I played rhythm guitar. After the first tune, we all gave each other the thumbs up.

"That's great," I called out. "We've got it." Then I added with a laugh, "Now, as Al would say, all we need is practice, practice and more practice."

"Practice makes perfect, you know," Al countered with a smile.

We had the sound but we were still a long way from being a band that could play for a dance. First I needed an electric guitar and amp. Second, we

needed a set of drums and a place to practice. Oh yes – we also needed a name. We solved the name problem at our next practice.

“We need a name guys,” I said as we got our instruments ready. “Any ideas?”

Everyone paused and tossed in some names but nothing seemed to stick.

“How about we use our names or initials to make up a name,” I suggested. “We have V, A, A and D. So let’s try some combinations.”

“Too bad we didn’t have another A in the group,” David said with a laugh. “We could be the Triple A’s.”

“That would be a good name but the AA’s would be fine also - as in Alcoholics Anonymous,” Aaron countered a big laugh. Finally we got around to the VAADs and it sounded good but Al said, “We don’t need two A’s. How about just using one A - the VADs?”

And that was that.

David was doing his “Sachmo” impersonation of “Hello Dolly” and the crowd in Elfros was buzzing and having a great time. David could do Louis Armstrong’s big hit, “Hello Dolly” to perfection. Armstrong was a big black singer and trumpet player while David was this little white guy but if you closed your eyes and listened, you would swear he was the real thing. Somehow David could duplicate Armstrong’s deep guttural voice then pick up the trumpet and play just like Sachmo. The crowd loved it and gave us a loud and long standing ovation. David bowed gracefully while we clapped and gave him the thumbs up.

It was time for a break so we put down our instruments and went outside to Al’s truck. The farm truck was great transportation for a band. We could all pile in the cab and carry the instruments in the box. Al opened the truck and pulled out four bottles of beer for us.

He passed around the beer and tapped David on the shoulder. “You sure knocked them out with that song,”

David just shrugged and laughed a bit. “It’s a great crowd and I like this hall. We seem to have some regulars like Conlin Josephson and his friends that follow us wherever we play.”

“Yes, and you know why?” Al answered. “He’s going steady with my sister Joan and she always wants to go to our dances.”

We nodded our heads and sipped our beer quietly for a while then Aaron noted, “We really do well at Elfros. Too bad we have to shut it down after this summer.”

That added a somber note and made us all stop and think. David and Aaron had another year of high school but Al and I had decided to go to Teachers’ College in Saskatoon after graduation so that would pretty well be the end of the band.

"We can still play over the summer and on some weekends and holidays if you guys can make it back to Wynyard," David suggested hopefully.

"That might work if one of us had a car. Maybe we could take this old beater with us to Saskatoon?" I gave the old truck a whack with my hand.

Al looked at me and shook his head. "I don't think this old truck would make it that far." With that, we finished our beer and went back in to work.

We had played all the dance halls in the Wynyard area from Elfros in the east to Raymore in the west over the winter and spring. Our favorite halls, however were in Wynyard. We had a dance booked at the Legion Hall on the second Saturday in July so that gave us a break to concentrate on our school work. We had to get ready and pass our final exams or there would be no college in the fall.

The final school days in June dragged by very slowly. For the last couple of weeks, all we did was to study for the provincial exams. I was sitting in my desk with my feet on a chair looking out the open window and wishing I could just get up and go outside. The weather was pleasant and I could study just as well sitting under a tree rather than here I thought lazily. I found some sunflower seeds in my pocket and started to eat them discretely. Then it occurred to me that I could throw the shells out the open window. I threw a seed at Al to get his attention and motioned him to watch as I threw a couple shells at the window but they fell short. We both laughed quietly and the teacher turned around and looked at us sternly. "Get back to your books and study."

Al gave me a wide eyed look and a nod to try again so I did and this time the shells made it to the ledge. By now, others around me were getting into the act encouraging me to try again so I got a few shells ready in my hand and gave them a good throw. The shells barely cleared the window sill but they did and there was a clear murmur of excitement around me at my accomplishment.

Then there was complete silence as the teacher walked over to me and said, "Victor, I told you once to quit that. Now go to the principal's office."

"What did I do?" I said shrugging my shoulders innocently.

As I sat in the Principal's office waiting for Mr. Marken, I realized this was the first time I had ever been sent here. Four years of high school and now with two weeks left I get in trouble.

"Victor I see you got yourself into some trouble today," said Mr. Marken rather sternly as he walked in and took a seat behind his big desk. "I just talked to your teacher and he said you were spitting seeds out the window and wasting your time instead of studying for the exams."

"I really didn't think I did anything all that bad. Did I?" I asked innocently.

"No, it may not seem that bad to you but spitting seeds out the window shows disrespect for the teacher and the school. Besides, we are all under pressure to do well on the departmental exams."

Then he added ominously, "You know that I can suspend you for the rest of the year which means you won't be able to write the finals."

I was rather stunned by that. Kicked out of school! No way. I was thinking of telling him that I was just throwing out the seeds not spitting them out but decided that fine distinction wouldn't make any difference now. He was serious and I was getting worried. No finals meant no graduation and no College for me. There was a long silence as my fate hung in the balance.

Finally he looked up at the ceiling then gave me a direct look. "Is this is your first time in my office?"

"Yes sir," I said quietly, trying to sound quite humble.

"Well, I'm going to let this go for now but don't let me see you here again." He got up then added, "That's all, now, get back to class." With that, he left.

The provincial exams were a big deal for us and the teachers. Up to grade eleven, our teachers made the exams and marked them. Whether we passed or failed was in their hands. However, in grade twelve, the final exams were made by experts and marked by teachers from around the province. Some stranger would mark my exams and decide my future. It was a sobering thought.

How we did on the provincial exams reflected directly on everyone in the school and the town. There was a lot of pressure and tension around the tests. On the day of the first exam, the teacher brought in the tests and we all sat absolutely still as they were distributed to each of us face down. When everything was ready, the teacher walked up to the blackboard and wrote down the time. Then he turned and said, "You can start now."

There was a rustle of paper as everyone turned over the exam and started reading. While we sweated through all the questions the teacher walked up and down the rows to make sure there was no cheating. After an hour, the teacher changed the time on the board and announced, "You have an hour left."

After each test we would gather in small groups and go over the questions and possible answers trying to estimate how well we did. Some complained they had wasted a lot of time studying the wrong things while others congratulated themselves on guessing correctly but everyone was anxious. When we finally finished all the tests I was relieved but also a bit concerned that I could have done better.

"I hope I do well enough to get into college," I told Al as we sat in Paul's poolroom sipping a coke.

"You know Al," I added thoughtfully, "I'm the youngest of ten kids in our family and I would be the first one to go to university. But it all comes down to the marks in these exams."

"Well if I don't pass I can always get a job or run the farm," Al replied. "Hey, there's Tillie."

I looked over and my heart took a jump as I noticed Bernice was with her. They came over to our booth and Tillie gave Al a little kiss on the cheek while I stood up and said hello to Bernice.

"How's your training in Portage? Are you here for a while?" I asked.

"Portage is great. We work with crazy people all day. Like here in the poolroom!" she said looking around. We all laughed.

"Yeah there are some crazy ones here all right," said Al. "Remember last month when Shorty called Red Bukowsky a 'bohunk'? Well that sure pissed him off and Red starting chasing Shorty with a pool cue in hand."

"Yeah," I added, "and poor old Shorty is only five feet tall but he ran like hell round one pool table to another then finally got out the back door with Red hot on his heels shouting at him, 'Run you little English bastard, cause when I catch you I'll beat the shit out of you.' Red has a temper and Shorty is lucky he got away."

Tillie looked at Al, "Bernice and I should be finished around eight so why don't you come over to the house after that?"

"Okay," Al replied as we got up to leave. "We'll see you later."

I was looking around for Bernice and wondering what to say but she was already getting to work behind the counter so I just followed Al out the door.

"Should I come with you?" I asked rather confused.

"Why not, you can see Bernice if you want while Tillie and I do some smooching."

Al and Tillie had been going steady for a couple years now and that gave me the chance to go over to the Wasylenko house quite often. When Al went over to see Tillie, I sometimes came along and would hang around for a while to see if Bernice happened to be there. However, since she had graduated from Sacred Heart Academy in Yorkton and moved to Portage la Prairie, she was rarely home. I heard she was training as a psychiatric nurse and living at the nurses residence. But sometimes on long weekends or on holidays I would see her in the poolroom and we would make small talk. Once in a while the four of us would go somewhere together and I would have a chance to sit and talk with Bernice as if we were on a real date.

Al picked me up at eight and we drove over with his truck. "I may take Tillie out for a ride later," he said, "so you'll have to walk home."

"No problem, I don't even know if Bernice will be around."

We came in the house and Tillie met us at the door. "Hello you two; come on in."

As she led us through the kitchen, my heart sank. Bernice was sitting on a man's knee giving him a big hug. Now I felt like a real fool. She already had a date!

"Hello Victor," she looked at me with some surprise.

Then she stood up, put her hands on her hips and said with mock formality, "Victor, this is Victor Ukrainetz." Then she kind of laughed and added, "Yeah, Victor meet Victor."

Victor waved at me while I mumbled something and quickly went to the living room with Al and Tillie. While I sat trying to hide, Tillie was chatting away and holding a drink in her hand.

"You guys want a shot? We have some rye and coke?"

"Sure," Al said as he gave Tillie a big hug. She went to the kitchen to make our drinks while I looked at Al.

"Well I guess I won't be staying long. I'll sneak out with you when you take Tillie out."

"Look at that guitar and amp. Tillie told me he's quite a good guitar player." Then he looked at me and added for effect, "Just like you."

Yeah I thought, just like me except he has a car, a job and Bernice while I have nothing.

"Cheers guys," Tillie said and we all clinked our glasses. The drink tasted good and I needed it. As we drank and chatted, Bernice called out from the kitchen, "My honey and I are going out for a ride in his fancy new car." And with that, they left.

So, I thought bitterly, he also has a car. Well, why not? He had to drive here all the way from Tufnell. I finished my drink and looked at my watch, "I guess I better go. I'm sure you two have other things to do." I gave Al a wink and a nudge on the shoulder then left on my long and lonely walk home.

On July 1 the Town Band was all decked out in their white and red uniforms topped off with a sharp looking braided captain's hat. We were ready to march and play for the annual Canada Day celebrations. Eddie and I had our horns polished and played some scales to get our lips in shape.

"This could be your last march with this band," he said rather abruptly.

I thought about that for a moment. "Yes, I guess you're right, but only if my marks are good enough. If all goes well, I'll be in Saskatoon at the end of August. But, you know, I'll miss this band and the annual parade."

Aaron and David came over and we chatted about this and that. "Don't forget we have the Legion dance next Saturday," I reminded them as we got in line for the march down Main Street. David and Aaron gave me the thumbs up. Valdi gave us the sign to march and away we went.

As a Flight Sergeant and senior NCO with the Air Cadets last year, I was well trained in marching. I noticed that our lines were kind of crooked in places and some of the guys were out of step but they were good musicians and that's what counted. Valdi gave us the sign to play and we started playing the Colonel Bogey march just as we turned on to Main Street. There was a big crowd lined up on both sides waving and clapping as we marched by. I took a quick look at Paul's Poolroom as we passed it hoping that maybe Bernice would be there waving at me but she wasn't. She's probably at home smooching with her boyfriend I thought. I saw Eddie turn and give me a look and realized I had lost my place in the music.

After the parade, I rode home with Eddie in his 1928 Model A Ford. As we drove, I started thinking about last summer when Eddie finally got the old

car started. He had worked on the car most of the spring then near the end of school, he told us he was ready to try and start it. However, it took two people to start the car and we were more than eager to help. Mervin, Alan and I gathered in his backyard, watching as Eddie fussed over the engine making some final adjustments.

"This damn thing better work now or I'll take a gun and shoot it," he exclaimed as we all laughed. "Merv, take the crank and give it a try."

Mervin took the crank and stuck it in the opening at the front of the car.

"Ready!" he yelled to Eddie and started to crank the engine. The car sputtered then stopped.

"Try it again," yelled Eddie. "I'll give it more choke."

Mervin gave a big turn and the car sputtered again so he pushed the crank back in for another turn. Except this time the car engine fired up as Eddie stepped on the gas. The engine caused the crank to spin and fly out the front. It smacked Mervin hard on his right hand.

"Ouch!" he yelled and backed away holding his hand. "That hurts!"

"Yeah, but the car's running!" Eddie yelled over the noise. We all checked Mervin's hand which looked bruised but not broken.

"Let's take this out for a spin down the alley," Eddie waved his hand to us so we piled in. The car had a passenger seat and a rumble seat in the back that could sit two.

"Once I get my driver's license we can all go to the drive-in." We all smiled and nodded to each other.

"Yes, it looks like this is a big day for all of us," I exclaimed. We had wheels. Now we could go anywhere, anytime.

Over the winter Eddie drained the radiator and covered the car until spring. Once it got warm enough he removed the covers, put water in the radiator and some gasoline in the tank. It took a while to get the car going again the first time after the long winter and my arm was pretty sore from cranking the engine but we got it going. Ever since Mervin hurt his arm, I took over as the official car starter.

It was good to have a car available and Eddie was quite happy to take us around. Today he had picked me up and we drove to the parade.

"Good thing you got a car," I said. "This is a lot easier than hauling these alto horns downtown like we used to."

As we were driving home after the parade, Eddie looked at me, "Let's take this buggy out for a ride on the highway. I'd like to see what it can do."

That sounded like a great idea so we stopped at home, put away our instruments and changed quickly then drove over to see if the Howitt boys wanted to come along.

"You bet," said Alan happily. "It's holiday time so let's do something."

"Ready?" Eddie called out as I grabbed the crank and inserted it into the engine slot. He turned the key on and shouted, "Okay." I gave the crank a good

turn and the engine fired, sputtered then died. "Again," he said and I gave it another good turn and this time he had the engine running. I had learned after Mervin's accident that the key to starting the engine without breaking your arm was to get the crank out and keep it out before the engine started running.

I sat in the passenger side while the Howitts piled into the rumble seat and away we went. We drove all the way to the drive-in theatre east of town on the highway and stopped there to check the engine and all the tires.

"I'm going to put it to the floor going home and see what she can do. So, everything better work," Eddie noted. "I'd like to see how fast we can go."

We got on the highway and Eddie put the pedal to the floor. The car made a loud sound and gradually picked up speed. We both watched the speedometer while the Howitt's grinned and laughed in the back as the wind blew their hair.

"Forty," I yelled out, "forty-two, forty-five." The speedometer needle was wavering unsteadily but still climbing slowly. By now the front end of the car was shaking quite badly so Eddie slowed it down and stopped.

"The wheels are probably out of line and maybe crooked and that's causing the wobble," he said. "I could have gone faster but I don't want to be going sixty miles an hour and have the wheels fall off!"

"Yeah," I replied a bit nervously, "I think we should keep the speed down in this thing."

It was a glorious July day and we had a car. We all took turns driving all over town and sitting in the rumble seat. The rumble seat was something else. You felt like royalty sitting back there waving at everyone. It was a wonderful feeling to celebrate July 1st with good friends. What a great day I thought as Eddie finally drove me home.

On the day of our dance gig at the Legion, Al came over early with his truck to get all the equipment. Since there was a dinner before the dance, we helped ourselves to some free food and sneaked some wine from the kitchen when no one was looking. By about 7:30 we were ready and so was the crowd. As expected, we had a large crowd and they danced to everything we played. At the break we filled our cups with wine and pretended it was coffee or juice.

"There's nothing like playing with a good band," I thought as we sat back and chatted. David and Aaron really worked well together. They played one tune after another all night long. I added a few polkas on my guitar for a change of pace with Al playing rhythm guitar and David on the drums. Then the boys started playing a beautiful slow waltz and I couldn't help but think how nice it would be if I could just drop my guitar and go on the dance floor with Bernice. I simply couldn't get that girl of my mind. To bad she's not here I thought.

Then suddenly I saw her. There she was in the middle of the dance floor stuck like glue to a blonde guy. As they glided smoothly closer to the stage

I recognized she was with Doug Melenchuk from Wynyard. Where did he come from I wondered? First there's Victor from Tufnel now Doug from Wynyard. How many boyfriends does she have? The beautiful waltz lost its glow as I watched the two of them snuggle together and dance like lovers lost in the music. I wanted the music to stop and put an end to this scene but the boys kept playing their hearts out and I kept looking. Finally the music ended with a flourish and we took another break.

"Hey cheer up and have a drink," Al said as he poured the last of the wine into my cup. "Why the sour look? This is a great crowd and they sure love what we're playing for them."

"Yes," I said quietly without any elaboration. Then I asked, "Where's Tillie tonight?"

"She had to work at the poolroom. I guess Bernice had a date or something so Tillie said she would work since I was busy tonight playing."

Makes sense I thought.

"Well," I said downing the last of my wine. "Let's give those lovers out there some music."

Chapter Nine

TEACHERS' COLLEGE

The letter I needed finally arrived in the middle of July. For two weeks since the end of school I had walked to the post office every day checking the mail. Now, here it was - my letter from the Department of Education in Regina. I tore it open and quickly scanned the test results. It looked like I had passed all the subjects. I made a sigh of relief and then began to make some calculations. I needed a 60% average plus 60% or more in the core subjects to get into Teachers' College. I did a quick scan of the marks. They were not great but they were good enough. I ran the rest of the way home and burst into the house.

"I did it," I exclaimed to Mom waving the letter. "Looks like I'm going to be a teacher!" She gave me a polite smile and nodded her head.

Now it was just a matter of waiting for the end of summer and getting ready for my big move to Saskatoon. I was sitting in my favourite spot on the couch by the window reading a book but my mind kept wandering. A teacher, I thought, where did that idea come from? I had toyed with the idea of joining the Air Force but my eyes were not quite good enough. Then I thought teaching might be a good idea. I liked school, reading books and learning all kinds of stuff so maybe I should work in a school. Al and I talked about it once or twice and then we decided to go to college after high school. I got registered at Saskatoon Teachers' College (STC) and assumed Al had done the same. Then, it was just a matter of waiting for our marks.

The good thing about Teachers' College was that I could get a job after just one year of training and finally make some money. I could hardly afford one year at college never mind three or four years at a university to get a degree. Leo had gone to Saskatoon last year and enrolled in an accounting college which landed him a job when he finished. I thought that maybe I could do the same - one year at college then get a job. Leo was working now and promised to help me out with tuition and books. Walter called and said he would also help. I knew I could stay with my sister Mary who had a house in the city. Why not, I thought; everyone else in the family stayed there! It seemed that Mary was home base for our family. Most of my older brothers took their turn staying at Mary's place when they left home. They just moved in and stayed as long as needed until they could get a decent job and a place of their own. I would be the last in the family to take advantage of my sister's hospitality.

"Come with me," Dad said one morning after breakfast. "I need to go to the bank."

I got up and followed him out of the house wondering why he wanted me to go with him. I never went with Dad anywhere so this was something different.

"I want to see if the bank will lend me some money for you."

"For me!" I exclaimed very surprised. I never thought Dad would actually borrow money to help me out.

"You can stay at Mary's place and Walter and Leo said they would help with school fees and books but you still need some money for yourself. You are the first one in the family to go to university so we all should help out if we can."

This was a side of Dad I never saw before. He was an older man by the time I grew up as a kid so we never did much together. In fact, he never showed much interest in my life on the farm or in town. I guess he never went to school himself so there wasn't much to talk about. Eddie, Leo and I were the first ones in the family to graduate from high school and now I was planning to go even further. This was the first time I noticed Dad showing some interest in my education. Maybe there was a bit of pride in the fact that one of his sons would actually go to university; or, maybe he was just glad that the last of his kids was finally leaving home.

We stopped at the bank and I waited while Dad went in to the back office. He seemed to be there a long time but finally he signed some papers and came out.

"This is all I could get," he said as he handed me a small wad of money. "That's \$150 for you so be careful with it. That's all you get."

"Wow," I replied totally impressed. "That's a lot of money."

It was a pleasant walk home for me as I pondered my great fortune and good luck. I didn't know what to say to Dad but then he probably didn't expect me to say anything so we just walked home in silence.

After we got home, I quickly hid my money in my room. I was pretty excited about my good fortune so I went back downtown. I had to tell someone of my good luck and say some goodbyes. Mom and I were taking the bus to Saskatoon in a couple days and who knows when I would be back.

I walked briskly to Paul's Poolroom and looked around to see if anyone I knew was there. It was a quiet day and there was no one of interest just a few old timers playing pool. I walked back out through the restaurant and waved at Stella as I left. I knew that Bernice was away in Portage so there was no point hanging around here. She would be there for three or four years while I would be somewhere else. "I wonder if I will ever see her again," I thought with a heavy heart.

As I walked slowly back home, I began thinking about my friends and my future. For some reason, Al had changed his mind about going to college with me and got a job at the Bank of Nova Scotia instead. Maybe he figured that a job now was better than spending a year in college before you could get

one. Or, maybe he really never wanted to be a teacher. Who knows? Anyway, I was on my own now leaving Wynyard behind. Bernice was away training to be a nurse, Al was working at the bank and Eddie was busy most days working with his Dad. It was time for me to go.

When I finally got there, Teachers' College was amazing. School started on a beautiful September day and I made sure I got there early. I stood in front of a huge two story red brick building on a large lot with all kinds of trees, shrubs and flowers all over the place. It reminded me of my first day in Wynyard starting grade eight. Everything and everyone was new. There were hundreds of students just like me milling around looking both excited and confused. I followed the crowd into a very large auditorium and found a seat. There were some clusters of friends, girls mostly, chatting away like they were totally at home. Finally, several older people walked on the stage and one of them took the microphone. He was a rather classy and distinguished looking gentleman.

"Attention please," he said into the microphone, "can I get your attention?" When the buzz died down he continued, "I am Mr. Bates, the principal of this college and I want to welcome all of you on behalf of the staff. We have nearly a thousand students here from hundreds of towns and farms all over Saskatchewan. Our job is to help you become teachers. Now I will introduce you to our staff and then you will all be assigned to your classrooms."

The guy sitting next to me leaned over close to my ear, "Did he say Mr. Bates or was it 'Master Bates'?"

I looked at him wide eyed and started laughing. As the names of the staff were called out the pun got funnier and funnier until we were both doubled up in our chairs. The more we tried to stop the funnier it seemed and soon a number of students around us were giving us a dirty look which simply added to our problem. Finally they began the long list of names assigned to the various classes. They kept it simple, starting with class A and proceeded to class Z. Each class had about 35 names and as each group was completed, they were given a room number and told to proceed to it. By the time I heard my name called they were up to Class M. I got up to go and noticed that my new acquaintance beside me got up as well.

"You in Class M?" I asked rather surprised.

"Yep, Tom Wright's my name, what's yours?"

"Victor Zelinski, from Wynyard. That's some luck for both of us to be assigned to the same class don't you think?"

"Yeah, I'll say. Let's go find our room. I'm from Outlook, by the way. Where the hell is Wynyard?"

As we searched for our room, we told each other about our towns and where we were living in Saskatoon. We found a couple seats together and

waited for everyone to settle in. Our teacher came in and introduced himself.

"You will assemble here each morning and stay together as a group for the year. So I hope you all get to know each other. Otherwise it could be a long year!" He looked at us closely and smiled. No one laughed so he added, "That was a joke." Tom and I looked at each other and raised our eyebrows.

Then he continued, "I will teach you science and other instructors will come in and teach you the other subjects. So, the teachers will move from class to class while you stay in one place. That is, for every subject except a couple like music and Phys Ed where you have to go to a different room but you'll go as a group. I hope that's clear." He paused and shuffled some papers on his desk then continued. "Now, I'll take the roll call to make sure everyone is in the right class. If I pronounce your name wrong, just let me know."

As he read out our names I was surprised to learn that my name was not the last. He called out, "Helen Zinovich" after my name and I heard a voice from the back say, "Here." I turned to look at her and we gave each other a knowing wave. For a change, I wasn't last on the list.

Tom and I quickly became the best of friends. He was a small guy, quite thin with a friendly smile and a cheerful attitude. He always had something to say about everything and most of it was quite funny. On the second day of school, he brought in a couple decks of cards and taught me how to play bridge. After that, it seems we played bridge every day.

As for the classes, we were basically treated like high school students getting a refresher course in all the subjects. No one actually taught us much about teaching. I guess they figured if we knew the basics about the subjects we could figure out how to teach it. However, there were a few classes on methods and school administration. And, we all knew that we would have two extensive practice teaching sessions – one in the fall and one in spring. That is where we would learn how to teach; and, they would decide if we should become teachers. Meanwhile, some of the instructors did show us some interesting methods.

At one of our science classes, the instructor said, "Today we are going to learn about clouds and the best way to do that is to look at some. So, follow me outside and let's see what we find." This is different I thought.

After a short walk outside we all gathered around him and he pointed to the sky, "That over there is a cirrus cloud. Joan, describe it for us."

"I guess it looks very high up and has a kind of wavy pattern, like something you would see on a beach." She looked around rather uncertain of her answer.

"Right, like waves on a beach or in your hair," he exclaimed with some enthusiasm. "How about those over there? What do those clouds look like? Anyone please?"

"They are much fuller and fluffy and grey, kind of like rain clouds," someone else offered.

"Right again, those are low lying clouds that bring rain or snow. Now

sometimes you see those kinds of clouds but higher and not as thick and not as dark and those are called cirrus cumulus clouds.”

The class continued until he had explained all the various kinds of clouds in the sky. Then he told us to go back to class where he would show us some pictures of other clouds.

“What do you think about taking a bunch of little kids outside to talk about clouds?” I asked Tom as we made our way back to class. I thought this was an interesting way to teach.

“I don’t know about that. I think the little buggers would probably run off and hide in the bush. Then what?”

When we returned to class the teacher showed us pictures of different kinds of clouds and reviewed the names and characteristics of each. We were rather impressed by the fact that we had actually learned something useful. As I walked out the school and took the bus home, I couldn’t help checking the clouds and naming them correctly.

Sometime in late October we had exams in the basic subjects. But these, we were told, were more than just exams – they were more like qualifying exams. It turned out that this was a chance for the instructors to assess each student and decide if they had the potential to become a teacher. After all the exams were completed and marked, the instructors planned to get together and make a list of students to be expelled! So, having the marks to get into college was only the first step. Now we had another hurdle to cross. This caused a great deal of tension in the school and everyone started to study more than ever.

“I think I’m in trouble,” Tom said after the math exam. “I never was good in math and my English is not much better.”

“Maybe so, but you know the difference between cumulus and cirrus clouds don’t you?” I replied in jest.

“Yeah, but that question wasn’t on the math exam.”

About a week after the exams were done, it was D-Day. On this day, those who failed would be called to the principal’s office and told to leave. It started first thing in the morning with a school wide announcement, “Would the following students from Class A come to the office.” They read a list of three or four names and we looked at each other. We all knew what that meant.

Then, soon after, there was another announcement calling a few students from Class B and so on. We tried to ignore the tension but as the letters got closer to M, I could see fear in the eyes of many students. Finally, just before lunch, the announcement we all dreaded came over the intercom, “Would the following students from Class M come to the office.” There were three names called out and one of them was Tom Wright. I looked at him in disbelief as he shook his head and slowly got up to leave.

“I guess that’s that,” he said looking straight into my eyes. Then he

turned and walked away. I was stunned. How could this happen to my friend! I had to talk to him and tell him how sorry I was but just like that he was gone and he never came back.

After D-Day, many of us felt like survivors. We had survived the cut, but some of our friends were gone and all we could do was to carry on without them. For a while after Tom left I felt the emptiness of loss. I started thinking about the loss of my friends from high school like Eddie and Al. Then, of course there was Bernice who was gone from my life. Now Tom was gone.

I even started to think again about the loss of my older sister Helen who died in Wynyard when I was thirteen. It was the middle of winter and Helen had developed a stomach ache so Mom took her to see Dr. Polec. He thought it was stomach flu or something like that and sent her home. However her condition got worse and finally Kasmer took her to the hospital. By the time Polec figured out what was wrong, Helen's appendix had burst and she got seriously ill. Mom took me to see her before she died. It was a sunny but cold afternoon in February and we were all gathered around her bed in the hospital.

Frank and Olga were by her side trying to comfort her. Olga was the oldest in the family so it seemed appropriate that she should take charge. Olga was a lot like Jean with a round face, sparkling eyes and a constant smile. She was a bundle of energy always fussing about and organizing things. Maybe she felt obliged to be Mom's helper with the growing family. I sometimes heard my other sisters quietly complain that she was just too bossy but I found her quite gentle and motherly. Actually, I barely knew Olga but she was special to me. She was the oldest in the family and I was the youngest so we were like bookends with all our brothers and sisters in between. She got married in 1947 when I was very young and moved to a farm near Wishart. She married Leo Urbanoski, a sharp looking veteran soldier who had served in World War II. Olga showed us a picture of Leo in his uniform and we were all impressed.

I noticed Helen look around and say, "Mom, open the curtains. It's getting dark in here."

Mom looked at us sadly and lied to Helen, "Sure, I'll do that." She walked over to the window and made a noise pretending to open the curtains. We all looked at each other silently and some began to cry. Helen died quietly after that and we all knelt down to pray. She had just turned nineteen and suddenly she was gone. Losing a friend is not like losing a sister but it's a loss all the same and there was nothing I could do about it. It was sad to realize how quickly things can change in your life.

After Tom left, I moped around for a couple months without any close friends. I got to know some of the classmates a bit better such as Dennis Beerling who was the class clown and morale booster. He was rather short and stout but always cheery. Even on the gloomy days of winter he would get us singing our class song as we walked down the hall from one class to another. I chummed around with some others such as Larry Booth, Dale Kielo, Murray

Sproule and Keith Meise but I still missed Tom.

Then, one night in December I went to a party with some of my classmates and there was a dark haired guy playing a guitar and singing folk songs. He was singing to a few girls sitting on the floor in front of him so I grabbed a beer and walked over.

"That's pretty good," I said. After all the playing and singing I did in Wynyard I could spot a good player when I saw one. This guy was okay but you could tell he was pretty new at it. However, I had to give him credit; at least he had the nerve to sit there and play in front of everyone.

"Thanks," he said. "I'm Wayne Salloum, do you know any songs?"

"Vic Zelinski," I replied. "Yeah, I sing a bit, how about 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?'"

He started strumming the guitar and I began to sing. He looked up at me with some surprise and kept playing. When I finished the first verse, I nodded to him, "Take the second verse". As Wayne began the song I joined in with some high harmony. Now everyone was looking at us and nodding.

"Hey that's great stuff you guys," one of the girls said. "You two should play together." And we did. After the party, I went over to Wayne's place and we sat around drinking more beer and talking about music. Wayne was quite new to folk music so I took his guitar and showed him a bunch of country songs that Al and I used to sing plus some of the more complicated new folk songs. It turned out that Wayne was also at STC but in class F and unlike most of us he actually lived in Saskatoon. We began to get together a lot after that to play and sing at parties. Living in Saskatoon and graduating from Nutana Collegiate, he had many friends so there were plenty of parties and I got to meet many of his friends.

"It's pretty amazing that here I am in Saskatoon playing and singing at parties just like I did in Wynyard with my good buddy," I told him after one of our parties. Wayne wanted to know all about our playing and he was especially impressed when I told him about the VAD's.

"You mean you guys actually played for dances and made money!" he exclaimed. "Wow, that's my dream. To form a band and play for parties and dances."

"Yeah," I said, "But now-a-days, everyone's listening to folk music and going to the coffee houses. You got to be like the Everley Brothers or the Kingston Trio to be a hit. By the way, they have a coffee house on Broadway Avenue. We should go there sometime and check it out."

As winter ended its fierce grip, we began to prepare for our spring practice teaching session. Everyone had to do two sessions: one in a city school and the other in a rural setting. My first session was in Saskatoon and it was pretty easy because it was mostly a matter of watching the teacher do her thing. However,

the spring session was a full month and we had to do some serious teaching. I was partnered with Paul Ziobroski from class Z. When I saw my assignment I thought someone was playing a joke on me. Ziobroski from class Z matched up with Zelinski? Are you kidding? Out placement was in North Battleford. This wasn't exactly a rural placement but I was quite happy to be in a small city than some one-room farm school.

As Paul and I drove to North Battleford, I looked at him and quipped, "I guess they couldn't find a school starting with Z so they had to settle for North Battleford." Paul looked at me strangely and furrowed his brow.

"No matter," I continued, "if we're lucky, our supervising teacher will be Polish and we will have it made." Paul nodded but failed to appreciate my humor so we fell into small talk for the rest of the trip. I got the impression that Paul was quite concerned about passing the practicum. Actually, so was I. After all, if the supervising teacher decided we were not made to be teachers, well, that would be it. There were no grades for student teaching; just pass or fail.

We took turns teaching a grade six class for a whole month while our supervising teacher gave us endless criticism for our efforts. Paul had a tough time loosening up with the kids but he worked hard to prepare his classes. I was the opposite; smooth and easy going but not always properly prepared. Paul was kind of boring but the kids learned a lot from him while I was more entertaining but not always on topic. In the end, we weren't bad enough to fail so we passed.

Student teaching in spring was the last big hurdle we had to cross. By the end of June, I was a teacher. We walked across the stage and got our official teaching certificate from the Department of Education. Sure it was only an "Interim Standard" certificate but it meant we were now legally teachers. All we had to do was put in a few years of successful teaching in a school to get a permanent certificate. And, most importantly, we could now start looking for a job.

"So, where you going to teach?" I asked Wayne. We had our certificates in hand and having a nice lunch in a real restaurant rather than the usual grub at the college cafeteria.

"The paper is full of job ads for teachers all over the province but I'm going to try and get one close to home. What about you?"

"I think I'll try get something near Wynyard. That way I would be close to home. If not, then who knows?"

It was the start of summer and we were new teachers looking for a job. Wayne found one near Saskatoon but I wanted to go back to Wynyard. The Saskatoon papers had dozens of teaching jobs all across Saskatchewan. It was just a matter of picking the right place. I couldn't find anything in the Wynyard area in these papers so I figured the best thing to do would be to get back home and take a closer look from there.

I got a ride back to Wynyard and settled into my old bedroom. It felt strange to be back. The town still looked the same and nothing had changed at our house but yet, it wasn't the same as when I left a year ago. Mom and Dad didn't seem bothered by the fact that I was back home. I guess I was just one of many in my family that came and went over the years. All in all, I felt pretty lucky; I had my own bedroom with no rent and free meals. Now all I had to do was find a job.

I started looking in the Wynyard Advance and found a few openings. There were still a number of small one room schools around that needed teachers willing to work for minimum pay. Teachers with more education and experience cost a lot more than new ones like me so we were in high demand by the small school districts. Levant SD 1591 was one of them and they needed a teacher. The school was only five miles or so from town and a couple miles off the main highway. I called the phone number in the paper and arranged a meeting. When the day arrived, I borrowed a car and drove out for the interview.

The chairman of the School District was farming his land immediately next to the school grounds. When he saw me drive into the school grounds, he stopped, got off his tractor and walked over to me.

"You Mr. Zelinski?" he asked as we shook hands. I liked the sound of 'Mr. Zelinski'. It made me sound important, like a teacher or something.

"Yes, you must be Mr. Goodwin. I called you about the teaching job."

"Yes, I'm Greg. I farm the land around the school and I also serve as the chairman of the Levant School District."

We walked over to the school where he unlocked the door and found us a couple of chairs inside. I looked around the school, "Looks a lot like Evelynne School. I went to a school like this up to grade eight before I moved to Wynyard."

"Oh, good," he replied. "I'm glad to hear that. Some of the teachers from the city have no idea how to handle a one room school with seven or eight different grades but you should be all right with that. We have nineteen students here but most are in the lower grades. We also have one older student doing grade nine but he will be taking correspondence courses so you won't need to worry much about him. Let me show you the rest of the school."

"As you can see, there is no furnace here. It's downstairs and an oil burner so you won't have to worry about keeping a wood fire going in the winter. There's a stairway by the girls' clothes room. Follow me down and I'll show you the basement."

"A basement!" I exclaimed quite surprised. "They never had that at Evelynne."

"Yes we have a full basement that we turned into living quarters for the teacher. There was a time when I started school here that we had forty or fifty

students with two teachers – one upstairs and one downstairs. Then everyone started leaving and moving into the big towns like Wynyard so we changed the basement. You can see we have a nice kitchen, a bathroom and a bedroom.”

“This looks great. I’m going to live in Wynyard with my parents for now but this is nice to have. I could stay here if the weather turns bad in the winter. Which reminds me, do you keep the roads open?”

“Yeah a couple of farmers have a tractor with a blade to clear the snow from here to the highway so you should be alright if you want to drive to work. Well, if you’re interested, I’ll draw up a contract and you can start getting yourself organized.”

“Sure, why not,” I said and we shook hands. Just like that, I had a job.

We went back upstairs and I checked out the library while Greg wrote out the contract. There was one shelf of books that looked pretty old. Greg looked over at me, “There are some basic teaching supplies at the bottom of the book shelf and there’s another order on the way, mostly workbooks and readers from the Department of Education. The last teacher made up the order before she left.”

“How come she left?” I asked without thinking. Did I really need to know why?

“She was getting kind of expensive for us with four years of experience. And, she was hoping for a job in a bigger school closer to her home.” Thank goodness he didn’t take offence to the question.

He finished writing some more then called me over, “Here’s the contract. It’s for one year and pays \$2700 over twelve equal payments. I write out the cheque at the end of each month and bring it over to the school. All you have to do is sign here and we have a deal.”

I pretended to look carefully at the one page contract in front of me but inside I was jumping for joy. I had a job and I would get a cheque every month. How good is that! I signed my name with a flourish and we both got up. He handed me the keys to the school and shook hands again.

“School starts on September 5th. All the parents will be here with their kids in the morning so you will get a chance to meet them. Some of the older boys may be busy with harvest in the fall but don’t worry about that. Also, every family will want you to come over at least once for dinner before winter sets in. It’s a good way for you to get to know us better.”

With that, he got back on his tractor and went to work. I stood there for a long time enjoying the moment and surveying my new domain. The school yard was about five acres or so mostly surrounded by caragana bush and some scattered poplar and maple trees. I could see the outline of a ball diamond in one corner. An old barn sat at the other end. Must be for the horses – if they still use horses to get to school like we did I wondered.

I went back to the school and sat down at the teacher’s desk. “When you sit down at the big desk in front of the class, you’re in charge and don’t ever

forget it," I recalled one of our instructors at college telling us. Then he added, "Start out being firm and strict. You can always get friendly later but it is very hard to regain control of the students once you lose it."

I looked through the list of names, grades and ages and suddenly I stopped. "Holy shit!" I said out loud. "My oldest student is sixteen!" I was still eighteen until my birthday in late December. I didn't want that to get out so I'd better try to look a lot older. I walked back to the car and drove home. Yes, I think I'll get a hat and maybe smoke a pipe. That should help me look more mature. But, first I had to get a car.

"Hi Mom," I called out when I got home. "I got a job. I'll be teaching at Levant School."

"Ohy, yoh, doosheh dobreh" (Oh, very good) she replied. She smiled and nodded her head. Then she added, "now you probably need a car. You should call Vera's Joe. He has a garage."

Not a bad idea, I thought. Joe Zatylny lived in Dysart and owned all kinds of land in the area plus a garage. Vera and Joe had lived in Punnichy for a while then settled in the small hamlet of Dysart where he quickly accumulated some substantial wealth and a big family. My sister Vera got married when I was not quite two years old so her oldest son, David was only a couple years younger than me. I remember him laughing with his younger brothers as he sarcastically called me "Uncle Victor". When they came to visit us on the farm, it was pretty chaotic. They had four boys in a row; David, Gerry, Gary and little Joe while we had four as well; Walter, Ed, Leo and me. That made eight kids from about two to sixteen all in one bunch and mostly looking for mischief. Walter was the oldest so he had to try and keep us out of trouble.

"Hey, look at all those little piggies," David called out to his brothers one time when they were visiting. "What you going to do with all these piglets, Uncle Victor?" He drew out the "uncle" part and nudged Gerry.

"Maybe we should catch one for supper?" Gerry suggested. David gave him a nod and Gerry jumped into the pig pen to catch one. David laughed out loud and the little kids hooted and hollered as he finally caught one of the pigs. Everyone thought this was pretty funny, even little Joey who giggled and ran around in circles. Everyone, that is except Walter.

"Put that pig down you little brat or I'll come in there and kick you in the ass." There was silence as Gerry put the pig down and leaped back out of the pig pen. Walter wagged his finger at David and Gerry, "Stay out of trouble you little buggers. I'll be keeping an eye on you." With that, we all scattered and found other things to do. No sooner had Walter turned his back however, I heard Gerry whisper to David, "There's a bunch of little chicks over there. What do you think?" They nodded to each other and started picking up some stones. They looked around to see that no one was watching and started throwing stones. They all laughed aloud as the chicks started to squawk and scatter.

When they left, Mom waved goodbye then shook her head and muttered quietly, "Horoba, horoba, (trouble, trouble)." Then she put her hand on Walter's shoulder and they walked slowly to the house.

Joe had strong opinions about everything and quite happy to share them with anyone willing to listen. He had a loud voice to go with his opinions and you couldn't miss him in a crowd. He was a big man with a round freckled face topped with bright red hair. Joe was well off. I remember him pulling out a \$1000 bill from his wallet. "I like to keep one of these in my wallet just to have it," he said with a great deal of satisfaction. I wish I had one of those now I thought, that bill could buy me a pretty nice car.

I talked to my brother Kasmer about going over to Joe's place for a car. I needed a ride and some advice. "Sounds like a good idea but don't think Joe is going to give you a special deal. I buy machinery from him mostly because he is family but I'm sure I could do better sometimes shopping around. However, if you want to go, I'll drive you there next time I need to see him."

About a week later we drove over to Joe's place and took a look at a couple of cars he had on the lot. I didn't need to look long because the first car I saw there I knew I had to have. It was a 1956 red and white Ford Fairlane. My brother Ed had a car just like that except his was a convertible. This wasn't a convertible but otherwise it was the same car and I really liked the look of it.

"How much for that one," I asked pointing at the Ford.

"Aha. You want a fancy car do you?" Joe nodded and scratched his chin for a bit. "Well, because you are family, I'll give it to you for \$750. But how the hell are you going to pay for it?"

"I have a job so I'll get a loan at the bank and pay you."

Joe thought about that for a while. "Normally I wouldn't let a car go unless I had the money in my hand but as I said, you're family so I'll let you have it. But you better be back in a week with the money."

He gave me the keys and I started up the motor. "I hope this old car is in good shape," I said listening to the engine run. Then I noticed the gas tank was almost empty. "Hey, how about a tank of gas? It's almost empty. I'll never make it home."

He pointed to the gas pump so I drove up and he filled it without a word. "That will be \$5 mister," he said firmly, holding out his hand.

You bugger, I thought as I handed him my last five through the open window and drove out without waving bothering to wave goodbye.

Dysart was about fifty miles (80 km) south Wynyard over country roads that were windy, dusty and rough but for me, the leisurely drive home was sheer pleasure. Here I was in my own car and I had real job. It was another one of those great prairie summer days so I rolled down the window and let the wind blow through my hair. "What was it Paul Wasylenko used to say when things were going very good?" I wondered as I drove. Then it hit me. He would say, "That's what I call living". I thought about that and smiled, "Right on Paul!

"This is what I call living!" Then I turned the radio on quite loud and stepped on the gas.

I got to work early on the first day of school. I had a new suit with a white shirt and tie. My new car was parked close to the entrance so everyone could see I had one. As the cars and trucks pulled in I went over to each family and introduced myself. I noticed that all the kids were dressed in their good clothes and the ladies wore nice dresses. This was the first day of school and everyone wanted to make a good impression.

One of the families had several kids so I went over to chat with them.

"We're the Antoniuk family," said the father. "I'm Pete and this is my wife Johana. We got one in grade 5, one in grade 3 and a new one starting this year."

I leaned over to the little one and asked, "What's your name young man?"

He gave a big grin showing a large gap in his front teeth.

"Donnie. Who are you?"

"Well Donnie, I'm Mr. Zelinski, your teacher this year." I tapped him gently on the head and gave him a big smile. He gave me a big smile back and ran away to his older sister.

"We'll be expecting you for dinner soon as you can make it," Johana said clasping my hand and shaking it. "How about later this month once the harvest is in?"

"That sounds just fine. I look forward to that. But now, it's time to get to work." With that I walked over to a couple more families for a small chat then to the school. Once inside, I took out the big brass bell with a sturdy handle and walked out to the entrance. I rang it loudly. All the kids still outside playing came running in. Within minutes, we were all ready for day one of the school year.

Having spent seven years at Evelyne, I was quite comfortable in a one room school. However, I soon learned that teaching in a one room school with several grades was pretty complicated. It required a lot of planning, organization and time management. I had nineteen students from grades one to eight with the largest group in grade one. There were five of them and they were still not able to read so I couldn't very well give them workbook assignments like the others. I had to focus most of my attention on them. For the rest, they had their workbooks and if they had a question they could ask me or one of the older students. We would start the day with reading or math and while I worked with the grade ones, the others did their workbook assignments. Once I got the grade ones looked after, I would go through the other grades quickly and help as needed.

There were two girls in grade two who were pretty special. They always

tried to be so good and never did anything without my permission. As a result, they seemed to be around my feet much of the time. One day I was teaching an experiment on magnetism with the grade five and six students when I felt a familiar tug on my pants. I looked down and one of the girls stood there holding a pencil.

“Yes, dear.”

“Teacher, can I sharpen my pencil?”

“Well, of course, go ahead.” However, just as I turned back to the experiment, there was another tug on my pants. It was the same girl looking up at me holding two pencils.

“Teacher, can I sharpen both pencils?”

I watched the little girl make her way to the pencil sharpener and thought, “I should become a grade two teacher in a big school. Now that would be a great job.”

By the end of the first month, I felt I had things going pretty well in the school so I thought I should celebrate. I had a respectable job, a car, a suit, a pipe, a top coat and sporty hat. It was time to walk boldly into the beer parlour and buy myself a case of beer. I parked the car and walked in.

“I’ll have a case of Boh,” I said casually to the bartender and pulled out my money. He gave me a long look which made me a bit nervous.

“You Pete Zelinski’s boy who teaches around here somewhere? I heard you live in town.”

I was put off a bit at being called a “boy” but let it slide.

“Yeah, I’m teaching at Levant.”

He brought me the beer, took the money and turned away to serve another customer. There, I thought, that wasn’t so bad. Sure, I was still only eighteen but I must look twenty – one so why not buy my own beer? I walked out the beer parlour into the hotel lobby with my case in hand. Then, just as I stepped into the lobby, two RCMP officers walked in from the street. I froze and my heart sank. What now? I had to walk directly by them. There was no place to hide so I just kept walking. One of the officers even held the door open for me while he chatted with his partner. I took the pipe from my mouth and said, “Thanks, officer, have a good day.”

I stashed the beer in the trunk and sat in the car for a while to settle my nerves. I shook my head and said quietly to myself, “Thank God I had my hat, pipe and topcoat or I’d be in big trouble right now.” I started my car and drove home very slowly.

Chapter Ten

THE TROUBADORS THREE

It was hot as blazes and I was bent over to my toes tying steel. Sweat poured down into my eyes and dripped on my sunglasses. I stood up, took off my steel helmet, wiped my eyes with a dirty rag and looked around. We were laying steel rods into the foundation of another office tower in Saskatoon and there was no time to waste. The contractor had already ordered the cement trucks for noon so we had to be finished before they came. John was working his way towards me in the same trench. He stood up, smiled and yelled out, "Get your back into it Victor. I'm not paying you to stand around getting a sun tan."

I gave him the finger and got back to work. John was a tall, thin, good looking Irishman with an angular face, high cheek bones, light brown curly hair and bright blue eyes. He had a strong Irish accent and loved to argue with anyone about anything – particularly after a drink or two. He was a great guy but had no particular qualifications or skills other than playing golf when he immigrated to Canada as a young man in his twenties. He heard there was work in Kitimat so he went there, found some work and met my sister Mary. In 1957 John and Mary got married in Wynyard then moved to Saskatoon where he got a job laying steel.

Once he learned the steel business, he formed his own small company and bid on contracts. He hired a couple of experienced rodmen who could tie steel and read a blueprint but the rest of us were part time laborers and relatives looking for short term work. Laying steel was very tough but it paid quite well compared to other summer jobs. We would carry in the steel rods on our shoulders and lay them out in a crisscross pattern as needed. Then, we would tie each cross point with a metal wire and snip it off with sturdy pliers. John was a good boss and the fastest steel tier of us all. Sometimes when we did a large cement floor, four or five of us would line up at one end and race to see who would finish first. John usually won.

After work the crew gathered at Mary's place as usual to drink beer and bullshit. I was staying with John and Mary again and enrolled at the university. After teaching for a year at Levant I decided to go back to university and maybe try some other career. \$2700 per year seemed like a lot of money when I started teaching but it didn't take long for me to realize I needed to upgrade my qualifications or look for something better. Besides, the one room schools in Saskatchewan were rapidly shutting down with more and more of the farm kids bussed to larger schools in nearby towns.

After a shower and a couple of beer with the boys, I told Mary I

wouldn't stay for dinner. I was in a hurry to meet Al at the coffee house on Broadway Avenue. The coffee house brought in some pretty good talent on the weekends and we wanted to get a good seat for the show.

"How you doing?" Al asked as I sat down.

"Fine, but it was hot as hell today – not that you would notice. It must be nice to work in an air conditioned bank pushing paper from one pile to the next. I'll be glad to get back to the books. Teaching was a lot easier than tying steel; that's for sure. I wouldn't want to do this for a living."

Al laughed, "Yes I didn't really notice how hot it was today until I left the bank. So what you going to take at the U?"

"A bunch of first year stuff like history, English, sociology and so on. I'm going for a BA in history I think."

"Then what?" Al asked always practical.

"I have no idea. Maybe something will come up or I might end up teaching history. That would be fine if I got a job in a high school."

We both ordered coffee just as the first group took the stage for their set. It was good to have Al in Saskatoon. Instead of going to Teachers' College with me after high school he got a job in Wynyard at the Bank of Nova Scotia. So, while he worked there I went to college then taught at Levant for a year. Now, as luck would have it, Al was transferred to a bank in Saskatoon so here we were back together again. It wasn't long before we had the guitars out and playing at parties.

The duet performing on stage was local but pretty good. The girl strummed the guitar and sang lead while the guy harmonized here and there and did a bit of picking.

"Not bad," Al said as he munched on a snack. "Do you think we should get up there sometime and play?"

"I don't know about that. Most of our songs are kind of country and western. These groups are all folk singers. I think we'd do better with a country band doing dances or something. Maybe I'll find some players at the university."

"Yeah, to bad Aaron and David aren't around. We could get the VADs going again and make some money playing on the weekends."

"Yes, I wonder what they are up to these days. Anyway, let's get out of here and get some real food. I have to work tomorrow. Classes start next week so that will be it for steel work for a while – thank goodness."

University was right up my alley. On the first day of class, I found a parking spot on the street and walked a couple blocks to the campus. The weather was mild with just a hint of fall crispness in the air and the university grounds were in great shape. The grass was lush and green with flower beds all over the place and beautiful spruce and maple trees just starting to change color. Most of the buildings were covered with a grey colored sandstone quarried in the area. I joined the thousands of students milling about all over the

place trying to find their buildings and rooms. My letter from the university directed me to St. Thomas More (STM) College for registration. STM was a Catholic College within the university. I guess I must have put Catholic as my religion on the university application so my name got passed on to them. Registration included picking my courses for the year so it took some time. When that was completed I found the STM cafeteria for lunch and joined hundreds of others already there. It was a very lively place to eat and I felt quite at home. I got myself registered and found a good place to eat - that's probably enough for one day I thought as I headed out to my car.

Next day I arrived on campus early because I had to find where all my classes were. The first one was easy because it was in one of the classrooms at STM. Much to my surprise an older priest was at the front of the room and introduced himself as our instructor.

"I'm Fr. O'Donnell," he said quietly, "And this is English 102 so if you're in the wrong class, leave." No one left so he continued. "That's pretty good; no lost souls yet."

Then he looked around slowly and added, "Don't let the collar fool you. Claiming to be a good Catholic won't get you through this course." That made a few of us chuckle.

My second class was in political science and I had some trouble finding that one. When I did, the room was already full with students lined up in the hallway. The instructor was standing by his desk shaking his head.

"This is ridiculous! You all can't be in my class. This is Poli. Sci. 102 not Glee Club so check your registration again. If you're not registered in this class, take off so we can get down to business."

There was a general buzz and this time, a few students left the room. The professor shook his head, "Why is it that every bone head in the province wants to go to university? Can't you people find anything else to do? Like run a farm or get a real job? This university is jammed to the rafters." Then he smiled at us, "Maybe we won't be so crowded after the first exams."

We all looked at each other and I could see some of the students seemed worried. Being a teacher, however I was pretty sure that was just a bluff.

After lunch I found my way to History 102. A classic looking elderly professor with white hair stood in front of the class with a soft smile on his face. I poked the guy sitting next to me, "This one looks nicer than the prof I had in the last class."

"Yeah, I heard great things about him. We're lucky to get into his class. By the way, I'm Evan," he said extending his hand. I noticed he was a very big man with large hands. I shook his hand and introduced myself.

"I'll do the roll call ladies and gentlemen," the professor said and began calling out the names in alphabetical order with the last names first.

"Anderson, Ken; Boyko, Vernon," and so on while each student put

up their hand and answered "Here." About half way down he stopped, looked carefully at his list then looked up and asked with a smile, "Is Lord Evan here?" My new buddy next to me raised his hand and said, "Here."

"Well, I see we have royalty in this class," and the whole class laughed. "Welcome, Evan Lord."

After class I turned to Evan, "Your Highness, Lord Evan, may I buy you a coffee at STM?"

"STM! I have a few classed there also. Let's go."

Evan was tall and lanky with the biggest hands I had ever seen. He had an angular face with a square jaw and an easy smile. His complexion was quite light and his hair seemed to be prematurely grey with silver streaks. Odd, for a man so young I thought.

We settled in at the cafeteria and talked for a while then Evan paused, "Hey, did you know there's a hoot-an-any here every Sunday at 7 PM in the theatre. You said you like music so why not meet me here on Sunday and I'll save you a seat."

"Sure, why not. I'll see you on Sunday."

The rest of the week flew by rather quickly. I met Evan at STM on Sunday as planned and by the middle of the show, I knew Al and I had to perform here. I thanked Evan then added, "I'm going to get my buddy Al to come here next Sunday and do a few songs."

Evan looked at me wide eyed, "You're going to go on stage and play here! Wow, this I have to see. I'll even tell the organizers to save a spot for you."

I called Al when I got home and told him to come over next evening and bring his guitar. When he came over I got right to the point. "Al, we've got to go to STM on Sunday!" I said rather emphatically.

"We do? What's STM?" Al asked with a surprised look.

"It's a Catholic college at the university and I take a few classes through them. They have a great cafeteria, a large theatre with really nice soft seats and they put on a hoot-an-any every Sunday at 7 PM. It's kind of like an amateur hour like we used to do on the Yorkton radio station back home. Anybody can come up and play. I was there last night and believe me, you and I are better than most of the groups I heard. We just show up and do two songs."

"Okay with me." Then Al added with the usual emphasis, "But we have to practice."

Next Sunday night Al and I were standing off the stage waiting to go on. The theatre was almost full and some of the groups in front of us sounded pretty good. Each singer or group did two songs then left. Finally it was our turn.

"Ladies and gentlemen here is a new group for you. They just started here at U of S and I'm told they used to play and sing together in Wynyard – wherever that is. Anyway, give them a warm welcome to STM."

Al and I walked up to the mic and I started the guitar riff opening a

hit song by the Everley Brothers, "Bye, Bye Love." The song had a big impact right from the start with our harmony and the crowd gave us an enthusiastic round of applause. Al and I gave each other a nudge and started our next song. This time the crowd cheered and hooted for an encore. We bowed and left the stage. Evan and some of his friends slapped us on the shoulder and told us to make sure we came back again.

Just as we were putting away our guitars another guy walked over with his hand out, "Great job guys, I'm Terry Mooney. I sang here last week with a friend of mine but he's not here today. You two sounded great." Terry was about my size with a round face, dark hair and large dark eyes. He seemed very outgoing and friendly.

We introduced each other and were about to leave when he asked, "You guys mind playing a few songs with me? I don't play the guitar."

Al and I looked at each other then I said, "Why not."

We got the guitars out and found a secluded spot under the stairs. "How about this one in the key of C I think," Terry said and started to sing. Our jaws dropped as we listened and played. Terry had a full, rich baritone voice and the acoustics in the cement stairwell amplified the sound. After a while Al and I added some harmony and Terry gave us a thumbs up as he sang.

"Sounds pretty good don't you think," he exclaimed after he finished.

"Not just pretty good," I replied emphatically, "but pretty damned great!"

"Well I'm glad you like it because I'm kind of looking to join a group and when I heard you guys on stage I thought maybe this could be it."

"A group it is," I said and shook his hand. "Let's get together tomorrow and work on some songs." With that we exchanged addresses and phone numbers and left.

"What a hell of a singer," Al repeated as we walked to my car.

"Yeah, I think we have a group," I said with a big smile. "You and I sing, but he's a real singer."

We met the next day at Mary's place and played for a couple hours in the basement. Terry had everything Al and I needed to form a folk group. He was a natural lead singer with a great voice. Al and I had ordinary voices but we were pretty good at harmonies. Al could sing below Terry and I sang harmony above him. And, as we started learning all kinds of folk songs we found that Terry had the gift of remembering the words to hundreds of songs. When Al and I played, we often had a song book with us so we wouldn't forget the words. We memorized some songs for performances but Terry was like a living song book. We practiced for a couple of weeks before we started playing at some parties to try out our material. Evan Lord became our unofficial manager and number one fan. He would often come over to our practices and sing along in the background then whoop and cheer when we sang a good one. One day

he showed us his famous one handed clap. He raised one of his big hands and started to clap! We all looked at each other in amazement and gave him a full round of applause – with both hands.

“It’s time to hit STM guys. I think you’re ready,” Evan said one night after practice. “I’ll tell them to put you on the program next Sunday and maybe you could do a special show rather than just a couple songs.”

We looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

“Okay,” he said. “However, you need a name. So what are you going to call yourselves?”

We started throwing out some names, ‘The Three Guys’ which was rather bland, ‘The Singing Three’, which sounded too much like “The Singing Tree”! We all laughed about that one. Then Terry offered, “The Troubadors” and we liked that. It had a classic ring to it.

As we thought about the name, Evan added, “How about The Troubadours Three?”

We all looked at each other and Terry nodded his head. “I think that’s it.”

Next Sunday we arrived early and found a place back stage to tune our guitars and get ready for the show. Evan brought one of the organizers to meet us.

“Here they are, The Troubadours Three,” Evan said with a mock flourish. “This is Bill.”

“Hi, so you guys are the Troubadors,” Bill said as we all shook hands.

“I see you are listed in the program as the Troubadors Three without the ‘u’. But then I guess it doesn’t matter how you spell the name it still sounds the same.”

“Actually I kind of like it,” I said looking at the others. “It’s like color vs colour, you know, it’s like the American version of Troubadours.”

Everyone looked at me rather confused but Evan interjected, “Troubadors, matadors, Dukabors, what’s the difference. Let’s get the show on the road.”

“Right,” said Bill. “Evan says you guys sound great so we’re going to give you some extra time on stage. How many songs do you want to do?”

“How about four and an encore,” Terry suggested with a shrug.

“An encore! Now there’s confidence. You got it buddy, but only if the crowd asks for one that is,” Bill added with a big smile as he left.

The crowd was ready and so were we. We sang our songs and the crowd loved it. We did our encore but they still called for more so Bill waved us on to do one more.

After the show Bill was all smiles, “Evan was right. You guys are damned good. Come back anytime you want.”

After our big opening at STM we started getting invited to all kinds of parties and gatherings. STM was still our home base but soon we were asked

to play at functions for money.

"Hey guys, I got us a paying gig for next Friday night," Terry announced as we met for our usual practice session at Mary's basement.

"That's more like it," I said, "where and how much?"

"At the university nurses residence and we get a \$100 for one set."

Al and I looked at each other and nodded. I added, "A hundred bucks and we get to meet a bunch of nurses. That's what I call living – as Paul would say."

"As Paul would say? What's that?" Terry asked.

"Paul Wasylenko owns Paul's poolroom in Wynyard. He would say that when things were really going good."

"That's what I call living," mused Terry with a hand on his chin. "I like it."

"Yes and Paul also has a couple of good looking daughters," Al added. "I've been going out with one of them since high school and Victor here is madly in love with the other one."

"Yeah, I guess," I said rather sheepishly. "However, she's in Portage la Prairie now and probably doesn't even think of me."

"Hmmm," Terry muttered looking at me. "I guess that's not 'what I call living' in this case!"

When we arrived at the nurses residence we were taken to a large meeting room filled with rows of nurses all dressed in their starched white uniforms and fancy hats. Apparently these were student nurses having a special event. We were taken to a small room on the side of the hall and got ourselves ready for the show.

"Have you ever seen so many good looking girls in one room?" I asked the guys.

"No," Terry replied. "But I hope to snag one tonight if I can."

"Well there's enough for all of us," Al remarked with a smile. "But let's get the show done first and get our money."

Our set included a bunch of standard folk songs which went over very well with the nurses. I could see that many of them knew the songs because they sang along then clapped loudly after each one. For the last few songs however we had worked up a couple of very popular hits by the Beatles. We had watched the Beatles on TV and were amazed at the effect of the group on the audience – especially young women.

"Maybe the nurses will get all excited about us like those girls on TV," Terry suggested partly in jest at our last practice. We laughed at that but practiced the songs anyway. As we tried some of the Beatles hits it turned out that my voice was best for lead in some of these songs.

"I think we really nailed 'She Loves You'. All we have to do is shake our heads like this when we do the chorus," I demonstrated by shaking my

head vigorously.

"Yeah let's all do that on the chorus," Al agreed. So we decided to finish the show that way.

Now we were in the middle of the first Beatles song, a slow love song and we could see the girls were really into it with us. They were swaying and singing then some of them jumped to their feet and clapped loudly. When we started 'She Loves You', most of the girls stood and started to sing and clap along. Then, on the chorus we did the famous Beatles head shake and the place went wild. We looked at each other in utter amazement as girls jumped up and down cheering so hard we could hardly hear ourselves. Then, some of the girls in the front row began to lean over as if they were fainting! Maybe they were pretending but it was just like the images on TV and quite unbelievable. We finished the song and quickly ran off the stage to our little room. Terry closed the door just as some of the girls started banging on the door yelling for more.

"Do you believe this," I shouted to Al and Terry over the noise.

"This is the craziest thing I have ever seen. I think some of them started to believe we were the Beatles!" Al exclaimed.

We heard the organizers on the microphone telling to girls to settle down and gradually the noise subsided. While we put away our guitars, the door opened and shut quickly as one of the organizers entered the room.

"I don't know what to say, guys," she said. "I've never seen anything like this. I think some of the girls must have mistaken you for the real thing or something. Anyway, you did a hell of a show and here is your money. I have a feeling you guys will be making a lot more in the future."

Then as she turned to leave she stopped, "Sorry I didn't call you back for an encore but I'm sure you understand."

A few months later, on a cold and dreary evening in November, we sat in Mary's basement drinking beer and reflecting on what Al had just told us. We could tell something was up when Al came in and stood there for along moment looking at us. Then he blurted out, "I've been transferred to Moose Jaw."

"What? When?" Terry and I said at the same time.

"Next week," Al replied grimly as he opened a beer and took a long drink.

We all sat silent for a while then Terry stated the obvious, "Looks like that's it for the Troubadors."

"Yes and here we were just planning a road trip to some of the smaller towns around here and maybe make some money," I said.

"Well Al," I added, putting my hand on his shoulder "We've gone through this before with the VADs so maybe we'll have another go at it sometime."

There was silence in the room as we all thought about that but I didn't sound all that convincing. There was no point in practicing anymore so we just sat around and drank a bunch of beer.

A couple days later Terry phoned, "Listen, I've got a guy here that you should meet. Maybe we could replace Al and keep the group going. What do you think?"

I didn't know what to think so I just said, "Sure, why not. We need to try something."

For some reason Terry and I didn't consider just singing as a duo. I guess you couldn't be the "Troubadors Three" with just two guys and the "Troubadors Two" didn't sound right. When I got there, Terry met me at the door and introduced me to a tall thin red headed fellow with a freckled face. "Hi," he said as we shook hands. "I'm Boyce Neufeldt."

Terry looked at me, "Boyce and I worked at the same bank last summer. We did some singing together before I met you guys. He plays the guitar a bit as well and sings way up high."

"A tenor?" I asked. "That should be interesting because Al was more of a baritone or bass. I had to do all the high parts. Let's do a couple songs and see how it goes."

Boyce lent me his guitar and Terry and I started on a song the usual way then Boyce joined in. My eyes popped wide open as Boyce started to hit the high notes. He had a full rich tenor voice that blended perfectly with our sound. Like Terry, he had a real voice that could carry a melody or harmony.

"You have a hell of a voice, Boyce," I said shaking my head. Then I looked at Terry, "Boyce the voice, I like that!"

We laughed at that then I added, "It looks like we have Terry in lead and a high tenor. I'll fit somewhere in the middle with my harmony."

"Yeah, like baloney in a sandwich," Terry added with a laugh.

"That's me alright. With a voice above and below I just might sound pretty good as well. Let's work up some songs then do a couple gigs and see how it goes."

With that, we started to practice. Over the next month we prepared a good set of about a dozen songs and of course we could always count on Terry to know the words and sing just about any request from the audience. I told Evan about the new guy in our group and he came over the very next practice.

"You guys were good before but now the sound is even better. Boyce can really hit those high notes," Evan told me after practice. "He has a great voice."

"I think the new Troubadors should do a couple songs at STM next Sunday. I'll let them know," Evan looked at us and we all nodded in agreement.

By spring we were seasoned entertainers and thinking of recording a single 45 record. Boyce ran into Rudy Heineki, who did the sound for different events around Saskatoon. He also had a small recording studio on Avenue B and 21st street where he hoped to produce records. His wife was called Barb, so he named the record label Barb Records. He asked Boyce to bring the group over for a recording session.

"We have no money for a recording session but I'd sure like to try it all the same," I said when Boyce told us about Rudy's offer.

"I think he would do a recording for nothing if we could make a record that would sell," Boyce replied. "We could all make some money if we got a hit record and we could charge more for gigs."

That sure started us thinking so we gathered at the studio on Saturday morning.

"Hi guys," Rudy waved at us with cigarette in hand. "Boyce tells me you're a pretty good group so why don't you set up and play something."

Rudy was from Holland and spoke with an accent. We found out later that he had lived through the war as a child in Rotterdam then immigrated to Canada after the war. He had a very simple recording operation but we had never been to a recording studio before so it looked pretty good to us. There was a single mic in the studio so we gathered around it to sing. Rudy sat behind a large glass window in his recording room and started the tape recorder then gave us the go ahead signal with his hand. With that we started singing. When the song was over Rudy rewound the Roberts reel to reel recorder and played us the song over a couple speakers. As the song played he joined us in the studio and listened with us.

Rudy was rather short and stout with high cheek bones and a large expressive face topped with soft brown hair that had some natural curls. He was probably in his mid-thirties and a chain smoker. He listened intently to the songs while he tapped his foot to the music and puffed endlessly on one cigarette after another. By the time the songs were over, he had created a big cloud of smoke around us. We looked at him nervously.

"Boyce was right," he said nodding his head. "You guys are good, very good. You have a different kind of sound." We all sighed with some relief then Rudy added, "Do four or five songs for me and I'll record them. Then we can talk."

When the songs were completed, it was time for lunch so we all walked down to the nearest beer parlor a block or so away on 20th street. It was rather dark and dinghy inside but the beer and chips tasted pretty good.

"I think you guys have a very good chance for a hit if you can get the right songs. You have a great sound but you need original material if you're going to get anywhere."

We sat there drinking our beer and thinking about that. I had written a few songs but that was just because I felt like writing – not to actually use them

for performance or a record.

Terry looked at me then turned to Rudy. "Victor told us he has a couple songs already and maybe he could write a few more for a single. All you need is two good songs for a single 45."

They all looked at me while I shrugged my shoulders, "I'll give it a try."

"That would be great." Rudy nodded his head. "Come back next Saturday with your songs. We'll tape them and see if they are worth recording."

When I got home that afternoon I felt inspired to get at it. I took out a notebook and my guitar and looked at the empty page. I started trying out some tunes and words. What do I write about? Then it came to me – I grew up on a farm so why not write about farm life. With that, I started.

Hard Ground

*We broke the back breaking sod
And we cleared the north timber line
And I'm proud to say, in my little way
That this hard ground is mine*

Chorus

*Oh, this hard ground is mine
It's the best darned land, you will find
There are places that claim to be fine
But I love this hard ground of mine.*

*The spring, when days get long
And the sun from the blue does shine
There's an eye to the sky
And a will that won't die
In this hard ground of mine*

Chorus

*The summer and life that is grown
Oh the gold may wither and pine
But there's always next year
Here's health and good cheer
In this hard ground of mine*

Chorus

Just like that it was done. This only took about half an hour I thought as I looked at the finished song scribbled in my notebook. That's amazing! The verses seemed to flow out as if the song was already in my head and just needed to be written down. It may not be all that commercial but it's honest and I liked it.

I called Terry and Boyce. "I have a song. Get over here and let's try it."
They both dropped everything and came to my place.

"Here it is," I said and sang them the song.

"Wow," said Terry. "I like it. Where did that come from?"

"I don't know how to explain it. I just sat down and wrote it – the whole song just flowed out from head to hand. I hardly had to change anything when it was done."

Terry pursed his lips and gave Boyce a nod. Boyce picked up his guitar, "The song is great but it's in a weird key. The key of D has some tough minor chords for me. How about we play in the key of C with a capo on the second fret?"

"Sure," I said. "C capo two is D anyway."

We started practicing the song and each of us found our own parts with the melody and harmony. Boyce's part was particularly sweet when he hit the high notes.

"Sounds good," I nodded to him.

"Yeah," he replied, "But I think we can move it up a half tone."

"Up a half tone, are you sure? That's fine with me if you think you can handle it."

We moved our capos up one step and did the song again. Sure enough, that was the key.

"Okay," Terry said as we took a break, "See what else you can come up with and we'll do them all for Rudy next Saturday."

Rudy thought *Hard Ground* was great for one side of the record but we needed something more up beat and catchy for the other. We brainstormed some ideas and decided we should write something about Saskatchewan, the railroads and all the new towns and cities along the railway.

"Saskatchewan will be celebrating sixty years as a province in 1965," Terry offered. "Maybe we could write something about that?"

I took a few days to think about it all. I liked the idea of writing about a whole bunch of towns linked together like beads on a chain as you travel on the CPR and CNR railroads. Towns like Wynyard grew and prospered mainly because of the railroad. Naturally, I started with the CPR line going through Wynyard to Saskatoon.

*"From the Manitoba border you are westward bound
Sixty more miles to Yorkton town
Theodore and Foam Lake and the Wynyard line
Lanigan and Guernsey and the view is fine
Viscount to Colonsay to the potash mines
You hit the Hub City and you're right on time"*

On Saturday morning I brought a few songs with me to our recording

session. "Ok guys, how about this," I sang my verse. "Those towns are all on the CPR line running through Wynyard."

"I like it," Rudy stated emphatically. "It's catchy and has a good ring to it. You just need another verse and a chorus."

"I'll do the second verse," Terry offered as he grabbed a pen and sheet of paper. "I'll write the same kind of verse for the CNR line from here to Regina."

He went to a small room and began writing. I sat down with Boyce and started trying some ideas for the chorus. I thought of singing something about riding the rails from town to town.

"CP rider, CP rider

You got to go, on the CP line

Sixty years of growing and the CPR is still on time"

"That's good," Rudy said. Boyce and I practiced that for a while then Terry came back.

"Here it is," he said dropping a sheet of paper in front of us. We both looked at it and grabbed our guitars. I did the first verse then Terry sang his.

Well we're rollin' through the forests and the fields of grain

Keneston and Davidson and Chamberlain

Up and down the valley we are climbing the grade

To Regina on Wascana where the laws are made

South of the capital where oil is found

There's Weyburn, Estevan and many more towns

We all hooted and hollered at Terry when he finished.

"I think you guys just got your hit," Rudy exclaimed rather excited. "Now polish it up so we can record it."

We played the chorus for Terry and he liked it but added, "That's good but we need to add the CNR line for the last chorus. So the last line of the chorus would sound the same but end with "Sixty years of growing and the CNR is still on time".

As we began rehearsing the whole song I assumed that Terry would sing the lead. However, for some reason he insisted that I sing the lead on the first verse and that he would take the lead on the second. I didn't have half the voice he did for singing lead but I could see the logic of it since those were our verses.

Railrider was an instant hit. The record sold over 800 copies in Saskatoon the first week it was released for sale through the local music stores. Rudy called to give us the good news.

"You guys outsold the Beatles last week in Saskatoon. What do you

think of that? Too bad we don't have any way to get this record across the country. Then we could make some real money!"

We didn't think much about national exposure. We were big in Saskatoon and that was good enough for now. We got a lot of singing jobs after the record was released and we were able to charge more for our performances. We also made some extra money after each show selling our record.

Railrider became our signature song so we usually saved it for the end of our shows.

By spring university was done and I was not too keen on working as a rodman again for my brother-in-law over the summer. I thought we should go on the road and try to make some money. Terry thought he could take some time off in the summer from his job as a salesman at CFQC. Boyce was not doing anything special except help Rudy in the studio once in a while so he was ready to go anytime. We all started planning a big summer tour.

Since we had no manager, Terry took on the job. He was rather skilled as an organizer and promoter. After all, he was a salesman with a lot of contacts from his friends and clients at the CFQC radio and TV. His job was to create ads for clients all over the city. Sometimes his clients would need entertainment for an event and Terry was more than happy to offer our services. Over the winter and spring we played all kinds of gigs for special events and even some restaurants and bars.

By late spring we were making some progress on our tour. "I got us a gig in Wadena and maybe Lanigan at the end of June," Terry told us. "We would have to play at the skating rink in Wadena for their annual fair. I hope our sound system is good enough."

"That's good," I said. "Since we're in the area I should check with my brother in Wynyard to see if we could play there."

"Yeah, I guess we should check with Rosthern and Prince Albert as well then we could play all our home towns," Boyce suggested.

"Why not," Terry said, "I'll make some calls."

Sure enough, Wynyard hired us to entertain for the July 1st celebrations. Rosthern was a bit uncertain however they told us we could do a show in the arena at no cost and keep whatever we got at the gate. We had a few other small gigs as well so by the end of June we were ready for our big tour of small town Saskatchewan.

But first, Boyce and I decided we needed to upgrade our guitars. Our black bodied Gibson's were fine but they didn't quite have enough punch in a big crowd. When we did a show, we usually used one mic for the voices and guitars. If I needed to do some picking I would lift the guitar up towards the mic and play. We soon found out that any serious folk singers had to have a Martin. The Martin was a hand-made guitar and it had a great full sound. We

went for the best of the Martins and ordered two D-28 models from a music store at \$495 each. It was a small fortune but when we got our guitars, we were simply amazed at the beautiful sound and the power of the instruments. Now, we could sing full out and the guitars gave us everything we needed.

Our first stop on the tour was Rosthern but the only people who showed up were Boyce's relatives. Somehow or other we had forgotten to advertise the show so the only people who knew about it were Boyce's family and friends. However it was nice to meet all the relatives and we did a small show for them at no charge.

"Nice bunch of people you have Boyce. Too bad you don't have more relatives so we could make some money," Terry noted and we all had a good laugh.

Wadena was also a bit of a bust because of the venue. They had a pretty good crowd but the organizers set us up to play in the players' box in the arena. Rather than having chairs in front of us they put the crowd in the bleachers way across the rink. It was hard to establish any rapport with the audience a hundred feet away. Also, our sound system was totally inadequate for this kind of job. However, the people were polite and seemed to enjoy themselves.

The Wynyard gig was a different story. Outside it was a beautiful hot July day but inside the arena it was cool and rather dark but with decent lighting for the stage. This time the town organizers did it right. They had set up a large elevated stage for us at one end of the arena with a good sound system. Then they allowed the people to gather on the dirt floor in front of the stage. That put the audience close right in front of us.

As we got ready for the show, a large crowd gathered in the arena. I looked out from behind the curtain back stage and studied some of the familiar faces in the crowd. There was Mr. Cooper, my social studies teacher, in the middle and near the front. Then I noticed a couple other teachers, Bill Minkin and a good number of old timers I used to watch at Paul's Poolroom. I looked for Bernice but to my disappointment I couldn't find her. As we made our final check to make sure our guitars were in tune we heard a bunch of announcements. With the formalities over, we waited for our cue.

"And now, let me introduce Terry Mooney from Prince Albert, Boyce Newfeldt from Rosthern and our very own Victor Zelinski from Wynyard - the Troubadors Three!"

We ran on stage and started with a rousing rendition of 'Ghost Riders in the Sky'. The crowd was in a festive mood and ready to be entertained. They whistled and clapped loudly after every song and some of my old buddies like Gary Johnson from high school yelled out "Way to go Vic". We sang *Hard Ground* and the crowd grew quiet and listened. Most people in Wynyard had heard our records from the Saskatoon and Yorkton radio stations. *Hard Ground* was thoughtful but the real hit was *Railrider*. Everyone knew it was

coming and they were ready for it. When we started the song, the crowd hooted and hollered. When I sang the line with Wynyard in it, they cheered and clapped even harder. Yes, I thought as I looked at the crowd, it's great to be a big hit; even in a small town.

Two weeks after the show I was back in Wynyard visiting my parents. It occurred to me as I drove home that they probably didn't know about me and the Troubadors Three. Dad only read the Polish paper and they rarely listened to the radio. I even wondered if Kasmer knew anything about the group.

I had my usual uneventful pleasant visit with my parents and listened quietly as Mom talked about this and that in town. Old man Cherwinski was drinking too much again and fighting with his kids; Lena and John weren't getting along; Olga dropped over for a visit with the kids; groceries were getting higher all the time; the garden is not that good this year and so on. It was comforting for me just to sit and listen for hours on end while Mom talked. She rarely asked me how or what I was doing but that didn't bother me. Then, she got up and made lunch.

After lunch it was time to leave. I drove downtown and checked out the poolrooms for old time sake. Truth was, I just wanted to see if Bernice might be around. I had a steady girl in Saskatoon now but Bernice was still on my mind. I walked into Paul's poolroom and said hello to Stella. She was neatly dressed as usual with her hair all done up. Someone once told me that if you want to see what you wife will look like when she gets old, just look at her mother. Well, I thought as I looked at Stella, if that's true, Bernice is going to be a pretty lady in her old age.

"How's business going?" I asked cheerfully.

"Oh, you know, too much work and too little money. But what can you do?" She replied sweetly with a smile. "I heard you did quite a show at the arena. People still talk about it."

I thanked her. Then, I had to ask, "How is Bernice doing?"

"Very good I think. A couple more years of training in Portage and she will be a nurse."

Without thinking I said, "I should write her sometime." With that I said goodbye to Stella, waved to Paul and left. Well, at least she's still not married. That's good news. I was half way home before I realized I didn't get Bernice's address. Oh well, maybe next time.

Before I drove back to Saskatoon next day I made the dusty ten mile trip to our old farm. Kasmer dropped whatever he was fixing in the shed and came over to see me.

"Look what the dog dragged in. My famous brother! How was the show at the arena?"

"Oh, pretty good I guess. How come you didn't show up? Too busy making hay?"

"No," he said, "We marched in the parade like we do every year. Your

old marching band was there of course. Then we went to the Legion to get ready for our dinner and dance. You guys should come and play for us sometime. But then you probably charge too much. Let's go in and see Myrtle. I might even pour you a drink."

We went in the house and it was nice to see the familiar surroundings. Myrtle gave me a big hug. "It's so good to see you again, it's been a long time." She leaned back and gave me a long look, "My you have grown up and such a handsome young man!"

I blushed, "It's good to see you. I still remember sitting at this table and talking with you about all kinds of stuff."

She nodded and smiled. "I used to enjoy our little talks. Can I get you some lunch?"

I sat down at the table, "No need to bother. Kaz and I will just have a shot of whisky then I'll have to head back to Saskatoon."

"Look what we have for you," Kasmer said as he rummaged about in a pile of old newspapers. "Here it is." He handed me a copy of the Wynyard Advance. It had a large headline: "Local Boy Does Good."

I laughed out loud. "This is hokey as hell, but I love it! It's the kind of thing you see in a bad movie. Imagine that."

Then I proceeded to read the whole story about the show we did on Canada Day and how wonderful it was to see a Wynyard boy do well in the big city.

"They sure like that *Railrider* song. They are still talking about it in the Legion and the poolroom."

The poolroom, I thought, I wonder if Bernice heard the talk?

"Wynyard today and Hollywood tomorrow," added my brother with a laugh. "I guess we should have a drink on that."

"I thought you'd never ask," I replied as he poured us a strong rye and coke.

Chapter Eleven

THE PROPOSAL

After my second year at university we decided to take our show on another road trip over the summer. However, we needed something more than a few concerts around the province. Terry set his mind to it and somehow or other he landed us an offer to play at the Gordon Motor Hotel in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. The job was only for a couple weeks in July but it seemed like a good start. We had no idea what the Gordon was like but they were willing to pay and we were willing to play. Of course, I was quite excited about going to Portage and it had nothing to do with music. Bernice was there in her last year of training as a psychiatric nurse at the Manitoba School.

On one of my trips home last winter I made a point of stopping over at Paul's Poolroom on the slim chance that I might run into Bernice. I sat at the counter drinking my coke and chatting with Stella. Then I had to pop the inevitable question, "How's Bernice doing?"

"Everything seems to be fine. She has some very good friends and even brought a few of them here for holidays. That Marta is a crazy girl but very nice."

"What about her boyfriends?"

"Oh she has lots of those. Some guy called Danny who owns a jewelry store in Portage and of course Victor Ukrainez still comes around once in a while. He's now a manager or something at a big grocery store. One of those would be a good catch. Then she also goes out once in a while with Doug Melenchuk from here but I don't think he'll get anywhere."

Yes, I thought, like me. I listened with a frozen smile as she went on. "I told her she better get married pretty soon or she will be too old. Then what?"

Well if you want to know, I'd marry her in a second if I could but I guess that's not going to happen. Then an idea hit me.

"Do you have Bernice's address? Maybe I'll drop her a line or two. I haven't seen her in a long time."

"Sure," she said as she grabbed her purse and pulled out a letter. She took out the letter and handed me the envelope. "Her address is on here. She writes to me all the time."

"Thanks, Stella," I said and left.

On the long drive back to Saskatoon I pondered the bad news. Danny, Victor, Doug and who knows how many more were after her. I wonder if she really loves any of them or is she just having fun? How about me, am I in love

with my girlfriend or just having fun? I've been going steady with a wonderful girl for almost two years now and I still don't know if I really love her. When you go steady for that long you have to assume we must be in love but why is it that the mere mention of Bernice gets me all excited?

Lately Joyce has been trying to lead me to the altar. I already met her family several times and she was very much part of my group of friends and family in Saskatoon. Everyone liked her and told us how right we were for each other. Even my sister Mary took a liking to her and very few of her brothers girlfriends ever made it into her good books.

She started talking more and more about how nice it would be to get married, have kids, buy a house and so on. She had a good job as a secretary so at least we would have a steady income until I finished university. Yet, for some reason, the more she talked about it the more I backed away. Marriage was the last thing on my mind right now. We were doing pretty well with our music and I still had to finish university. How could I think of marriage? I squirmed in my seat as I realized that Joyce probably thinks we're going to get married some day and yet here I am thinking of writing a letter to Bernice. I'm sure she loves me and Bernice probably doesn't give a hoot so why am I even thinking of writing to her? On the other hand, all I want to do is write a damn letter to an old friend so why do I feel like that would be cheating on my girlfriend? The whole thing was getting far too complicated so I turned up the radio and started singing along to a nice country song.

By the time I got to Saskatoon my mind was made up. As I unpacked my bag and got ready for bed I pulled out the envelope from my pocket and looked at it for a minute then said softly, "The hell with it. Tomorrow I'm going to write her a letter."

Next day I concentrated on my classes and tried to avoid thinking about the letter. What am I going to say? I've written dozens of papers on everything from historical topics to deep philosophical ideas yet here I was worried about a stupid letter. By evening I was ready. I started the letter by trying to be casual asking all the usual questions; how are you doing, hope all is well, haven't seen you for a while and so on for over a page. Then what? I can't just say goodbye. I thought for a bit then finished the letter with a simple request.

"I know you are probably not interested but it sure would be nice if you could find some time to write back and tell me if you ever think of me. Lately I've been thinking about you a lot." Then I signed the letter "Love, Victor."

Okay, I thought as I sealed the envelope, she'll either ignore me or have a good laugh and tell me to drop dead. But then at least I'll know.

For two weeks I kept checking the mail.

"How come you keep asking me about the mail," Mary asked. "Are you expecting something important?" Nothing got past Mary.

"No," I lied, "I'm expecting some mail from the university. Anyway, let

me know if I get anything.”

Finally, one day when I got home, Mary handed me a letter with a smirk on her face.

“Is this the big letter you were expecting from the university? It looks like a letter from Bernice. Isn’t she the one from Wynyard? How come she’s in Portage? She’s older than you so what’s she doing writing to you?”

I gave her a dirty look and grabbed the letter from her hand. “How will I ever know unless I read it?”

I went down to my room, closed the door and opened the envelope. “Surprised and delighted to hear from you,” she wrote. Delighted to hear from you I thought, that’s a good start. The letter carried on with the usual stuff about doing fine, miss home, good friends, etc. Then at the end she wrote, “Please write back and tell me everything about yourself and the Troubadors. I hear from Mom and Dad that your group is getting pretty famous. Maybe we could get together sometime.” Then she signed the letter with three large X’s followed by Bernice.

I lay back on the bed and smiled. She may not love me yet but at least she’s interested. After that, we began writing to each other on a regular basis. She sent me kisses and I sent her my love. The only hitch was that I now knew I had to break the news to Joyce. She was such a nice girl that I didn’t have the heart to tell her. Besides, what do you say? It’s not like I was dating someone else. All I was doing was writing to an old friend. But I knew in my heart there was more to it than that and I had to tell her eventually.

The moment of truth finally came and it was not pleasant. I had just found out about our plans for the summer and had written a letter to Bernice telling her we were going to be playing at the Gordon Motor Hotel in Portage and that I was looking forward to seeing her. She had replied that she was very happy to hear the news and was looking forward to seeing me. I had to tell Joyce and soon.

We were out as usual at a party with some of my college friends having a good time and I got drunk enough to talk. I drove her home to her apartment, shut off the car and just sat there. She sensed something was wrong.

“You haven’t said a word all the way home. What’s wrong?”

“I have to tell you something,” I said looking at her but yet glad it was quite dark so I couldn’t see her eyes.

“I’ve been writing to an old girlfriend of mine for the last few months and I think I’d like to see her again. In fact, I think I will be seeing her this summer.”

There was a long silence then she pulled out some Kleenex and began to wipe her tears. I felt terrible.

“I knew there was something. I guess this means we’re through,” she said very softly.

“I don’t know what it means exactly but I feel terrible about this and

I'm really sorry. But I just had to tell you."

"Well, thanks for telling me," she said quietly and left without looking back.

I sat in the car for a long time. How could I hurt her like this? I wish she had yelled or maybe threw something at me and called me some dirty names. But she didn't. Life can be a bitch, I thought bitterly. Why didn't I grow to love her like she loved me? She loves me and I love Bernice but for all I know Bernice probably loves someone else who may or may not love her. The whole damn thing didn't make sense. Why is life like that I wondered? And, what is this thing called love anyway? If it's so great then why does it cause so many problems?

For a month after my break up there was tension at Mary's place. The very next day at supper she shot daggers at me. "So you just had to break up with Joyce. She's the nicest girl you'll ever find."

"That's not what you said when I first met her," I reminded her sharply. "And besides, you should keep your nose out of my business."

"Well Joyce and I are still good friends and that won't change so if she wants to come over to see me she is perfectly welcome." And occasionally Mary did make a point of inviting her over when she knew I would be home.

"Oh, it's you," Mary would say smooth as silk when I got home. "Look who's here. Of course you two know each other."

"Hi," I would reply lamely and sneak down to my room.

I couldn't wait to get going on our summer road trip. At our next rehearsal I told the guys about Bernice. "I have an old friend from Wynyard in Portage. Actually, an old girlfriend, who is in her last year of nurses training. Well actually, she's more of a friend who happens to be a girl than a real girlfriend, if you know what I mean?"

"No I don't know what you mean except there's someone you know from Wynyard in Portage," Terry replied looking rather confused.

"Right," I said. "And I'm sure she has some pretty nurse friends."

"Now that's what I want to hear!"

We packed our bags and guitars into my Ford and Terry's old Pontiac and headed east playing at a few small towns along the way. Yorkton was about half way to Portage so we stayed there a while doing a big show at the arena and making appearances on the local radio and TV stations. Yorkton was the first town mentioned in *Railrider* so we had a lot of fans there. However, as we headed further east, fewer people heard of us.

"So this is Portage," I said as we finally arrived at our destination. "I guess its only sixty miles (96 km) or so from Winnipeg."

Larry looked around and said, "Yeah, I've got some contacts in Winnipeg so we will have to go there after we finish at the Gordon. But first we better check in and see what this place is like."

Larry Romanoski was our new manager. We got to know each other at university and he became a big fan of the Troubadors. When I told him we were planning a road trip for the summer he immediately volunteered to come along as our manager.

"You need someone to get the jobs and make sure you get paid," he argued. "You guys should just worry about the music and I'll do the rest. Every group needs a manager."

"You're probably right but how do we pay you?" I asked.

"The normal rate is ten per cent so I'll just take that of the top."

I approached Terry and Boyce about the idea and they weren't sure what to think.

"I guess if he wants to starve with us he can come along," Terry laughed. "As long as he understands that ten per cent of nothing is still nothing."

Boyce agreed so the next time I saw Larry I told him, "You're on but don't think there's a lot of money to be made."

"I just want to go along and help if I can. I don't have anything lined up this summer and this sounds like a fun adventure. You never know, we may all end up being rich and famous someday." Then he smiled and shrugged his small shoulders.

"Yeah, or broke and tying steel again," I replied as we shook hands on the deal.

Larry was about my age with light blonde hair, bright blue eyes set in a small face with high cheekbones and a great complexion. He had a whimsical smile; and he smiled a lot. We had spent some time together at STM. He was a really nice guy and I was glad he wanted to go with us on this big trip.

The Gordon Motor Hotel was just another plain ordinary small two story motel with a large beer parlor attached. About the same as Wynyard I thought as we entered the building. We sat down at a table and ordered some beer while Larry went looking for the manager. He came back shortly and introduced us.

"Everything is fine and ready to go," Larry told us. "You play on the stage over there from Thursday night through Saturday."

"Any ideas about where we can stay for a couple weeks?" I asked the manager.

He scratched his head and thought for a moment, "Well, if I rent you a couple rooms you'll probably end up owing me money so I guess you should try a room somewhere else that is big enough for all of you. It's probably not much but I hear they are renting a place over the Bank of Nova Scotia that you could try. It's just a block away so that would be convenient."

"Thanks," I said as we all got up. "We'll check that out."

We parked in front of the bank and saw a sign "For Rent" with a phone number. It looked like a dump but we decided to look at it. Larry went to the payphone and came back shortly.

"The guy will be here with the key in a few minutes."

The room was huge but more like a storage room than an apartment. It had a table, a few chairs, a small sink with a hot plate for a kitchen and a small bathroom. Actually, it reminded me of the room Rudy had upstairs at Barb Studios. He even left an old mattress there and once in a while I ended up staying overnight.

"Well, what do you guys think?" Larry asked. "It's not much but it is cheap and close to the Gordon. We can take it for a couple weeks while you play at the hotel and I'll look around for something better."

"Sure, why not. It's a place to crash," said Terry. "And it's a good place to practice and party. Listen to the acoustics!" We all nodded and gave Larry the money for the first week's rent.

"You guys bring in all the stuff. I have a call to make." I walked down the stairs and over to the pay phone in the parking lot. Finally, we were in Portage and Bernice was somewhere close. I told her I would call once we got in. The phone rang and a voice on the other end answered, "Hello, Manitoba School of Nursing Residence."

"Oh, hello. My name is Victor and I'd like to speak to Bernice Wasylenko."

"She may be in the cafeteria so just a minute and I will page her." I waited for well over a minute or two then finally there was a sound of someone picking up the phone.

"Hello, this is Bernice".

For a moment I was speechless then I finally answered, "Hi, this is Victor from Wynyard. We just got into town."

"Oh great! I was wondering when you would get here. We should get together later maybe."

"Yes I'd like that. What time should I come over?"

"How about seven o'clock. We'll be done supper by then. Just come into the main entrance. There's a small reception area there. Maybe I'll bring my friend Mardi along. She wants to meet you."

"Ok. Seven it is. It's great to talk to you. Goodbye."

Wow, I have a date just like that. I wonder how this will all work out I thought as I went back to our room.

"Hey Terry, I got a date tonight at seven. Bernice is bringing a friend. You want to come along?"

"Sure, I'd like to say hello to Stella's girl."

Just before seven, we parked the car and made our way up the grand entrance to the residence. Bernice and her friend were waiting for us. They came over and we all said hello.

"This is my friend, Martha or Mardi as we like to call her," Bernice said. Terry and I shook her hand then I leaned over and gave Bernice a polite

hug. It felt good to hold her in my arms but I pulled away.

"This is Terry Mooney, the lead singer in our group." Terry gave Bernice a big hug, "I think we met at Paul's Poolroom once or twice when I was with Victor. Anyway, it's good to see you. You look like Stella."

"Maybe so, but I can't cook like her. Let's get out of this place and we'll show you around." We walked around the grounds for a while.

"We live in the residence but we do shift work at that building over there."

"That's where they keep the mentals," Mardi added with a wry smile. Mardi was small like Bernice but with a head full of unruly brownish red curly hair. She was loaded with freckles and had a very expressive face and large bright eyes. Her voice was kind of deep and loud for a girl and when she laughed her whole face lit up.

"You have to be careful over there. Bernice had a pretty close call one night when she was attacked by one of the patients."

"So you work with the mentally handicapped?" Terry asked.

"They're mental alright," Mardi replied with a loud laugh.

"Let's go for a ride and you can show us around town," I suggested. Terry drove my car so I could sit in the back with Bernice. This is great I thought, Bernice and I going for a ride.

"It's been quite a long time since I saw you. You haven't changed at all," I said taking a good look at her.

"Yes it's been a while. You seem older than I remember from school. By the way how is university?"

"I like it. We have some great profs who really know their stuff. The campus is big but you can get around easily. I spend a lot of time at STM – that's a Catholic college right on the university."

"I hope you go to church every Sunday," she said looking at me as if she already knew the answer to that one.

Mardi interrupted from the front. "Oh that B of yours is a real holy roller. She even has me going to the Catholic Church sometimes and here I am a good Baptist. What would my mother say if she knew!" Mardi looked at us in mock horror and laughed her contagious laugh.

I was beginning to like Mardi. She was open and friendly with a good sense of humor. I could see why the two of them were friends. She also liked to talk a lot and tended to exaggerate the ordinary.

"We had a wicked party at the Gordon Hotel and most of us got so drunk we all passed out all over the room. Then in the morning, there's B getting all dressed up and putting on her make up. 'Come on Mardi' she says to me, 'we can just make it to church.' Can you imagine? I'm hung over like a sick dog and she wants me to go to church!"

"If I didn't take you to church you'd never go," Bernice said firmly and they both laughed.

"We're playing at the Gordon," Terry said. "We'll be there tomorrow, Friday and Saturday. You girls should come over."

"We sure plan to," Bernice replied. "I think we'll come over on Friday so we can sleep in on Saturday if we end up with a late night. You never know what can happen on a Friday night at the Gordon." She looked at me and winked.

We drove around town for a while then stopped for a root beer at the A&W. It was dusk by the time we got the girls back to the residence.

"See you guys on Friday!" They called out and waved at us as we left.

On Thursday we did our gig and quickly found out that playing the Gordon was a job with little glory along with the poor pay. In Saskatchewan we were used to doing shows for people who were there to hear us sing. Here, we were playing to a bunch of drinkers out for a good time. They weren't here to be entertained; they were here to drink beer and visit with their friends. At our shows the audience clapped after each song then we would chat a bit and set up the next song. At the Gordon beer parlor, people basically ignored us. We would sing a great song and there would be no applause – just the usual noise level of people drinking and talking loudly. There was hardly any rapport with the audience.

"Well, I think that was kind of a bust," I said after we finished the last set.

"Why do you say that?" Larry countered. "I was sitting in the crowd and I heard lots of people say that you guys were really good." Then he added with a laugh, "Actually, the more they drank, the more they seemed to enjoy the performance!"

"Well they sure didn't show it," I replied glumly.

"Yeah," said Terry. "Maybe people are different in a bar than at a show. Here, they want to drink and visit. The music is kind of background entertainment."

"Long as I get paid, I don't care if they like it or not," Boyce noted as he downed his beer. "Let's get out of here and have a drink at home."

I was a bit worried about Friday night with the girls coming over to see the show. We'll have to make sure they get a good seat up front so at least they can hear the music. On Friday night we saved a good table for the girls and started our set. Half way through we saw them come in and there were four of them. We waved them over to the table and sang them a couple of special songs. They clapped loud and hard after each song and some of the regulars seemed to take notice and joined in.

"You guys sure are good," Mardi exclaimed as we joined them after the set. "You guys should play in a fancy place rather than this dump," she added giving the bar a dirty look.

"Don't worry about the locals. We love it so keep it up," Bernice said

with a wink and a thumbs up. That kind of lifted our spirits so we did the next two set with a bit more zip and after a while we actually got a pretty good reception from the crowd.

By the time we were done, the girls were getting kind of tipsy so we finished their beer and took off to our place.

"You think this hotel is a dump," I told them as we left. "Just wait until you see our place."

We took our guitars and walked over. The girls made a sour look when we walked up the back stairs to our room. Larry opened the door and made a grand flourish with his hand, "This is it."

"Well it may not be the Ritz but at least it's big enough," Bernice noted as the girls scanned the room. Terry put on a Joan Baez album and dimmed the lights.

"Now this is music," he said. We all cracked a beer and settled down on various mattresses, cushions and chairs in the room. "The best way to listen to this album is to lay back, close the lights and smoke some pot. Too bad I don't have any." Then he looked over to Larry. "You're the manager, get me some Mary-Jane, I'm not much of a beer drinker."

"Anything you say boss," Larry replied with a laugh. "Just get me some cash first."

"Good point. I guess beer will have to do."

We settled into the beauty of the music and I noticed Terry and Mardi were starting to smooch.

"Looks like your friend is really hitting it off with mine," I whispered in Bernice's ear.

"Maybe we should be doing the same?" She turned her face to me and I kissed her softly then we broke for a moment and looked deeply into each other's eyes. Then we kissed again and again.

She snuggled tightly in my arms. "I think I need a little snooze. That beer made me sleepy."

That was just fine with me. She could snooze in my arms as long as she wanted. I had the girl of my dreams beside me and Joan Baez playing in the background. "That's what I call living," I thought as I closed my eyes.

The next day the girls were back at the same table. After the show, we all decided to go back to our place again but Mardi said we need to make a stop first at the residence.

"We noticed you guys have no decent food in your room and no place to do any proper cooking so we borrowed some food from the cafeteria for you."

We all looked at each other and Boyce said, "Now that is a good idea. I'm getting sick of mac and cheese. You guys go and we'll meet you back at our place."

We took my car and drove slowly near the entrance then parked hid-

den behind some trees. Bernice and Mardi went in while Terry and I waited in the car. "You and Mardi seem to be hitting it off pretty good," I said as we waited.

"What a girl," he said shaking his head. "It's like we were meant for each other or something."

"Well I know I'm meant for Bernice. The only question is whether she feels the same."

The girls came running down the stairs carrying a couple bags of stuff and laughing like crazy. "Get this car going before Miss Vohs comes after us with the police," Mardi yelled as I drove out of the parking lot without lights.

When we got home, the girls laid out the food on our small table and we had a feast. They had all kinds of food; cheese, bread, fruit, ham, and sausage. The four of us ate it all and downed a case of beer then settled into our favourite spots on the floor as Terry put on some Gordon Lightfoot.

Over the next week, Terry and I saw the girls every day. If the girls weren't free, we would sneak in quietly with the car and blink the lights. Somehow or other they always found a way out to see us.

"We're going to get caught and sent home" Bernice told us one night. "Then what would my mother say?"

"We'll just tell her the devil made us do it and she'll forgive you," Mardi replied and we all laughed.

On Thursday they were working the late shift so there was no way they could leave. "Maybe they should come over to our place for a change after we finish our shift," Mardi suggested.

"Yes, it's your turn to come over. Our rooms are on the lowest level so tap on the window and I'll let you in. I'll show you where I live," Bernice added brightly. She then drew me a rough diagram of the windows at the bottom floor on the east side of the residence with a big X indicating her room.

I looked at her and grinned broadly. "It's a date."

Right after the last set Terry and I took off for the residence. We parked in the dark and slowly made our way around the back of the residence. It was hard to see anything and we couldn't very well use flashlights.

"This is crazy," I whispered to Terry. "What if I tap on the wrong window?"

"You'll be in a shit load of trouble, that's what so make sure you get the right one."

I started counting the windows but it was quite dark and we had to be very careful not to trip on something. "That's all we need now is a damned dog to come charging at us" I said very quietly. "I think it's this one. Here goes." Then I hesitated and looked at Terry. This whole thing was so crazy we both started to laugh. I tried desperately to keep quite while Terry stood there shaking his head.

I finally got control of myself and whispered, "If you hear screaming, run like hell!"

Then Terry doubled up with laughter yet trying to keep quiet. I tapped softly on the window ready to run. I waited for an eternity then I heard a soft tap from the inside.

Terry and I both let go a sigh of relief. He motioned that he was going to see Mardi but I grabbed his arm and whispered, "Five minutes max. If they find us inside we're all dead."

The window opened slowly and I helped push it wide enough for me to get through. I went in head first which turned out to be rather dumb. It was at least four feet from the window to the floor so I landed rather hard on my side and we both froze. We waited for a while to see if anyone heard the noise then I slowly got up and we shook our heads. We sat on the edge of the bed and looked at each other, "If you get caught here we are in really big trouble," Bernice said softly still shaking her head.

"You want trouble," I said as I lowered her on the bed and leaned over. "You just let in the midnight rapist and now you're going to get it."

"Oh dear," she said feigning helplessness. "I guess there's no point in fighting about it now."

With that we kissed and hugged each other until I got all worked up and she finally said, "No, we can't! You have to go." She was right of course. We both sat up and she gave me a very big kiss then added, "I'm a good girl, don't you know?"

"I don't care what kind of girl you are. All I know is that I love you."

We kissed again and I stood up on a chair and wiggled my way out of the room. Now I had to find Terry so we could get the hell out of here.

On the final night of our contract at the Gordon we decided to have a farewell party. By then we were quite well known to the nurses and a number of locals at the bar and they all wanted to send us off with a bang.

"We'll get some beer and go to Sandy Beach. It's on the lake and hidden away. We'll make a fire and have a party," the girls told us. After the show we all got into our cars and followed one another to the beach. It was some ways out of town on a narrow windy road and there were at least a dozen cars following each other.

"I hope the lead car is going to the right place otherwise we'll all be lost." Terry noted. I grunted a reply and kept following the car in front of me. When we finally got there, someone had already started a fire so we all got out of the cars and gathered around it. The night was warm and beautiful with a half-moon shining down on us.

"What a great spot," I said to Bernice as we snuggled down on a blanket. "This reminds me of home when Al and I would get Clarence to get us a case of beer then we'd head out to an isolated spot in the country and have a great time singing and playing."

There was the sound of beer bottles being opened. Then suddenly, out of the darkness, two men in uniform walked in. It was as if they appeared from nowhere - two Mounties, standing right there in the middle of the party! Everyone was stunned. There was no noise and no lights yet here they were! How did they get here?

"We'll take that beer," one of them said sternly. "You know it's against the law to drink in a public place. And, from what I see, I'd say some of you are under age. Now that could be rather serious."

There was a long silence as we realized this could be big trouble for those of us like me still under age. Then one of the officers said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. If you cooperate and one of you takes responsibility for the beer, the rest can go. So, who's going to take the rap?"

There was an awful silence as everyone hoped someone else would step forward.

Finally a voice said, "I'll do it." It was Terry.

"All right everyone, it's time to go home and don't let us catch you doing this again or we'll take you all in next time." There was a quiet but quick scramble as everyone left while one of the officers talked to Terry and gave him a ticket.

"What a bummer," I said as we drove home. "I would have stepped forward but you know I'm not even 21 yet."

"Yeah I know," he said. "We're born in the same year but your birthday is not until December. Anyway, no problem, they told me to come over to the station tomorrow and pay a \$25 fine and that will be it. Some of the guys already gave me some money so it won't cost me much."

"That's a relief, but where the hell did the Mounties come from?"

"That's the funny thing, I asked them and they said they just joined the parade of cars. I guess no one noticed the cop car! They got here the same time we did and waited until we opened the beer."

After the Gordon gig we hung around looking for work but there was none to be found. Portage was a small place so there weren't many opportunities for a folk group. We decided to move into a smaller and cheaper place in the basement of an old home and try our luck in Winnipeg. But first, we had to deal with a sticky problem.

"We have to let the manager go," Terry said as the two of us sat down for lunch. Terry had asked me quietly to go out with him while Boyce stayed back with Larry. "We can't afford to pay Larry and there's no work." I reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"I guess you talked this out with Boyce?"

"Yes, and we think you should be the one to tell him."

"Me!" I said taken aback. "Why me?"

"Well somebody has to do it and he's your friend."

"Some friend," I said shaking my head.

When we got back, I asked Larry to come with me and we walked down to the Gordon. I think he sensed something was wrong. "So what do you think the chances are of getting some good gigs in Winnipeg," I asked as we walked.

"Your guess is as good as mine," he replied. We settled into a chair at the pub and I ordered a couple glasses of beer.

"You know," I said as we clinked glasses, "I'm really not old enough to be here." I leaned over to him and said softly, "You won't turn me in would you?"

We both laughed. Then I took out a quarter from my pocket and put it on the table.

"This is my last quarter. Beer costs a dime so that leaves me with a nickel. How can we pay you anything if I can't even buy you another beer?"

"Yeah I know." Larry looked downcast. "I guess it's time for me to hit the road. You guys are broke and I don't have a cent so I guess that's that."

"I'm really sorry it didn't work out better. I guess we'll give it a try in Winnipeg but I'm not sure we can make a living at this. I have tuition to pay in the fall. Thank God for student loans."

As we walked back I had to wonder again why bad things happen to really good people. Larry was a great guy and all we needed was a couple of good paying gigs and maybe we could have toughed it out for the summer. First I had to cut my girlfriend loose now it was my friend Larry. I felt a strong sense of loss. I stopped and grabbed Larry by the hand and looked at him, "I'm really sorry to see you go."

We hugged and then he left.

I stopped suddenly, turned around and called out. "Larry, you're broke. How the hell are you going to get all the way back to Saskatoon?"

He turned to me and shrugged his slender shoulders, "Hitch hike, what else?" He gave me a big smile and waved goodbye.

"That was tough," I said to Terry and Boyce when I got back. "The poor guy doesn't have a dime and he's hitch hiking all the way back to Saskatoon. I feel awful about the whole situation but what can we do? If the girls weren't feeding us we'd be on welfare ourselves."

Yes, I thought, thank God for the girls. Somehow or other they managed to get enough food from the cafeteria to keep us well fed. I knew that if things didn't change soon I'd have to go back to Saskatoon and start tying steel again. That wouldn't be too bad but leaving Bernice now would be a killer.

After we settled into our new room we drove out to Winnipeg. Larry had told us to try the Paddock. "It's near the football stadium and they have entertainment all year round. I think it's a pretty classy place so try it." The Paddock was just off the highway coming in to Winnipeg so we found it quite easily. We went in and asked for the manager. We told him about our group

and asked if we could play at the club.

"You say you just finished playing the Gordon?" he asked. We nodded our heads. "And you say you made a record and all that good stuff?" We talked for a while longer while he appeared to be thinking about whether to hire us.

"I usually hire professional entertainers who have a manager and lots of promotional material. But I do have an opening in a couple weeks and I'm willing to give you guys a chance. I'll book you for a week. You do four sets a night starting at 7 PM. Just remember, this is NOT the Gordon," he stated emphatically looking directly at us. "It's a classy night club so dress up and don't be late." Then he added, "And no dirty jokes on stage."

We drove back in high spirits and began to work out four sets of quality material. I had a good feeling about this gig. It was a really nice place that hired professional entertainers. I thought this could be a big step up for our group.

We had lots of time to practice and the girls kept us well fed. They noticed on their first visit to our basement suite that we were short one mattress. Boyce had a camp cot for a bed and I had a small lumpy mattress on the floor but Terry had nothing. "We'll have to fix that," Mardi told Bernice. And sure enough, the next day they came in and Mardi said, "Come out to the car and see what we got you."

We all went out and there was Mardi's little Volkswagen Beetle filled with a mattress! "Sorry, we had no time to pack properly!" Bernice said then burst out laughing.

"We almost got caught by the warden" added Mardi as they both doubled over.

"I think I peed my pants," Bernice gasped, crossing her legs and laughing even harder.

Somehow we got the mattress out of the car and into the apartment. We plunked it on the floor. Terry fell on it and said, "This is great. Now I have the best bed in the house! Come on women," he pointed at Mardi, "Let's try it out."

The atmosphere at the Paddock was nothing like the Gordon. It had the elegance of a quality night club. The guests were polite and talked quietly over dinner and drinks. When we finished a song, many of them clapped but when we did a really good one, they responded with enthusiasm. There were a lot of older people there and we had a number of requests for birthdays and anniversaries. Terry was always able to find a song for the occasion. "Send up your request folks" he would say. Then I would add, "And if you don't have anything to write on you can always use a 10 dollar bill." Terry would pretend to give me a dirty look and the audience would laugh.

After the first night, the bartender came over, "Good work guys. We had a lot of complements from the customers. I talked to the boss and he's very pleased." He turned to go then stopped suddenly, "Oh yes, I almost forgot. I

have to see your driver's license. You have to be 21 to play in this place and the liquor commission is pretty strict about that."

My heart sank. We all dug in our pockets for our wallets while I tried to think of what to do. Maybe I should tell him I forgot my license? But then I'd have to bring it tomorrow anyway. Shit, we're finished! He looked at Terry's and Boyce's license and said, "Okay, 1943. These are fine. Let's see yours." There was nothing I could do but hand over my license.

He looked at it and smiled, "You guys are all born in the same year. What a coincidence!" He gave my license back and walked away as I stood there frozen. Terry put his hand on my shoulder and said quietly, "Good thing they don't put the actual date of birth on the license; just the year."

"Yeah," I said greatly relieved. "Now you tell me."

We would play at the Paddock until after midnight, then get in the car and make the one hour drive back to Portage. Sometimes the girls would sneak out of the residence to meet us and give us some food then we would go home and eat. After that it was time to play some cribbage. When that was done, we'd get to bed around three or four in the morning and sleep until noon. Then we would laze away the day practicing or playing cribbage until it was time to head back to Winnipeg. Near the end of the week, as we drove to Winnipeg, Terry announced, "I'm planning an engagement party for our last night on Saturday."

Boyce and I dropped our jaws. "Engagement! You mean you're getting married!" Boyce said in amazement. "When did this happen?"

"Oh Mardi and I kind of decided last week. Then I figured it would be very nice to do it at the Paddock since it's such a classy place. We're going to have a fancy dinner after the gig with candles and champagne. I'd like you guys to join us. Just don't say anything to Mardi. It's a surprise."

Wow, I thought. I can't believe this. I come here to see an old girlfriend while Terry meets a perfect stranger and he's already getting married! I always thought I would be the first. Hold it! What am I thinking? I can't get married now anyway since I don't even have a job. However, come to think of it, neither does Terry.

But it was more than that. For some reason, things were not going well between Bernice and me. On a couple of occasions lately when I called her to go out she told me she was busy. I let it go but it bothered me. What was she busy at I wondered?

Then Mardi told me that she had a couple old boyfriends in town and she was still dating them. Sure, I thought, we go to work at six and don't come back until two in the morning which gives her all the time she wants to do her thing. This was a real setback. I thought she was in love with me yet she seemed to see nothing wrong in dating her old boyfriends. I had an awful feeling that something had to be done and soon.

Our time in Portage was running out. After the Paddock we had no

more good gigs and no more money coming in so we would probably have to head home. If nothing else came up for us, I had to get back to Saskatoon and maybe make some money before university started. What was I going to do about Bernice?

On Friday, during the first break I went out to the parking lot, got on the pay phone and called Bernice. We chatted casually for a bit then I said, "I wonder if you could come with us to the Paddock tomorrow. It's our last day there."

"Saturday," she paused thinking a bit. "No I think I'm busy."

"Doing what," I asked rather sharply. "Seeing one of your old boy-friends?"

"Oh be quiet," she snapped back. "If I want to see someone else I will."

After that, there wasn't much more to say and I couldn't tell her about Terry's plan to propose on Saturday. So I said goodbye and hung up.

I was miserable all day Saturday. Terry had arranged for us to pick Mardi up on our way to Winnipeg. She was surprised about going along with us and wondered why Bernice wasn't coming. Terry was also puzzled.

"I thought Bernice would come with us today?" he asked as we got under way.

"She's busy," I replied abruptly and said nothing else for the rest of the trip.

We got to the Paddock and did our show as usual while Mardi sat at a nice table having a drink. After the set, Terry went over to Mardi and had a little chat then they both left. A short while later they both came strolling back all excited. Mardi held up her hand, "Look, we're getting married!" She showed off her diamond ring and the *matre de* came over with a bottle of champagne. We all sat down and lifted our glasses. Boyce announced loudly, "To the happy couple!" Some of the guest caught on to the proposal happening near the stage and joined us in a toast to the happy couple. We drank the champagne and got up to do our next set.

As we got singing, my mind was in turmoil. This should be me and Bernice. This was all wrong and I had to do something about it. By the time we finished the set, I knew what had to be done. Boyce and Terry sat down with Mardi but I said, "Sorry guys, I need to make a phone call. I'll be right back."

I walked outside, picked up the pay phone in the parking lot and called Bernice.

"Hello," she said tentatively. "Why are you calling?"

"I just left Terry and Mardi at the restaurant and they got engaged."

There was a moment of silence as the news sank in. "Are you kidding? I thought Mardi was getting in over her head and acting a bit strange but I didn't think they would actually get married so quickly."

"Neither did I. Terry told us about the engagement yesterday but he

wanted to surprise Mardi. That's why I wanted you to come today but I couldn't tell you why."

"Oh I see. You did sound rather funny about it."

"Listen, I'm also sorry about the argument we had. In fact, I think we should be the ones getting married not them. This is all backwards don't you think? I mean, them getting married first."

"Getting married? What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

Then without thinking I said, "Yes, I said getting married. Would you marry me?"

There was a long silence at the other end. What the hell am I doing I thought while I waited. Did I just ask her to marry me – and on the damn pay phone!

"This is such a surprise I don't know what to say," she finally answered. "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

"Okay," I said rather deflated. "We play our next set pretty soon so I better get going."

The next morning I awoke early with a start and sat up. I must be crazy I thought. I asked Bernice to marry me on a pay phone. How stupid is that. No wonder she said no. Well, she didn't exactly say no but she didn't say yes either. All she said is that we can talk about it tomorrow. That makes sense. It's the polite way of saying no. She wants to tell me in person rather than on the phone. I can't believe what I did.

Around noon the guys got up and Mardi came over. "There's someone outside to see you," she said giving me a knowing look as she walked by. I went upstairs and saw Bernice in Mardi's car so I opened the driver's side and sat in. I was ready for the bad news and feeling like a complete fool. Bernice, however, seemed to look rather pleased and happy.

"Yes," she said. "I'll marry you."

I was ready to tell her it was okay to say no and not to feel bad because marriage really was a bad idea at this time anyway. Then I looked at her very confused as the words finally registered. "Did you just say you'll marry me?"

"Of course I'll marry you but we will have to wait for a while. You have university for another year and I have to finish my training. I'll start looking for a job around Saskatoon once I graduate and meanwhile we'll be engaged. I'll have to phone Mom and Dad with the big news. Boy will they be surprised. I think we could get married next summer, what do you think?"

I was looking at her in a complete fog. "I have no idea what to think."

Then I realized that I had no ring. How can you have an engagement without a ring? This is the moment you are supposed to pull out that big diamond ring, get down on your knees and ask for her hand in marriage. At least that's how it seemed to work in the movies. I needed time.

"Let's go out tomorrow and celebrate," I said thinking quickly. "I'll book us a nice restaurant. Meanwhile, I guess we should go inside and an-

nounce the news then call your mother.”

Next morning while the guys were still sleeping I got in my car and headed out to Winnipeg. I have to buy a ring and be back before six o'clock. You're supposed to buy a ring first then ask the girl. That's how it's supposed to be done. However, now that she said yes, I better get a ring. But I did wonder for a moment what happens if you buy a ring then the girl says no? I guess the guy ends up with a nice diamond ring. Maybe my way is better – ask the girl first and if she says yes, then buy the ring. Who cares, what's done is done.

I stopped at the first jewelry store I found and went in.

“That's the one I like,” I said to the salesman after a quick look at a bunch of rings.

“Good choice,” he said. “The matching wedding band for you is very nice also. You can get both now or later.”

“Now,” I said as I tried on the ring on my little finger. I knew Bernice's ring size because I had tried on one of her rings on my little finger a while ago. I also made sure mine fit properly. I just as well get it now since I may not be back here again. After we were done I dug into my pocket and took out some money. Thank goodness we got paid in cash from the Paddock. “How about I give you \$150 now and I'll pay the rest over twelve months?”

The salesman looked at the cash and said, “Sure that's a very good down payment. I'll just confirm that with the manager and get you a copy of the sales contract.”

Now I can really get engaged I thought as the salesman gave me the rings. I waved goodbye and got in my car. So much for saving my money for university. Oh well, good thing I've arranged for another student loan.

I picked Bernice up at six and we went to the Mona Loa, a small Hawaiian restaurant. She was all dolled up and looked stunning. I put on my best suit and shined my shoes. There were just the two of us. We ordered champagne and clinked our glasses. “Here's to us,” she said.

She gave me a big smile and we had a drink. Then I took out the ring and held it in front of her. “Bernice, will you marry me?”

Epilogue

Bernice said yes and we were married on September 11, 1965 in Wynyard. We had a big wedding dance at the Ukrainian Hall! Bernice worked as a Psychiatric Nurse at North Battleford, SK then got a job in Saskatoon while I finished my degree. We then moved to Calgary and spent our working lives there with the mandatory visit “home” to Wynyard each summer.

Al Kuros worked for the Bank of Nova Scotia for some forty years and became a successful branch manager at various cities in Western Canada. He retired in 2004 and moved to High River in the same area as our house. We immediately got out our guitars and started playing again just like we did in high school.

Terry Mooney moved to Vernon, BC in the early nineties. We would get together each year and sing all the old songs. He now lives in Kelowna, BC.

Boyce Neufeldt moved to Texas in the Dallas area where he was running a hotel. However I have not heard from him since our Troubadors reunion at our home in Calgary in the summer of 2003.

Eddie Gudmundson stayed in Wynyard as a much respected and successful builder like his dad. He passed away in 2022.

Isaw Tom Wright once in Whitecourt, Alberta and it was a great pleasure to see him. He had met my brother Leo who lives there and asked about me. He hasn’t changed a bit.

Time has taken its toll on my family members. My sister Mary is in a nursing home in Calgary. Leo lives in Whitecourt, AB and I am in High River, AB. All the others have all passed away.

Our family has stayed connected through reunions in 2016 and 2022. We have a family website www.zelinskifamily.com developed by Olga’s daughter Sheila. The website has our family history, stories and other information. This book can be downloaded there in PDF.

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The production of this book would not have been possible without the help and expertise of my niece, Sheila Urbanoski, who designed and published the book. Sheila grew up on a farm near Wishart, Saskatchewan, a small hamlet south of Wynyard, travelled the world before settling down in London, England where she runs a successful website development business.

Finally, I am very grateful to Bernice, my wife and soul mate. She added valuable insight as the book developed over many drafts and provided the support and encouragement needed to finish it.

About the author

Victor Zelinski was born in Wynyard, Saskatchewan in 1943 and grew up on a farm. He was the youngest of thirteen children born to Pete and Barbara Zelinski. In 1955 he moved to Wynyard and completed high school then went to Saskatoon Teachers' College for one year and got a teaching diploma. He taught for one year at Levant School near Wynyard then went to the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon where he earned a BA in History.

He moved to Calgary in 1966 with his wife and their first son, Jason, where he taught high school social studies at Bishop Grandin and Bishop Carroll High Schools in the Calgary Catholic School District. In 1982 he became a curriculum supervisor at central office where he held a number of different portfolios until his retirement in 1999.

During his teaching career Victor wrote and co-authored a number of textbooks on history and social studies.